

NUS PRO BONO SCOOP

The
Elections
Special



FOREWORD

“What is the use of living, if it be not to strive for noble causes and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone?”

- Winston Churchill

What is the use of law, if not to strive for access to justice? Step up and serve today, with the NUS Pro Bono Group Executive Committee! Elections are drawing close, and we hope you will find your way to a specific position of service through this Elections Special! This issue takes a peek at the unique joys and challenges every office holder of the executive committee has faced the past year with the advent of expansion and the mandatory scheme. May you find yourself and the joy of true legal service!

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others” - Mahatma Gandhi

President *Lim Wei Zhen*



start 3 NGOs after a life-changing experience in Cambodia....

These experiences will only re-ignite your flame and passion for pro bono whenever obstacles and hurdles along the way threaten to stamp out the flame. It is a journey where you will change and be changed.

The Pro Bono Journey you are about to embark on will be best encapsulated by PBG's very own logo: BALANCE. With an aerial perspective of what's going on in the group and various projects, you will find yourself caught in the center: center of decisions, in between stakeholders, crossroads between idealism and reality, balancing actions and reactions, the turning point between yes and no. And of course, balancing everything against the sands of time that keep running and slipping away. You and your team will be brimming with ideas, vision and direction, yet knowing that at the same time, you constantly need to temper your dreams with reality. But most importantly, your dreams must never lose sight of what is best for the beneficiary. It will be a humbling experience, one where you will witness the limits of yourself, your organization, and our capacities as law students in general.

"A Journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." It's an uphill relay marathon, but every step you take will leave a lasting imprint. Each step you take might be the step that mattered all the world to whoever life you decided to touch. We can't guarantee to address every need. But we can choose to make a difference to that one life we do get to touch; and that one difference is worth it all. It certainly has been worth it all to me: text or call me at 92209486 if you have any questions or want to find out more! (:

The capacity of law, when placed in your hands and that of others, to really change a life: that is a superpower unique to our legal calling, and one we can never regret having (: So step up and seize the privilege to shape the life of true legal "service"!

"Is it tiring to be inspiring? No." was what a friend once thought-provokingly said.

Indeed, with the run for presidency begins a walk to remember. The presidential journey is a relay race filled with much perspiration, but way more inspiration. As the first to receive the proverbial baton, be prepared to be inspired by your beneficiaries, pro bono lawyers, case workers, and of course, your peers.

Dare to inspire others, as you have been inspired by: the woman who opened her house to over 100 injured migrant workers who were not allowed to work. The doctors who started a health-centric NGO for the poor. The woman who at 28 left her successful career to

As the story goes, once upon a time a black lesbian woman was walking quietly along a crowded street when suddenly she got hit on the head by a burly man. She did not retaliate. She turned around, and looked at the strangers who started to crowd around her, and asked in a quiet but powerful voice:

"Why didn't you do something?"

Indeed, our world is a troubled place, not just because of bad people, but also because of good people who do nothing. You are in law school, and by that very virtue you are greatly privileged. You wield great power. Use it wisely. If you decide to step up and use it for service, I can assure you one thing: you are in for a life-changing ride.

The responsibilities of the Vice-President are varied and sometimes ad hoc in nature. It also depends greatly on what sort of person you are, but in general, you could categorise the job as follows:

Representative: represent PBG to freshmen, external partners, Law Society, indigent people who need help, the list goes on. The number of inspiring people you can meet on the job is both astounding and humbling. In my short stint, I had the opportunity to represent Singapore and PBG at the 3rd BABSEA Annual Asia Pro Bono Conference 2014, among other events.

Assistant: the VP should definitely complement the P. You should also assist or take the lead in other administrative and substantive matters, such as helping the Project Heads plan their events, chasing after people for work, or replying to requests from external parties.

Direction: most importantly, together with the P, you provide the direction for the new Exco. With the Mandatory Pro Bono Scheme, your role is now more important than ever: Should PBG keep on expanding? How to ensure people do not do pro bono solely for the 20 hours? What are the pro bono areas in which students should be more involved? These questions, and more, have no clear answers - but the quest of trying to answer them will definitely be rewarding in itself.

