

Defending CUNY Law School

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Body

The executive forum article Nov. 21 by Herbert London about CUNY Law School contains errors of fact as well as inferences that are biased and unjustified. Whether these distortions are motivated by rivalry or political ambitions or both, they are unworthy of a member of the academic community and the press.

Mr. London states that CUNY Law School was founded "to accept racial minorities whose grades and Law School Aptitude Test scores wouldn't normally warrant their enrollment at a law school." This statement is not only false, it is demeaning and essentially racist in its implications.

Like all the colleges of the City University of New York, CUNY Law School has a mandate to provide access to higher education to all qualified applicants, including those from racial minorities traditionally under-represented and underserved.

Consequently, we recruit a diverse student body genuinely representative of the city. We are proud of our students, especially that we have one of the highest percentages of minority students (about one-third) of any law school in the country. But it is absolutely false to say that we were founded solely to accept racial minorities, and it is both false and racist to assume that minorities we do admit lack the intelligence and ability to be successful law students and lawyers.

It is incorrect to state that a "cheating scandal resulted in the suspension of several second-year students." There was no "scandal," and there have been no students suspended.

Mr. London states that "in early September two faculty members were dismissed for what was presumed to be their lack of competence." The faculty referred to were recommended for tenure a year ago by the faculty tenure review committees of both the law school and Queens College. The president of Queens College and the chancellor of CUNY subsequently refused to accept this recommendation and denied tenure, in effect dismissing them.

In fact, no reasons were given to explain this action. Last May, State Supreme Court Justice Edward J. Greenfield ordered the two professors reinstated for a year to allow for proper tenure review and observed that their credentials were "most impressive."

Mr. London provided selected statistics regarding the bar pass rate of CUNY Law School graduates. The first-time pass rate of our first two graduating classes was lower than acceptable to us. However, that is not unusual for a new school. Moreover, the article ignores the vastly improved record for graduates who have repeated the examination; for example, it fails to mention that at least 80% of the class of 1986 graduates have passed the bar and are practicing law.

Mr. London asks: "Is it true that traditional law schools don't graduate enough lawyers interested in addressing public service concerns?" *The New York Law Journal* (Nov. 17) answers this question. An article by Daniel Wise reports that "a high percentage of graduates from New York's top-ranked law schools are shunning government and public-interest jobs," preferring better-paying jobs with private firms.

That article also reports that large numbers of CUNY students said they had landed jobs with the government or public-interest organizations. Further, "the percentage of Queens students ending up with public-sector jobs far outpaced other area law schools."

Mr. London asks for "a justification for this experiment." Let him ask practicing attorneys who might not have been able to attend law school were it not for CUNY; the employers of CUNY Law School graduates, ranging from the governor's office to the district attorney to Supreme Court judges, and the many people who have received legal assistance from CUNY graduates, many of whom would otherwise have had no access to it.

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