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Correspondence school a sleeper in bar exam

By Michael J. Hall

SAN FRANCISCO – A correspondence school in Sacramento is one of the upset winners in the twice-yearly standings of how schools placed in the California bar examination.

Six of eight Northwestern California University students who took the test for the first time passed the February 1994 bar, according to statistics released by the State Bar last week.

The school's 75 percent pass rate represents "a lot of hard work and effort" by the students, said school spokeswoman Dee Parker. "The students did it ... we gave them the vehicle, but the bottom line is that they have to do it."

It is unusual for one of the State's correspondence law schools to have such a high pass rate on the bar exam, which is generally reckoned to be the nation's toughest. Correspondence schools rarely have high rankings.

Kensington University, with 2 of 4 first time takers passing, and Newport University, with 2 of 3 first-timers passing, also did well in the correspondence category.

While the statistics were good news for the Sacramento nontraditional school, they were nothing of the sort for the four University of California law schools, none of which made it into the top five for first-time test takers from the elite, American Bar Association-accredited law schools in California.

That category was won by Stanford University, which had 90 percent of its first-timers, 9 of 10, and 87.5 percent of all its takers pass the February exam. Second place went to California Western Law School in San Diego, which has an 85.4 percent pass rate among its 82 first-time takers.

Others scoring high for the first-time takers among the California schools accredited by the ABA were Pepperdine University, 84.6 percent; the University of San Diego, 77.3 percent; and the University of Southern California, 75 percent.

Among the four UC schools, Boalt Hall at Berkeley had the highest first-time rate, with 69.2 percent; Hastings College of the Law was second, with 66.7 percent; followed by UCLA with 57.1; and finally UC Davis, with a pass rate of 50 percent.

In fairness to Davis, it should be noted that it had only two first-time test takers. Overall, of its 16 graduates, 10 passed, for a pass rate of 62.5 percent.

First-time takers tend to have a much higher pass rate than those who are taking the test for a second or subsequent time. The February exam, taken by fewer people than the July exam – which comes just after most law school graduations – was taken by 3,671 people this year, and had an overall pass rate of 43.3 percent.

The 1,291 first-time takers had a pass rate of 60.7 percent.