Looking back, it definitely was not an easy

journey. Law school is already busy enough as it is. I have endured sleepless nights, months of great stress trying to juggle my various commitments, and moments when I just wanted to give up. But everything was worth it. The journey has kept me grounded and reminded me of what is really important, of how the knowledge and skills that we have will actually someday impact someone in very real ways. Do not hesitate to contact me at nguyenvulan1406@gmail.com or 98616332 for more information. Step up and come forward to serve, so that years later you won't have to ask yourself, "Why didn't I do something?" :)



Nguyen Vu Lan
Vice-President

Secretary

Lee Shu Qing

My time as Secretary in Pro Bono group came with many unexpected yet invaluable opportunities. In retrospect, I realize that it was due to the flexibility of the role and ultimately, the individual's desire to serve. The main responsibility of the Secretary would be to handle all the administrative work in PBG. Thus, e-surveys, e-mails and excel spreadsheets will soon be your best buddies. More than that, the Secretary forms part of the core ex-co. This entails working extremely closely with professors and the Presidents in defining the direction PBG takes. Furthermore, the Secretary also liaises with external partners and assists in the initiation of new projects. As students, you may think that our role in serving society through legal help is limited but I beg to differ! While lawyers have billable hours to worry about, we, as students are blessed with the luxury of time to put what we learn in school to good use. (No really! We only spend about 14 hours on lessons, out of the 168 hours in a week.) Thus, no matter what position you sign up for in the PBG Exco, just remember that legal knowledge is truly a privilege and I sincerely hope that you will take this chance to serve both PBG as well as the larger community! :)

"I have found my term as PBG's treasurer extremely rewarding and exciting. Being the treasurer isn't just about handling money; rather, the treasurer plays an active role in determining how PBG will be run. Every decision you make is crucial: determining membership fees, budgeting for events, liaising with law firms for sponsorships, etc. In this regard, I also had the privilege of working closely with Wei Zhen (President), Vu Lan (Vice President) and the Events Committee in running events such as Cohesion Day.

I will be lying if I said I found the job smooth-sailing; however I can say for sure that I have learnt immensely and had loads of fun with my fellow Exco members. It has also been extremely satisfying to see PBG grow over the year, as new initiatives are rolled out.

As PBG continues to grow in the coming year, exciting times and greater responsibilities lie ahead for the new treasurer. If you think you are the person to lead PBG to greater heights, do sign up today!"

Treasurer

Matthew Poh



Events Directors

Ashley Loh & Ashley Tan

Being an Events Director gives you the wonderful opportunity to partake in a wide variety of existing activities but yet also the flexibility to spearhead new initiatives that are close to your heart. The Events Committee has traditionally been in charge of organising the In-Session Dialogue collaboration with SMU and our PBG Annual Cohesion. We also work together with the other PBG exco members to organise the PBG Orientation, the annual PBG elections and any ad hoc events that may come about. In addition, this year we pioneered two new initiatives - Project MINDS and the Law Awareness Week(in conjunction with the Law Society). These are unprecedented projects that resonated with each of us, and it is our hope that these projects can be carried on by the incoming project heads.

In a nutshell, the role of an Events Director is a self-directed and self-motivating one. The job scope is protean, and it is really up to you to make the best out of the opportunities. If you're the type that wants to start new projects to help different groups of beneficiaries, this position is perfect because it provides you with the support, resources and manpower you need to make a difference. It would also be a plus if you are good at managing people and limited resources available to you because an Events Director who is able to juggle different projects by delegating tasks well would find that he or she would be able to reach out to many groups of people that need help. Undeniably, there are many challenges that the Events Committee faces. Starting new projects are never easy, and it may also be tough at times to find sufficient manpower. Nevertheless, what we've discovered is that the feelings of fulfilment from working with our beneficiaries never fail to re-ignite the passion to serve the community and ultimately make the hard work all worth it.

All in all, if you feel that you're up for the roller-coaster ride of managing existing events while spearheading new projects, go for it! It's a great opportunity to serve the community and also a journey you definitely won't forget.



Publicity Director

Angela Ang

As the publicity director, you are generally involved in ad-hoc work for the various projects, creating different publicity materials, like videos, posters, standees, as well as PBG scoop (i.e. this!) It may sound like a lot of work, but if you have a flair for design and know some of the tricks of the trade (Photoshop junkies, this is your opportunity), this is the job for you! :)

You may not call the shots or take an upfront role in the projects, but knowing that you are able to provide a very vital service when your friends need it is very fulfilling in itself - but of course, to the next Publicity Director, let your creative mind take you to newer and greater heights! Feel free to expand your role with new initiatives, it's a flexible role!

