

Undergrads can forget about politics

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KUALA LUMPUR: Undergraduates will still not be allowed to mix politics with their studies under the much-anticipated amendments to the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA).

The amendments will not allow students to take part in political activities, despite a call by Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed for undergraduates to be empowered.

Chairman of the committee to review the UUCA, Professor Dr Shad Saleem Faruqi, said although the minister had wanted to give more freedom to the students, he had not wanted it to go too far at the expense of stability and public order.

Furthermore, nearly all quarters, including a "surprising number" of students themselves, had opposed the idea of undergraduates getting involved in politics.

As such, students will not be allowed to join any political party or non-governmental organisation with political affiliations off campus.

Students, however, have the freedom to speak to the media on "certain academic occasions" such as seminars and workshops.

"At these events, they will be allowed freedom of speech without having to first obtain written permission from the university authorities," Faruqi said.

Non-political organisations include youth and community service groups, religious or sports organisations.

For example, undergraduates can join non-governmental organisations such as PT Foundation (previously known as Pink Triangle), a community-based, voluntary and non-profit making organisation in Malaysia which provides HIV/AIDS and sex education.

"There is more to life than politics," said Faruqi.

He added that students should concentrate on their studies as about 90 per cent of their university expenses and costs were subsidised.

A final draft of the amendments, which involved changes to 50 clauses in the Act, had been sent to Mustapa.

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The UUCA, which came into effect in 1971, was to protect students from being exploited by politicians and not to restrict their freedom.

However, in recent years, there has been much contention regarding the Act, with many parties, academicians included, who feel that students should be allowed to take part in politics.

Faruqi said the committee had tried very hard to "take the middle path" with much encouragement from Mustapa.

The minister had ordered the committee to consult all stakeholders including vice-chancellors, university staff, undergraduates, the Attorney-General, the student affairs departments and ministry officials.

Other amendments to the Act included having more democratic consultation within university administration before decision-making, clearer channels to seek redress for grievances, strengthening accountability, and a clearer demarcation of power between the different university authorities.