

Law school reviews freshman activities

by Heidi Toth
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The Extracurricular Review Committee at the Texas Tech School of Law has concluded its public forums, but is still continuing research into several issues related to extracurricular activities.

Marilyn Phelan, chairwoman of the committee, said three public meetings were held in which students could voice their opinions on first-year students participating in competitions, the role of alcohol at law school events, and the continuation of the Supreme Tort.

The committee, which is comprised of three faculty members, Dean Terence Cook and two members of the Student Bar Association, was formed at the end of the spring semester because of complaints from the students about student conduct at law school events, Phelan said.

When the members reach a conclusion, they will recommend a course of action to the faculty. The faculty will then make a recommendation to the dean. There is no cutoff date for when the committee's decision must be made she said and the committee is looking at the issues with an open mind.

Alex Straatmann, president of the Student Bar Association and a member of the committee, said the committee has not had a follow-up meeting since the last open discussion.

"I think the meetings went well, as far as attendance and people raising opinions," he said.

Kortney Henton, a third-year law student from Spearman, is the committee chairwoman of the Supreme Tort committee for the Board of Barristers. She called the Supreme Tort a "law school roast," where the law students and faculty get together to watch a slide show and hand out awards. In past years, students and faculty also have put on skits, she said.

"It's a time that we make fun of law school and the things we've done during the year of our law school careers," she said.

Alcohol is served at the Supreme Tort, which is one reason why the Extracurricular Review Committee is looking into it. Last year there also were some personal issues raised, Henton said. Some of the participants focused on people and personal concerns instead of the law school as a whole.

Henton said she and Faye Little, the Board of Barristers chairwoman, are drafting guidelines to make the event more inclusive and to avoid the problems they had last year. She does not think the law school should get rid of the Tort, because it's the time of year for the students, and especially the third years, to blow off steam and celebrate the end of the year.

David Doehring, a first-year law student from Houston, was incensed about the issues being discussed. It stems from the faculty's perception that the students are not able to choose whether or not to indulge in alcohol, he said.

The issue, in relation to alcohol, is not about liability, Doehring said. The students understand that aspect. However, they are all adults and capable of deciding to drink or not.

Sean Kilgore, a first-year student from San Antonio, said the overall feeling he got was that the committee had a predetermined goal and the members were just trying to find students to back them up on the alcohol issue.

"They've pretty much made up their minds that they're going to remove alcohol from all law school functions," he said. "I just hope the Extracurricular Committee takes into account the opinions of the students as much as they say they're going to."

However, Zak Hall, a second-year law student from Austin, said there is a serious alcohol problem within the law school, the legal profession and at law school events. He supports the committee's purpose of evaluating how big the problem is and what should be done about it.

"I think the committee is doing a good job of reviewing the problem of alcohol at law school events," he said.

Hall said he had not seen any negative consequences of alcohol abuse firsthand at these events, but some things have happened after the activities were over.

Hall is definitely in the minority. He has talked to a few people who agree with him, he said, but most do not seem to care.

Doehring was less upset about the question of first-year involvement. He said it was important for first-year students to compete, but first-years are already under intense pressure and participation in competitions.

He said he feels the faculty should not determine his participation. He can personally make that decision, as can the other students in law school. Part of being in a professional school he said was each student deciding how much

was too much.

"The job of the faculty is to make sure that we are competitive and successful lawyers," Doehring said. He said these decisions are not within their scope of authority.

Hall agreed that first-year participation is a good thing. He said if students do not have wonderful grades, they need something to set them apart from their classmates when job-hunting, and extracurricular activities do that.

"It gives them exposure to real world legal experience," he said. "It's stuff they can't learn in the classroom."

