- DISASTER RISK REDUCTION MANAGEMENT AWARENESS/PREPAREDNESS

CHED, Red Cross to teach students disaster response skills

Return service feature

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To allay concerns on the mandatory return service feature of the free higher education law, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has partnered with the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) to teach students life-saving and disaster response skills while they are still studying.

"This is the best argument against the criticisms of some critics that we will use the return service agreement to make the students suffer or to use student labor in the universities," said CHED Officer-in-Charge Prospero De Vera III during the ceremonial signing of Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with PRC recently.

"For who can argue if students learn life-saving techniques while they are still students or learn to prepare for disasters while they are students – who can argue against that?" he added.

De Vera, PRC Chairman and CEO Senator Richard Gordon, and DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones recently signed memoranda at DepEd Central Office, Pasig City in for Red Cross Youth and Red Cross 143.

De Vera lauded the partnership with PRC noting that it can be adopted by public higher education institutions through the "Return Service System" feature of the Republic Act 10931 or the free higher education law.

The Return Service System, De Vera said, aims to ensure that "in return for being subsidized by the national government for their studies," students should be able to "give back to the community – by helping the community, helping their school through volunteerism."

In the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of RA 10931, De Vera cited a provision requiring all 112 State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) as well as the 78-CHED recognized Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs) required to craft and implement their respective "Return Service System" programs wherein students – who are beneficiaries of free higher education – will have to fulfill the mandatory return service to their schools while still studying.

"We put a provision for SUCs and LUCs to craft a return service system for students while they are still students," De Vera explained.

He noted that around 1.3 million students are expected to avail of the RA 10931 this academic year 2018-2019.

PRC, De Vera said, will create a "rich network" and a "rich menu of options" that students can avail when the SUCs and the LUCs frame their return service agreement. "This is the best argument against critics who are saying that we are unduly increasing the work load for students while studying," he added.