

Economic downturn unlikely to affect entry trends into law schools

By S Ramesh, Channel NewsAsia

SINGAPORE: The current economic downturn is unlikely to affect the entry trends of students into Singapore's law schools at both the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Singapore Management University (SMU).

And NUS is already addressing the announcements made in Parliament last week on developing Singapore's legal landscape.

Singapore's legal education and law practice is evolving in line with challenges facing the Bar these days.

One such change is the abolishment of the year-long Diploma in Singapore Law course for students from overseas universities. In its place is a new optional three-month conversion course.

Dean of the law faculty at NUS, Tan Cheng Han, said: "We think that a year is too long. So a course of this nature focuses essentially on one semester, three to four months. We think it is much more optimal.

"Based on the fact that they (students from overseas universities) already have very good law degrees from overseas and have a good grounding in the law, I think a conversion course need not be more than three to four months."

The NUS law school is currently in discussion with the authorities to run the conversion course in the first year, once details have been ironed out. And about 150 overseas graduates are expected to enrol for it.

The law faculty dean agrees that continuing legal education is one area Singapore cannot neglect. He said the law is ever-changing and it is important for practitioners to keep themselves abreast with international legal developments.

Presently, the Singapore Academy of Law, the Law Society, and NUS' law school are the three largest providers of continuing education programmes - and these are well-subscribed.

Professor Tan said: "We think that mandatory legal education is a good thing because it will force members of the legal profession to continue to keep up the practice of lifelong learning. It will eventually be more sophisticated - in that you can earn points from giving lectures and running courses or maybe even writing papers.

"The Institute of Legal Education will be an important institute because it will play a coordinating function as far as legal education is concerned and presumably liaise with the



Singapore's Supreme Court building



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two law schools to ensure that the education that we provide continues to be relevant to the legal profession."

Professor Tan believes interest in the study of law will not lose steam, even in a downturn. This is because law graduates can work in many areas, and so the law schools will continue to do well.