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Wednesday, December 26, 2012

Education**UC Irvine's first law school class beat most California law schools on July bar exam**

UC Irvine School of Law's inaugural class scored a 90 percent pass rate on the July bar exam, second only to Stanford's 94 percent but edging out other top schools.

Government**Public attitude softens toward criminal rehabilitation**

Structural changes to the criminal justice system have not happened quickly, but the last 20 years have seen dramatic changes in public attitude toward it.

Judges and Judiciary**Judges seek expanded due process in misconduct inquiries**

The California Judges Association is pushing four proposed changes to the procedures used to investigate alleged judicial misconduct in an effort to expand due process for bench officers.

Education**New Stanford Law School leader ushers in changes**

Four months into her new job as dean of Stanford Law School, Mary Elizabeth "Liz" Magill is gathering information from top university administrators, faculty and students, while seeking ways to improve learning opportunities.

California group seeks to rid state of 'grossly ineffective' teachers

Students Matter, a non-profit education reform group, is suing the state and several school districts over allegations that statutory protections for teachers violate students' equal protection rights.

Law Practice**Recent bar graduates increasingly hanging their own shingles**

A saturated legal market and sagging economy are forcing many law school graduates to pursue what was once considered an impossible task - starting their own practice immediately after passing the bar exam.

Criminal**Prominent Chula Vista attorney convicted in 1989 murders**

Family members of a slain Victorville woman broke into tears as a San Bernardino County jury returned a guilty verdict Friday against a prominent Chula Vista attorney who remained free for decades after the murder.

Mergers & Acquisitions Dealmakers

UC Irvine's first law school class beat most California law schools on July bar exam

Dean Erwin Chemerinsky has vowed to make the school top 20 nationally

By Don J. DeBenedictis

SANTA ANA - UC Irvine School of Law's first graduating class passed the bar exam in July at a rate higher than every other California law school except Stanford's, according to the State Bar.

Ninety percent of the 51 UC Irvine law graduates who took the exam in July passed, putting the new Orange County school on the path to meet Dean Erwin Chemerinsky's oft-stated goal of becoming a top 20 law school nationally.

Chemerinsky credited "the wonderful students we had and the excellent legal education program we created."

"What this shows is that ... we are [becoming] one of the elite law schools in the nation," he said.

From Stanford Law School, 94 percent of the 111 graduates who took the exam for the first time in July passed.

But Irvine edged out other top California law schools, including UCLA School of Law with a 89 percent pass rate, USC Gould School of Law at 88 percent and both Pepperdine and UC Berkeley law schools at 86 percent.

Law schools generally move up or down slightly in the rankings from year to year. In July 2011, USC topped the pass-rate listings with a 91 percent rate to Stanford's 89 percent and Berkeley's 87 percent.

USC Dean Robert K. Rasmussen said he is satisfied with his school's showing. "If you look at the last five years, that's the range we've been in," he said. "No big ups, no big downs" but still "at the high end."

Rasmussen said Irvine made a good showing its first time out. "It's going to be interesting over the years to see if they can continue."

At the bottom of this July's rankings is Thomas Jefferson School of Law, where 62 out of 128 first-time exam-takers succeeded, making for a 52 percent pass rate. That's nevertheless a marked improvement from the troubled San Diego school's showing last year, when only 33 percent of its graduates passed. The school last year became the first of 15 law schools across the nation - including four in California - to be sued for allegedly posting false or misleading graduate employment statistics.

Dean Rudy Hasl could not be reached Monday to comment on the newly released rankings.

Other data from the State Bar's set of detailed statistics show that students from law schools not accredited by the American Bar Association continue to do quite poorly on the bar exam.

A mere 22.2 percent of first-time exam takers from the state's 15 unaccredited schools passed in July, while students from the 18 schools accredited by the State Bar passed at a rate of 31 percent.

Not one first-timer passed from three California-accredited schools: Pacific Coast

University School of Law, Southern California Institute of Law and the University of West Los Angeles School of Law's West Los Angeles campus. Four out of 19 from the West Los Angeles school's San Fernando Valley campus passed.

Nine of the 15 unaccredited law schools operating in California saw no first-time exam takers pass. A State Bar task force is set to examine whether the unaccredited schools should be required to obtain accreditation.

Women from ABA-accredited schools in California did slightly better than men, passing at a rate of 77.3 percent to 76.4 percent. But men edged out women 68.7 percent to 67.9 percent when passage rates from all types of law schools and legal education are tallied.

Racial minorities continue to lag behind Caucasians at passing the bar exam. This July, the pass rate for whites from California ABA schools was 81.4 percent, but it fell to 72.9 percent for Asians, 69.7 for Latinos and 58.8 percent for African-Americans, according to the bar statistics.

Here are the California ABA-accredited schools in order of their first-timer pass rates on the July 2012 bar exam:

Stanford 94%

UCI 90%

UCLA 89%

USC 88%

Pepperdine 86%

Berkeley 86%

Chapman 82%

Loyola 79%

UC Davis 79%

Western State 79%

San Diego 78%

California Western 77%

Hastings 77%

McGeorge 73%

Santa Clara 73%

Golden Gate 70%

San Francisco 70%

Whittier 70%

Southwestern 64%

LaVerne 53%

Thomas Jefferson 52%

don_debenedictis@dailyjournal.com

A roundup of recent mergers and acquisitions and financing activity and the lawyers involved.

Litigation

Class action against Instagram unlikely to get far, legal observers say

After provoking an online outcry with changes to its terms of use, Instagram Inc. finds itself in the crosshairs of a class action. But legal observers say the Facebook-owned company has little to worry about.

Perspective

Hobbit titles: An unexpected journey in confusion

Warner Brothers, New Line, and its affiliates recently achieved a rare courtroom victory by obtaining an order restraining distribution of a film they claimed unfairly competed with one of its titles. By **Mark Litwak**

Revised law is new paint job for construction remedies

If the sudden 2008 credit crunch can be likened to an earthquake, then the following flood of mechanics lien and stop payment notice litigation was its aftershock. By **William 'Fritz' Pahland**

Judicial Profile

Leland S. Davis III

Superior Court Judge San Mateo County (South San Francisco)

Law Practice

U.S. firms make way for global leadership

As U.S. law firms increasingly become global businesses, current leaders face the challenge of ensuring that lawyers in different countries are well represented in the firm's top ranks.

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Bar Exam insiders debunk myths about test

November 16, 2012

Those who write and grade California Bar Exam recognize it is a "high-stakes, professional licensing exam," so they try to make it as fair as possible, said Erica Moeser, president of the National Conference of Bar