This position will also involve you working quite frequently with your Exco counterparts, so you get the chance to build really strong and lasting friendships with these people! Over here, it's not just Pro Bono Group, it's a Pro Bono Family :)

On account of the Pro Bono Group's keenness on spreading the Pro Bono spirit beyond borders, Project Development (Overseas) was created as a new group. We focus on initiating sustainable overseas pro bono projects in the region.

We were incredibly fortunate that the 3rd Annual Asia Pro Bono Conference was hosted in Singapore this year. It served as the perfect avenue to understand the pro bono efforts by our fellow law students in the region and how we could help each other in our shared commitment to do Pro Bono work. An online forum for the enthusiastic participants was created to facilitate regional collaboration even after the Conference ended.

We are currently in the midst of planning an initiative in the Department of Law at Yangon University and a project in India. We have also compiled a list of potential projects and the contacts we have in the South-East Asian region as a resource for future PDO members to tap into.

Swathi Bhat

Project Development (Overseas)



Project Development (Local)

Clara Lim

My time as project director of Project Development (Local) has been incredibly fulfilling. What exactly does Project Development (Local) do? We aim to expand the range of projects that the NUS Pro Bono group has, in tandem with growing demand for Pro Bono projects amongst law students.

It has been a very good year for Project Development (Local), and we have spent a significant focus on kicking off the Syariah Court Friends project, which now has a consistent volunteering programme for law students. This has also been a year of consolidation and review, where we have reviewed NUS Pro Bono Group's past projects and strung together a compilation of things to look out for and areas of improvement for future batches of project directors in Project Development (Local). In addition, we have reached out to organisations which deal with domestic violence and family issues to explore how NUS Pro Bono group could be plugged in.

The beautiful part about project development (local) is its dynamism in playing a part in the issues which Singapore faces, and being a connector and facilitator for law students to be plugged into them, offering them a perspective of the world beyond the day-to-day confines of the classroom. Till today, there are still many communities in Singapore which we have yet to reach out to, but hope to do so gradually with future batches of the NUS Pro Bono group.

It has been a really humbling and heartening term for me. Project Development would not be as enriching or fulfilling if not for my team, whose commitment and passion has inspired me tremendously as well.

So if you are willing to be exposed to various local issues and external organisations, and subsequently be plugged in to lead a team to pioneer new projects, please don't hesitate to join project development (local)!



Students for Migrants

Josephine Yip & Sneha Gupta

Students for Migrants is one of the most unique and rewarding Committees under the NUS Pro Bono Group - it encompasses a cluster of projects which are united under the common theme of migrant workers. These projects include internships at various NGOs such as HOME, TWC2 and Healthserve, legal research projects such as the Justice Without Borders and HOME research projects, and legal education workshops such as the HOME Law and You workshops.

As Students for Migrants Director, your role would definitely be administrative, and a large part of it would involve liaising with the Pro Bono Office and managing the Start Now Law portal. However, it could also be substantial. For instance, both of us led a team of students to stage a re-enactment depicting the potential problems facing a construction worker and a foreign domestic worker at the 3rd Annual Asia Pro Bono Conference 2014. During your term, you will be involved in organising NUS Law's second Migrant Workers' Awareness Week, which would consist of a week-long string of activities, possibly including panel discussions, games, quizzes and movie screenings. How substantial your role will be also depends on your personal choice. You will have a lot of opportunities to ideate and come up with new initiatives to tackle and increase awareness on issues that migrant workers face.

Both of us have found serving as Students for Migrants Directors to be immensely rewarding. We have discovered that when you do pro bono work, what you take away from the experience is much more than what you give. Working on migrant worker related projects puts you in situations where you need to confront a multitude of challenges, such as being sensitive to cultural differences and communicating with people who do not understand your language. It has certainly prodded us to step out of our comfort zones.

If you are passionate about migrant worker issues, or are finding some way to contribute, please do not hesitate to apply for this position! Should you have any queries or concerns, do feel free to contact us at yehuijosephine@yahoo.com.sg or snehagupta96@hotmail.com.

