

# SUSS law school's pioneer batch sees 10% attrition

## Job, family demands see 7 out of 60 students quit night-class law degree or defer studies

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While making it to law school is tough, sticking with the programme is no less challenging, the first batch of law students at the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) found out.

Of the 60 pioneer SUSS law students enrolled last year, seven have dropped out or deferred their studies due to job pressures and family commitments.

The programme, which runs as a four to five-year course, is the only one to offer a full-load law degree with classes at night to cater to working adults.

The SUSS law school – where the average age of students is in the late 30s – was set up in 2016 to address a shortage of lawyers in criminal and family law.

On top of a heavy study load, many of the students have had to juggle work and family while attending night classes.

Professor Leslie Chew, the school's dean and a Senior Counsel, said: "I would be worried if there's no attrition, it would mean our standards are not good enough."

Of the seven who dropped out, two did not meet the minimum grade point average (GPA) to progress to the second year, three withdrew and two deferred for reasons that include work commitments such as being posted overseas.

One of those who deferred is returning next year to continue his studies. All 64 students in the sec-

ond batch are still in the course.

Students have to hit a GPA of 3 out of 5 in every semester to continue in the course.

But they need a GPA of at least 3.5 upon graduation to qualify as professional lawyers, just like graduates from the two other law schools at National University of Singapore and Singapore Management University.

The students also face financial pressures. In the Juris Doctor (JD) programme, for those already armed with other degrees, students have to pay more than \$160,000 in tuition fees in total.

These students do not receive a government subsidy as they would have already enjoyed it while studying at the other local universities.

For those who undertake the programme as their first degree, they pay about \$39,000 to \$46,000 in total, with government subsidies.

Prof Chew said the university is

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working hard to get more financial aid for students who do not qualify for the government tuition grant.

About half of those in the JD programme fall into this group. "Our fees are not low, and for some of our students who have worked for 20 years, supporting children and are self-funding, it comes as a great sacrifice," said Prof Chew.

From next year, a handful of students can benefit from the Choor Singh Study Award and the Irene Tan Liang Kheng Scholarship Award, made possible by recent donations.

Currently, at least three students are recipients of study awards from the Ministry of Law, which provides \$60,000 to \$75,000, depending on the course, to Singaporeans who are not eligible for government tuition grants.

But Prof Chew said the law school will work closely with the university's newly set up Advancement Office to source more funding and book prizes, for instance.

Amid concern about young lawyers leaving the industry too soon, he believes his students – many of whom are paralegals or have experience in family or criminal law – will stay the course because they made a deliberate decision to come into law.

He said: "They've invested so much money and their lives. They're not young kids with parents underwriting everything.

"They are the people who always wanted to be a lawyer but couldn't get into NUS... So they have kept their dream.

"I have great respect for my students because these are guys and girls who came the hard way."