

# New law school may also offer full-time course

## Panel to seek prospective students' views before taking a decision

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THE newly appointed panel that will help shape Singapore's third law school will study if the undergraduate degree course should be run both on full-time and part-time basis.

In October, when the Education Ministry announced that the law school will be set up at SIM University (UniSIM), it had said that the course will be run on a part-time basis.

But Senior Minister of State for Law and Education Indraneel Rajah, in an interview with The Straits Times last week, revealed that the full-time option will also be considered.

Although UniSIM was set up to offer part-time degree courses, from next year it will start running full-time ones.

Ms Indraneel, who will head the 12-member panel announced last Wednesday, said they will gather the views of prospective students before coming to a decision on whether to offer the law course full-time.

The law school, which aims to train family and criminal lawyers, is expected to take in about 75 students when it opens in the next few years. It is targeted at mature students with relevant backgrounds in areas such as social work and law enforcement.

The panel will provide strategic direction for the school, advising

on matters such as admissions criteria and curriculum development. It comprises prominent people from the legal fraternity such as Attorney-General's Chambers chief prosecutor Tai Wei Shyong and Senior Counsel Amarjeet Singh and N. Sreenivasan.

While the school will offer a general law degree, students will take up courses on criminal and matrimonial law. There will also be a strong emphasis on multi-disciplinary and applied learning.

In the interview, Ms Indraneel also addressed concerns that the graduates of the school will be perceived as "second class" to their counterparts from the two existing law schools at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Singapore Management University (SMU).

She was confident that like the other two universities, UniSIM, in time to come, will build a strong reputation for its law school.

"NUS has built a strong reputation for international law and litigation and dispute resolution. SMU is fast building up a solid reputation for corporate and commercial law. Our aim is to make UniSIM a centre of excellence for family law and criminal law."

She said besides the traditional core subjects, UniSIM students will be trained in the new emerging areas. "In criminal law, for example, they will be trained in computer forensics as the crime scene of the 21st century will be the Internet. Evidence trails will be in e-mail. And crimes committed often cross borders - so lawyers need to be familiar with extradition laws and mutual assistance treaties.

"In family law, the courts are moving towards non-adversarial processes like mediation and counselling. We need lawyers with that mindset and who are trained in aspects of social work, counselling and mediation."

UniSIM law students would already have a "head start" over their peers, in that they are likely to be more mature students with a background in social work or law enforcement.

She added: "What we are hoping to have in these graduates is that combination of work experience and the requisite legal knowledge. For example, a social worker who has had experience helping couples going through a divorce and their children. They could be very effective family law practitioners after adding a law degree to that."

Ms Indraneel said the school will follow a unique model of applied learning. "Attachments or internships are one thing. But doing pro-bono work under the supervision of qualified lawyers and working with people who are in need of the legal services - that will be part of the curriculum."

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