

CUNY Law School Gets Vote of Support For Accreditation

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Body

A pivotal committee of the American Bar Association has recommended that the Law School of the City University of New York -- an innovative institution with a mission to bring minority students into the profession -- be granted full accreditation.

Although highly praised from the outset for its goals and curriculum, the Law School had struggled in its first few years, with large numbers of its students failing the bar exam. But in recent years, the school has made considerable strides, with the rate of students passing the bar exam doubling. The action of the Bar Association committee appeared to recognize those gains.

The 455-student law school on the campus of Queens College has had provisional accreditation from the A.B.A. since it opened in September 1983. Although full accreditation still must be approved by another A.B.A. committee and the association's full House of Delegates at its annual convention next month in San Francisco, the recommendation of the accreditation committee is considered tantamount to approval.

The chairman of the accreditation committee, Wayne McCormack, a law professor at the University of Utah, said yesterday that a recommendation for accreditation by his committee had never been overturned.

Since its founding, the city's only publicly financed law school has won widespread national praise for its innovative curriculum, its efforts to bring under-represented groups, including women and older students, into the legal profession and its goal of training them for careers in public service.

The school -- with much of the teaching done through off-campus clinics and by assigning students to work in governmental and social agencies -- emphasizes what most lawyers do: counseling clients, negotiating settlements, drafting contracts and serving as advocates in a variety of forums.

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In its first few years, only 30 to 35 percent of its graduates were passing the bar examination. By last year, with that rate at 64 percent, Mr. Fields said the school was "approaching a par with other accredited law schools."

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