



NELSON GOH

STUDYING:

Bachelor of Laws (LLB), NUS
Master of Laws (LLM), New
York University

NELSON (FIRST ROW, EXTREME LEFT), WITH FELLOW COURSE MATES FROM THE NUS-NYU LLB-LLM PROGRAMME

When Opportunity Knocks

In 2007, law undergraduate Nelson Goh found himself in the right place at the right time to participate in a pioneer academic collaboration between two well-accredited institutions of learning.

By Ashley Choo

Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth US president once said, “I will prepare and some day my chance will come.”

These words certainly ring true for Nelson Goh, a self-professed late bloomer who had always yearned to study overseas but missed out on scholarship opportunities years ago after his ‘A’ levels. This law undergraduate at the National University of Singapore (NUS) made sure not to miss the boat the next time it arrived.

His chance came in March 07, after NUS and New York University (NYU) had successfully brokered a deal. This collaboration allows NUS students to obtain both an undergraduate bachelor’s degree in Law from a local university and a master’s degree in Law from a US university in just four years – the time they normally take to complete their undergraduate studies in law. It is built upon previous partnerships between the two schools, which include a student exchange programme enabling students from both schools to spend up to a year in the other institution.

A SELF-STARTER

As one of the privileged seven who were selected for the inaugural year of this distinctive concurrent law degree programme, Nelson couldn’t help but gush about how grateful he is for the opportunity. “It’s humbling too,” said the final year undergraduate. “We pale in comparison to the many who have had an illustrious career after their first law degree before doing their master’s in NYU.”

However, Nelson does have many accomplishments to flourish. The 24-year-old qualified for the Dean’s List in his second and third year of studies at NUS. Outside of school, he is actively involved in soccer, where he rose up the ranks from faculty representative to vice captain in less than three years. He also actively coordinates camps, conferences and missions for the university’s Christian group – Varsity Christian Fellowship. He even went for a trip to Chennai, India in 2006 to teach English, and another self-organised poverty exposure trip in Dagupan, Philippines in 2007.

Now that he is in New York, Nelson admits to being less active in church and soccer-related activities. However, he has also taken the opportunity to pick up tennis classes, visit the gym regularly, and have weekly runs.

Interestingly, Nelson has also noticed a side of New York that even New Yorkers themselves tend to miss in their busy lives. “New York, despite being affluent, has far too many homeless and poor around,” he observed. He makes it a point to give water, snacks, and money to the homeless. He and his friends have even helped out at a hospice for HIV patients, and he hopes to take that a step further. “One thought we’ve had in the next semester is to serve food regularly at a soup kitchen,” he mused. “Hopefully it will materialise!”

A KNOWLEDGE WONDERLAND

According to Nelson, NYU is more renowned for its modules in International Law as compared to its counterparts in the US, and he saw his year at NYU as the perfect opportunity to diversify his

knowledge.

Nelson is currently taking modules such as Conflicts of Law, Arbitration, and International Economic Law. When asked about the difference between studying law in Singapore and New York, he was clear about the distinct yet complementary relationship between the two. “Law in Singapore is definitely more doctrinal. This also means that our grounding in Singapore made us more rigorous and thorough in our purview of the law. American law on the other hand, is a lot more about economics, policy and argument.”

By “argument”, he was certainly not referring to courtroom dramas in the likes of *Ally Mcbeal* and *Boston Legal*. “A lot of emphasis is also placed on seeing how the law integrates with practical reality. It’s not as dramatic as what we see in American lawyer dramas, yet the law here is a lot more dynamic,” he explained.

PRACTISING THE PRACTICE

Months away from graduating, Nelson revealed that he has already been offered to start his pupillage with one of the leading law firms in Singapore, and is looking forward to coming home after his stint at NYU. “It was a huge struggle not to seek for international law-related job opportunities as I have family and financial commitments to come back to,” he said. “But I guess that door is never closed since I do have many years ahead of me.”

With Nelson’s perseverance and good attitude towards work, he will certainly be well-prepared when the opportunity presents itself years down the road.

The NUS-NYU LLB-LLM programme allows NUS law students in the four-year LLB programme to seek early admission to the LLM at NYU, and commence the LLM in their fourth year of studies at NUS before graduating with an LLB. The credits read at NYU towards the LLM will count towards the NUS LLB degree.

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