MANDARIN-SPEAKING AUSTRALIAN EXPERT IN INTERNATIONAL LAW TO SERVE AS NUS LAW DEAN
By Tan Leng Tuan

A good student will be able to answer my questions correctly. An outstanding student will be able to predict the questions that I will ask. A top student, on the other hand, can ask questions that I have never thought of.

Professor Simon Chesterman

Professor Tan Cheng Han, who has helmed the NUS Faculty of Law for more than ten years, will step down at the end of this year. Professor Simon Chesterman, Vice-Dean of Graduate Studies at the NUS Law Faculty, will take over from Professor Tan as the new dean. Professor Chesterman's three-year tenure will take effect beginning in January next year.

Professor Chesterman, 39, is an Australian. He started learning Mandarin in secondary school and received a scholarship to study at the Beijing No. 2 Foreign Language Institute for one year before entering university. His Mandarin teacher gave him the name "Chen Wenxi" based on the homophones of his English name.

He possessed strong curiosity about other cultures since young. This, along with the broadening of his international perspective while studying in China, prompted him to choose to become an expert in international law. Professor Chesterman, a young academic who has taught in Australia, Britain, the US and France, pointed out that the NUS Law Faculty is recognised globally for nurturing students with a strong knowledge base and for its high quality of education. The challenge facing the school now is how to continue to convince top students to choose NUS and not foreign universities.

Making the Law Faculty more attractive through three approaches

Professor Chesterman advocates using three approaches to further boost the attractiveness of the NUS Law Faculty. This includes improving the course content to allow students to not only master "hard knowledge" in law, but also soft skills and a basic understanding of other disciplines or fields. In addition, the Law Faculty has already established many research units, such as the Centre for International Law and the Asia Pacific Centre for Environmental Law, in the hope that these institutions can play a bigger role in the future to help NUS to become an academic thought leader. The school also hopes to realise its vision of transforming Singapore into an international legal hub through cooperating with academic institutions in Singapore and abroad.
Professor Chesterman noted that the legal issues that its graduates will face when they enter society will be very complex. Therefore, the ability to answer examination questions and achieve high scores is not enough to tackle future challenges. The NUS Law Faculty needs to nurture students who have creativity and initiative. He said: "A good student will be able to answer my questions correctly. An outstanding student can predict what questions I will ask. A top student, on the other hand, can ask questions that I have not thought of."

Professor Tan Cheng Han hopes to return to teaching and research

Professor Tan Cheng Han, the 13th dean of the NUS Law Faculty, was appointed to the position in 2001 when he was only 36. He is also a Senior Counsel and Specialist Judge. Sources say that Professor Tan's third term1 was supposed to end in the middle of last year and that he wished to return to teaching and research after stepping down. However, NUS announced to the public last year that the school believed that Professor Tan was the best candidate to lead the NUS Law Faculty. His current tenure was originally scheduled to end in 2013.

NUS Deputy President (Academic Affairs) and Provost Professor Tan Eng Chye explained to reporters that NUS started to recruit its dean-designate for the Law Faculty in November last year. The selection committee identified 60 eligible candidates after searching various international institutions. The Law Faculty also nominated three candidates from the school. Professor Chesterman ultimately stood out.

Professor Tan said that he is very grateful for the strong support he received from NUS, the legal sector, colleagues, alumni and students as dean of the Law Faculty. He believes that Professor Chesterman will lead the Law Faculty to another peak. Professor Tan will remain at NUS to teach and conduct research.

Professor Chesterman received a PhD degree in international law from Oxford University. The Queen's Counsel Ian Brownlie, who acted on behalf of Singapore in the Pedra Branca case, was his teacher. Professor Chesterman is also an expert on the UN and the UN Security council. He once helped assess UN institutions and the international policies of governments in Europe and North America. He had also served as the Director of the New York University (NYU) School of Law Singapore Programme in 2007.

Professor Chesterman is the son-in-law of President Tony Tan. He and his wife Patricia Tan have a son and a daughter.

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1 Lianhe Zaobao has done a file correction accordingly.