Mr Tan Wee Liang, a final-year law student at the National University of Singapore, undertook a research project on copyright in artificial intelligence-generated works, which won the NUS Outstanding Undergraduate Researcher Prize last year. PHOTO: COURTESY OF TAN WEE LIANG

Law schools rolling out more tech-related courses

Recognising the impact of technology on the legal profession, law schools here are infusing more tech-related modules into their curriculum.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) is introducing two compulsory modules starting with the intake of law undergraduates in the new academic year in August.

The first is a law and technology module that covers areas such as the "law of technology", which looks into the regulation of new technologies such as blockchain or autonomous vehicles. It will also include the "technology of law", which examines ways in which analytics and machine learning are changing legal practice.

The second is a data literacy module.

Professor Wayne Courtney, vice-dean of academic affairs at NUS' Faculty of Law (NUS Law), said these two modules, which will be taken in the third year of study, are in addition to the 30 elective modules in the categories of intellectual property and technology law that students can choose from.

He said the faculty will look to add more business and finance elective modules.

Currently, more than half of the law school's undergraduate cohort read at least one tech-related module, he added.

"Transformations in the way in which law is practised have always had an impact on the way it is taught," he said.

"Though a law degree is suitable for many careers, it is important that the vast majority of our graduates who do go on to practise law are well equipped to do so."

He said NUS Law has progressively introduced tech-related modules such as IT law, biotechnology law, privacy and data protection law, and artificial intelligence (AI), information science and law.

As part of an elective, final-year NUS law student Tan Wee Liang, 25, undertook a research project on copyright in AI-generated works, which won the NUS Outstanding Undergraduate Researcher Prize last year.

"I've always been intrigued by how the law addresses issues emerging from technological advancement, in particular AI. The world of AI actually raises a host of legal issues," he said.

"For example, who is liable when fully autonomous vehicles cause accidents? Is legal liability for libel possible with automated journalism?"

At the Singapore University of Social Sciences, law students have an elective in emerging technologies and law.

Associate Professor Darren Koh, vice-dean of its law school, said the module aims to get students to "consider how laws as they know it are coping with the emerging technologies that are beginning to challenge the old certainties of life".

Singapore Management University (SMU) launched a law and technology track in its Yong Pung How School of Law master of laws programme last year.

A university spokesman said the

IMPLICATIONS

Technological developments are not only reshaping the way in which legal services are delivered, but also calling for innovative legal and regulatory frameworks to promote their positive impacts on advancing social welfare.

❞

A SPOKESMAN FOR SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY

new track looks at the fusion of law and new technology, and its implications on the legal profession in future.

"Technological developments are not only reshaping the way in which legal services are delivered, but also calling for innovative legal and regulatory frameworks to promote their positive impacts on advancing social welfare," she said.

The new track will focus on three areas of technology development: data transmission, AI application and blockchain application, and how these interact with law, regulation and public policies.

The spokesman added: "The fundamental objective of this new track is to familiarise legal professionals with the technologies for future legal services, and to forge a common foundation for legal professionals, tech engineers and business players to understand and communicate about an institutional framework of future technological applications."

Meanwhile, the first batch of 21 students in SMU's four-year computing and law undergraduate degree programme completed their first year of study last year.

The programme aims to produce information technology and legal professionals adept at bridging technology and law.

Law Society of Singapore president Adrian Tan said it is timely that universities have begun to include tech modules in their law courses. "Future batches of Singapore lawyers who are equipped to handle complex legal-technology issues are sorely needed by the nation," he said.

"There is a growing demand for tech-savvy lawyers who can understand and advise on new areas of law and business."

Essentially, law does not exist in a vacuum, said NUS' Mr Tan Wee Liang, who will be doing part-time research work at the university's Centre for Technology, Robotics, Artificial Intelligence and the Law after graduating this year.

He went to Shanghai in 2019 on an NUS Overseas Colleges stint, where he did an internship with a food tech venture capital firm.

"I wanted to do something that went beyond the law," he said, adding that the experience helped him to consider other perspectives and challenges of clients, and possibly provide better legal advice that makes commercial sense.

Amelia Teng