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Chase law students get multiple choices

Accept grade, take a 'P,' or retake flawed exam

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A series of mishaps administering a Salmon P. Chase law school class' final exam has left 43 students with a decision. Students can keep the original grade they received, take a "P" for pass on the exam, or retake a second, different exam.

"It was a very complicated situation which could not have been put right by a single remedy, so we offered three different remedies, all of which were available to every student," said Nancy Firak, associate dean for academic affairs.

The problem occurred during the written part of the exam for a torts class. Students were to answer two questions, but not all of them did.

This was because the professor, Edward Brewer, left off captions in the exam that would have directed students to the question.

"For that reason, I concluded that the students' having missed the second question may have been partly my doing in not providing more precise instructions."

Brewer's solution was to have students who answered both questions be graded as planned. For students who missed the second question, he would grade the exam as if there were only one question on the exam.

But Brewer then found out that some of his students had taken an alumnus' review course on how to take a law exam.

As an example, the alumnus coincidentally used a 5-year-old question that Brewer was recycling for this exam. This gave the students who took the review course a decided advantage.

Using old exam questions is not an uncommon practice. Brewer is unsure of how the alumnus came across his old exam question.

"What a mess that was, and we had to find the best solution available to remedy the situation," Brewer said.

The solution was the dean offering the three choices to the students. That decision upset the other Torts 1 class, which didn't have a problem. They would be graded as normal. Their reasoning was that one class getting a "P" for pass might give that class a leg up in class rankings.

Lindsay Hunter, Chase's Student Bar Association president, wanted more involvement from the association.

"I would have liked to have seen the SBA play a greater role in creating a solution," said Hunter. "It was a difficult situation and there were no easy answers. Students did give input into what went wrong but didn't have involvement in creating a solution."

Brewer thought it was the best they could do under the circumstances.

"The solution was both as fair and as even-handed as it could be and it is the very decision that I would want to see implemented if I were behind the veil and did not know whether I would have answered both questions or one question, or would have been in the other torts class," said Brewer.

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