Moot Parliament Programme

David Crawshaw

The Moot Parliament Programme (MPP) is organised by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to promote legal awareness and active citizenry among secondary school students through role-playing members of parliament, researching public policy, drafting legislation and engaging in mock parliamentary debates. NUS Pro Bono Group provides student-mentors who work with expert-mentors from private practice or the Attorney-General's Chambers and MOE officials to guide the MPP participants. Our role is significant because we bridge the knowledge and generation gap between the students and the professionals. Being project director is extremely enjoyable and richly rewarding - not only is the enthusiasm and ingenuity of the student participants very impressive, but the friendliness and gratitude from MOE and the expert-mentors is deeply touching. Being a project head is not very taxing because MOE does most of the organising for key events; the key is communicating effectively with MOE officials (who are actually quite easy to work with) and NUS student-mentors (who are generally self-motivated and reliable mentors). There is a palpable sense of achievement on the part of all involved when everything comes together - when an event is successfully concluded, when the students use their creativity to tackle social ills, when the participants present their final bills, and when the debates are under way. I feel that NUS PBG (and the MPP project director's role in PBG) does important and meaningful work in helping MOE in the smooth running of MPP which is a laudable and valuable project for the students and the future of the nation.



Legal Clinics

Loh Tian Kai & Wang Yu Fei

If you have a knack for administrative work, rostering volunteers while battling StartNowLaw and other stakeholders, this role is for you! The amount of administrative effort accompanying this role appears deceptively little, but with the new Mandatory Pro Bono and the ever-changing new implementations to sort out the teething problems (Think: StartNowLaw), this job demands a high level of adaptability, organisation and thick skin.

However, there are many plus sides to managing Legal Clinics - you get to meet new people, and go down for the clinics you've always wanted but never had a chance to do so because of its overwhelming popularity. For us, another important reason for heading clinics is because we see the huge amount of meaning in legal clinics, as it is really similar to medical clinics - it is the first line of assistance to the down and destitute battling situations which appears legally minute but in fact would cause upheavals in their worlds. It is our regret that we hadn't managed to bring clinics to as far as we'd want it to because most of our time was spent battling StartNowLaw and the new administrative framework, but now that most of the teething problems are (hopefully) out of the way, here is your chance to change this seemingly administrative project to something way more than that, and to make a bigger impact on society and on the beneficiaries.

Legal Research

Chan Jia Sheng

Being Project Head of "Legal Research" (previously known as LEAP (Research)), I can confidently say that the projects under this branch exposes you to a side of society that most of us will probably never see. Our collaboration with the full-time staff of Project X has shown us the darker side of Singapore's seemingly glitzy surface. Our members heard first hand from sex workers about the stigma they face both from the authorities and general public. I'm glad to say our research for Project X on travel bans and the "yellow card system" will be used by the staff for a position paper to relevant authorities, highlighting the plight of these sex workers. In addition, the brochure we are preparing will no doubt be a way for sex workers to understand the laws that govern them.

Another group of beneficiaries we work with are Secondary school students. Our work with Project Schools (in collaboration with The Law Society's Pro Bono Services Office), even though quieter this year, aims to educate youth on crimes commonly committed by youth. We help prepare lesson plans and guidebooks for students and teachers both to use in class. I am glad to say our work is being put to use in classrooms!

Even though legal research can be menial at times, it is no doubt important. The oft-quoted and clichéd phrase "knowledge is power" is oft-quoted and clichéd for a reason - it is true. Having knowledge of the law is having the power to make informed decisions. It is the power to know your rights and knowing how to stand up for them. Being a member of Legal Research has given me the chance to be part of this empowering process. I strongly encourage people who want to be part of this process to sign-up and make a difference!



LEAP

Jethro Leong & Joey Ng

The Legal Education Awareness Programme (LEAP) aims to educate youth-at-risk on the legal consequences of unlawful behavior. Through the use of group discussions, skits and games, we help the youths to reflect critically, equipping them with knowledge to distinguish right from wrong in the eyes of the law. Topics include, but are not limited to, substance abuse, smoking, gang-related offences, petty crimes and sexual offences.

LEAP strives to provide youths with positive role models. In our interactions with the youth, we teach them about the standards of the law. In turn, the youth share with us about their lives, and we learn about their lives and the problems they face.

