

NUS Law has gone global, with dean's help

Grads benefit from faculty's broad education

By Amelia Tan



THE man credited with transforming the National University of Singapore's Law School into one with a global outlook saw off his last batch of graduates yesterday.

In his nine years as dean, Professor Tan Cheng Han (above) has overseen the broadening of law education as well as the building of ties with overseas institutions.

For instance, a partnership with the New York University allowed selected NUS law students to spend some time in the United States, and graduate with a double degree in law from both institutions. Alternatively, they could get a law degree from NUS and a master's in law from NYU.

Prof Tan, who firmly believes in giving graduates a well-rounded education, also oversaw the move by the law school to offer double degree programmes in the areas of business administration, life sciences and economics.

Speaking after the commencement ceremony yesterday - his last before he leaves his post on May 31 next year - Prof Tan, 44, explained his push for double degree programmes: 'The dynamic world that we live in will require different types of lawyers with different strengths.

'This is the reason why NUS Law has created a number of different programmes,' he said. 'It is not just to cater to different student interests, but also because the Singapore legal profession will benefit from the diversity in education that NUS provides.'

Indeed, he told The Straits Times in an interview, 'law is not an autonomous discipline, but one that is informed and shaped by different aspects of human society and endeavour'.

He added that NUS aimed to turn out 'globally oriented law students who at the same time have a strong foundation in Singapore law and the common law more generally'.

NUS Law School's push to go global will not end with Prof Tan's departure. The school, he said, is looking at forming partnerships with other North American and European universities, similar to the one it has with NYU.

A course which allows students to get an NUS law degree and a master's degree in management from a leading business school in Europe is also in the works, he added.

Asked what he would do after he steps down, Prof Tan said he would continue to teach at the school and focus his research on his main areas of interest: family and company law.

NUS hopes to identify a replacement by the year end.

Supreme Court Justice Chan Seng Onn, who attended the commencement ceremony yesterday, agreed with Prof Tan that lawyers would benefit greatly from a multi-disciplinary education. He studied engineering in Britain before receiving a law degree from NUS.

The judge's daughter, Jocelyn, 27, has followed in his footsteps: Besides a law degree, she also has an engineering degree from NUS. She was among 382 law students who received their degrees yesterday.

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