

MURPHY'S LAW AT CUNY

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Body

ADD CUNY LAW SCHOOL to the list of failing programs within the sprawling City University system. With its teacher-training programs in danger of being closed and its community colleges mired in endless remediation, the results from the recent state bar exam offer more evidence of a system on the verge of a meltdown.

An abysmally low 46% of last year's grads were able to pass the bar exam on the first try. That's down from 63% a year ago. Given that New York has 11 law schools, the last thing it needs is one that produces bad lawyers at taxpayer expense, no less.

News of CUNY Law's shocking pass rate the statewide average is 78.5% comes only weeks after the American Bar Association agreed to take the school off probation. CUNY which scores poorly in virtually all common categories, such as turning out lawyers who actually practice law had been warned that it would lose its accreditation if it didn't clean up its act.

So it did. Sort of. But it was more like a quick sponge bath than the full head-to-toe academic scrubdown required.

Perhaps the most dramatic change was elimination of a (would you believe?) pass-fail system in which virtually no student failed. Last year, when grades were given for the first time, 10 of 160 first-year students were placed on academic probation and 11 flunked out. That's a baby step in the right direction. Even so, law school Dean Kristin Booth Glen admits she is disturbed by the bar exam results. Ironically, they were reported just after she told monitors that "we understand that passing the bar exam is a necessary first step" for new lawyers.

Glen, like many legal experts, knocks the exam as a poor indicator. Some studies bear that out. But it is the only yardstick available, and other schools meet it. Why can't CUNY? To that, Glen repeats the tired CUNY mantra: Students are impoverished minorities (42% nonwhite), so they test poorly.

Oh, give it a rest. CUNY administrators must come to grips with the fact that so many of their students perform poorly because they are ill-qualified at the start and coddled to the end.

First-year students have a median score of only 147 of a possible 180 on the LSAT, the law school admissions test. CUNY had promised to toughen standards, but sadly, the LSAT scores

remain low. As a result, all first-year students will get a study-skills class. Study skills. In law school.

New York State taxpayers spend a whopping \$ 7.5 million a year to support this mediocrity. Yet tuition is so low \$ 3,225 per semester for residents; \$ 4,840 for nonresidents that students flock there from out of state. Thirty per cent of the Class of 2000 aren't even New Yorkers.

The city has plenty of lawyers, good and bad. It doesn't need to soak taxpayers to produce those who don't measure up.

Devil dogs

The pit bull attack in Queens that nearly ripped off a 70-year-old man's lips and chin has many terrified New Yorkers calling for a ban of this battle-bred canine. That would be good.

Even better, just shoot the damn things.

In fact that may be the only solution because banning these land alligators is out because breeders got Albany to prohibit the banning of dogs by breed. Still, the city must act.

It can start by enforcing license laws. According to a recent Daily News series on dogs, fewer than 9% of the city's estimated 1 million dogs are registered. If the city can get owners to scoop poop, surely it can get them to buy licenses.

A license costs only \$ 11.50, or \$ 8.50 for a dog that has been neutered. If the city publicized that fines for not having a license can reach \$ 2,000 and started handing out a few summonses, there'd be a stampede to register. The telephone number for those who want to beat the license rush is (212) 676-2100.

It's also time to put the bite on owners whose dogs do. With about 10,000 dog bites per year in this city, pooch owners must be punished when they lose control of their animals.

Top of that list: Pit bull owners. They love to whine that their breed is misunderstood. But get a load of some common names: Bite, Death Row, Monster, Spike, Kill, Terminator, Crusher, Destroyer, First Blood, Slasher. These aren't exactly names you'd give to a pooch you want to play with the kiddies.

In Yonkers, pit bulls must be muzzled and kept on a short leash in public. At home, they must be tied up behind a fence. Owners of vicious dogs must take out a \$ 100,000 insurance policy. New York City could adopt those measures.

Or, you could just shoot the dogs.

Back on the bus

When Deputy Mayor Randy Mastro was asked on TV who was responsible for new monthly transit passes a plan Mayor Giuliani opposed Mastro answered: "Mayor Giuliani."

Proof perfect those New York magazine ads were on target.

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