As the largest youth education project in the Pro Bono Group, LEAP is currently in partnership with 7 schools and social organizations, with the potential to reach many more. As a project director you will help to curate these relationships and manage LEAP's expansion to reach out to more beneficiaries. The journey has been long and uncertain, but the smiles and the friendships gained make it all worthwhile. If education and relationship-building is your calling, do consider running and/or future participation!

Lawyers often require deep expertise when giving advice and as a fresh law student, you might wonder how much impact your own pro bono efforts make. At Project Law Help (PLH), it's not about giving the most intelligent guidance nor the most elaborate strategies; instead, it's much closer to home than that.

PLH concerns itself with charities, voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs), and social enterprises. You'll be intimately involved in researching areas of law relevant to their work, empowering them with the skills they need to help the community at large. You'll be tailoring this information, translating the law into language a layman can understand. Finally, you'll also have a hand in developing our website, making this valuable knowledge accessible to all.

As Project Director, you'll have the opportunity to make this happen. PBSO has shown increasing support for the project, and many new opportunities await the PLH team in the coming year over and above the mere website. While the job won't be easy nor will the journey be smooth (you have been warned), the impact you make will touch the lives of many, and the many more these organisations help.

Joshua Kow
Project Law Help

University Court Friends

Chua Ting Fang & Chua Cheng Aik

As you may have observed, University Court Friends (UCF) is a pro bono project that invariably enjoys overwhelming sign-ups from freshmen and seniors each semester. As the UCF directors, your main job will thus be to coordinate the entire program, which includes a gamut of tasks such as:

- Liaising with the State Courts to work out suitable schedules for the incoming batch of volunteers

- Disseminating information to the volunteers to ensure a smooth run

- Liaising with the State Courts to coordinate training sessions at the start of each run, and an appreciation tea at the end of each run, to ensure the volunteers enjoy a holistic experience

- Collecting records from both the State Courts and the volunteers for verification of pro bono hours

- Working with the Pro Bono Office in various Start Now Law/ mandatory hours-related tasks

Which sounds like a lot of work BUT there are perks! You get to be an ad-hoc ambassador for the Community Justice Centre (CJC) and sometimes the State Courts in general. This may sound daunting but it mostly means that you get to meet other interesting individuals involved in the pro bono scene. You may also get invited to ad-hoc networking events with great food! Last but not least, as a project head, you are also a member of the PBG executive committee. Given the increasing emphasis on pro bono in school and in the legal scene at large, it is both an honour and a privilege to be part of a dedicated and dynamic team that spearheads pro bono activities in Law School.

So, if you have enjoyed your time as a volunteer in UCF*, we urge you to sign up for this chance to take on a bigger role!

*Note: volunteers in the Syariah Court Friends project are welcome to sign up as well!



Syariah Court Friends

Teo Jia Xuan & Clara Lim



The newly-initiated Syariah Court Friends has allowed students a deeper exposure into Syariah law as well as court practices (which are seldom delved into in the core law curriculum). Student volunteers cater to an inflow of walk-in clients, who have questions ranging from divorce issues to issues of settling their will. Throughout the process, students will be rotated and are allowed to sit in for mediation processes and court rulings, thus having a holistic yet practical overview of the Syariah Court. We hope to expand the Syariah Court Friends Scheme in future, as students gain depth and breadth of knowledge about Syariah Court processes. One scheme we are looking forward to work on is to have students sit in during Court trials and afterwards, explain the judge's ruling to the parties after trial (as parties may not be as well-versed in court language and the law).

The role for the Syariah Court Friends Project Head would mainly be two-fold. Firstly, you will coordinate the programme by organising volunteer schedules as well as disseminating information to them. Secondly, you will be involved in cross-sector collaboration or talks that the Syariah Court has to expand the programme - for example, offering feedback to the Syariah Court and being called to sit in for meetings with other organisations that the Syariah Court works with.

Having seen the growth of the Syariah Court Friends project, it has been incredibly encouraging to see both Malay and non-Malay speaking volunteer participants actively involved in the project, and being exposed to different aspects of Syariah Law. We have been blessed to work with a good team at the Syariah Court which has, in their best capacity, done their utmost to contribute to students' learning by exposing volunteers to different aspects of the organisation.

If you are keen to contribute your time to the Syariah Court, or have enjoyed your time as a volunteer here, do give this a shot!

