

New NUS centre to boost free legal help

It will offer expanded range of programmes and encourage law students to help the needy

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A new centre to encourage law undergraduates to offer legal help to the needy for free has been set up at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) law faculty.

The Centre for Pro Bono and Clinical Legal Education was launched

yesterday to consolidate the work of the NUS Pro Bono Office and the faculty's clinical legal education programmes. It will offer an expanded range of programmes for students in the faculty.

One new programme is the State Courts-NUS Clerkship Programme, which started in August. Students assist top State Court judges, get-

ting a first-hand look at criminal procedure and community justice issues from a judicial perspective.

Three students have completed the pilot run, and the programme is looking to take in up to 10 students in its second run, said Associate Professor Lim Lei Theng, the centre's co-director.

The move comes amid a growing movement among law students here to offer more pro bono work.

All law students are required to complete at least 20 hours of pro bono work as part of their

graduating requirements.

On average, NUS law students clock 48 pro bono hours by their second year. Past statistics are not available, but Prof Lim said she has seen a surge in the number of hours contributed since the launch of a pro bono work portal in 2014.

At Singapore Management University, law students in this year's graduating batch performed an average of 37 hours of pro bono work, a 70 per cent hike from 2009's average.

Ms Tan Yu Qing, 20, a second-year NUS law student, has clocked over 100 voluntary hours on the State Courts' Student Representatives Programme, which helps those without lawyers navigate law and court processes in harassment cases and community disputes.

"(The people we help) tell me that it makes a big difference. Such harassment or neighbour disputes affect their day-to-day lives... when there's a resolution, it allows them to move on with their lives."

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