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Students excel on bar exam

December 20, 2007 | Ron Brown

When third-year Liberty University law students arrived for fall semester in August 2006, they attended an opening ceremony in which they touched a stone taken from Mt. Sinai, the peak where Moses received the Ten Commandments from God.

“It was a reminder that they were linking back to the great law giver, God, who gave the law to the earthly law giver, Moses,” said Liberty University School of Law Dean Mathew D. Staver. “I challenged the students to set an example for every student to come in the future. We challenged them to have bar passage rates that would compete with any law school in the country.”

Mission accomplished.

More than 89 percent of LU law graduates who have taken state bar exams this year passed them.

“I wasn’t necessarily surprised,” Staver said. “I was exceptionally pleased. It’s like finding a diamond in a coal mine. We had set a high standard for our students to reach.”

The success of its graduates places LU’s law school in the top 20 percent of all American Bar Association-approved law schools with respect to bar passage rates.

Staver said it is not unusual for a new law school to have a bar passage rate in the 30 to 40 percent range. A milestone in the history of a law school is when it reaches a bar passage rate of 70 percent.

In Virginia, the overall passage rate for all law schools was 71.97 percent. LU’s passage rate for the Virginia bar exceeded 83 percent.

Last May, a total of 50 students made up the law school’s first graduating class.

Of that 50, 45 took bar exams in 16 different states this year. One of the graduates took bar exams in two states.

All told, 41 of the graduates passed state bar exams.

Staver said students who have not taken bar exams plan to do so in February.

The LU School of Law opened in August 2004 and received provisional ABA accreditation in February 2006. The law school’s drive toward permanent accreditation will be bolstered by its bar passage rate.

The law school's lawyering skills program is the most comprehensive in the country, combining the theory of law with the skills of law, Staver said.

Despite the success of the first graduating class, Staver said he will push for improvement.

"I have challenged our current third-year law class to meet and exceed this current bar passage rate," he said.