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# A Critique of Bar Review Courses - To Review or Not to Review, That is the Question

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## To Review or Not to Review, That is the Question

by Lindsay Schlottman

"Probably the highest pass-rate in the State of Maryland"

"Thousands of Successful Students"

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Throughout the year, bar review schools make known to the law student population their claims of greatness. Some are more visible than others; signs are posted on bulletin boards around the schools and campus representatives further the promotion in exchange for a free course. Others receive publicity through advertising in legal publications and/or word of mouth. The cost of one of these courses is approximately \$200. They last on the average six weeks, ending ten days or two weeks before the bar exam. Some schools offer longer and shorter courses. Methods of instruction, materials and faculty vary. In the final semester of law school, a student must evaluate these courses and determine whether a course is necessary to tackle the bar exam. The five following bar review schools are those which gain most of the attention of law students in the Baltimore area.

### *Beight Bar Review School*

Thomas L. Beight teaches a long course (twelve weeks) and a short

course (six weeks). The cost is \$210 and that includes the written materials, which the student may keep. Mr. Beight teaches the majority of the course and stresses the Maryland essay portion of the exam. He feels that little studying needs to be done for the multi-state. According to Ray Bennett (J.D., University of Baltimore, 1972, pseudonym), who took the Beight course in 1974, Mr. Beight teaches by reviewing prior bar exam questions and analyzing them in class. "He always states you look for four things: dates, ages, words and quotes, and mathematical computations. He refers to the five method approach: conclusion, issue, rule, application, and restatement of the conclusion," according to Mr. Bennett. Mr. Beight recently added a co-instructor who teaches constitutional and criminal law. These two probably cannot compete with the larger bar review faculties in terms of expertise in all areas of law. However, Mr. Beight is considered quite well-versed in all subjects in the opinion of Mr. Bennett and others.

### *Ginsberg & Ginsberg Bar Review Courses*

Hyman and Isidore Ginsberg opened their first bar review course over forty-five years ago. They have "made" many attorneys in the State of Maryland, including among others Mayor Shaeffer and Senator Mathias. Together the brothers teach the course, updating all materials and offering students access to any of their seventeen published books on specific areas of law. Their course (six weeks) presently costs \$200; the materials are loaned to the students. Hyman Ginsberg gave a sample bar review lecture to University of Baltimore students on October 14, 1975. The topic was Title 9 of the *Uniform Commercial Code*. His method of instruction involves a well-organized review of an area of law, with repetition of important words, phrases and sentences. Examples are given to clarify and explain certain concepts. Although Mr. Ginsberg gave students time for questions, few took the opportunity. Presumably those preparing for the bar exam would be more inquisitive. The Ginsbergs are acclaimed by many as outstanding au-

thorities on Maryland law and certainly are eminently well qualified to teach a bar review course. Mr. Ginsberg's sample lecture served an important purpose.

### *Maryland Bar Review Course*

Jeffrey J. Radowich gave a very well-organized presentation on the Maryland Bar Review to University of Baltimore students on October 22, 1975. Sample materials were displayed. This course is five years old and is popular with recent law school graduates. Mr. Radowich began his talk pointing out that the bar exam has nothing to do with law school and nothing to do with practicing law; the purpose of a bar review course therefore is simply to enable one to pass the bar. The method of instruction, according to Mr. Radowich, is "an integrated system of learning by doing." Students review old bar exam questions and practice spotting the issue, stating the general legal principle(s) involved, applying the principle to the facts (reasoning), and drawing a conclusion. In the process of this practicing, students are expected to learn the barest minimum of black letter law principles needed to pass the bar. Mr. Radowich reviewed a question, showing how it should be analyzed. Essay questions and predominant bar exam subjects are focused on by this course. Written answers will be critiqued by the instructors and returned to the students. Maryland Bar Review seems to stress that a student should tackle the bar exam with an eye on satisfying the bar examiners only. Mr. Radowich discussed Rules Governing Admission to the Bar of Maryland and the June 1975 Candidate's Letter to show what these examiners want. Dave Harvis (J.D., University of Baltimore, 1975) says, "The whole purpose of this bar review course is not to teach you to practice law, not to prepare you to deal with clients, not to prepare you to get along in life, but simply just to meet this artificial situation: the bar exam." Bar exam-taking psychology is drawn into the course. This course allows students to evaluate the course instructors after the course. It costs \$200, which includes the lease of the materials.

### *Modern Bar Review Course*

Modern is actually BRI-Modern since it is affiliated with Bar Review, Inc., "the largest and most successful bar review school in the nation," according to Modern's promotional literature. The BRI affiliation allows access to a nationwide faculty in the teaching of the multi-state portion of the bar exam. BRI-Modern is a five year old course which has quickly attracted the attention of graduating law students. On October 16, 1975, Ron Shapiro enthusiastically presented to University of Baltimore students a summary of the Modern method. The concern of this bar review is to develop techniques and to make up for substantive deficiencies by putting together in one format bar exam questions and lectures. Modern also emphasizes writing essays; students may turn in written answers which are graded and returned to the student. According to Gloria Johnson (J.D., University of Maryland, 1975), who took the Modern course in June, 1975, the essay writing was encouraged, but few students took advantage of it. Also, the student receives just a written critique. Modern's brochures announce the initiation of a tutorial writing program beginning with the winter 75-76 course in which a student may meet personally with a faculty member to discuss his or her written answers and analyses. The psychological aspects of bar exam-taking are covered by the course. Students are allowed to critique the instructors after the course is over. Ms. Johnson pointed out that the quality of instructors ranged from excellent to fair. Modern's six week course costs \$195 plus \$25 for materials (the \$25 is refundable if you return your materials).

### *Nacrelli Bar Review School*

Mr. Dan Beyer, in a positive, hard-sell approach, spoke at the University of Baltimore on October 15, 1975 about the Nacrelli Bar Review Course, bringing with him display materials. Nacrelli is the oldest (thirty-five years) and best known bar review school in Washington, D.C. The six week course is roughly divided in half, with two to three weeks spent on the multi-state review and the remainder

spent on the Maryland essay. The written materials are more concentrated than BRI, for instance, according to Mr. Beyer. They stress basic, simplistic rules of law and memorizing. Black letter law is taught through outlines and review of old bar exam questions which the professors analyze out loud. Key words are given, to aid in this memorizing. Indeed, the style is "focused and capsulated," quoting Mr. Beyer. In the Maryland review, the obvious differences between black letter law and Maryland law are pointed out. There's a small book on Maryland peculiarities. If you want your writing critiqued, you have an opportunity every two weeks to have a professor look over and criticize an answer you have written. There's also an optional practice exam. For those concerned about bar exam jitters, there's a lecture by a psychologist on exam-taking strategy. Nacrelli costs \$200. Unlike the other courses, if you need to take the bar review course again, you may do so without cost. Also, you may purchase their materials separately, without taking the course.

The bar exam is an enigma. Law students seem to think generally that a bar review course is necessary in tackling this strange creature. They generally choose courses based on a friend's recommendation. "I looked at available materials and I also spoke with students that had taken more than one course and

students that had taken just one course and I tried to synthesize their opinions about them." "That was the one everyone said to take." "Everybody said it was good." "It was recommended by a friend of mine." The course cover a vast amount of material in a short time. Materials are updated at least annually. Frequently the classes are large, too large. Often there's little time for personal guidance. There are frequent complaints about crowding at tables and other unpleasant physical conditions. It's difficult to say, based on a limited survey of opinions, if a course is necessary. However, taking a course boosts a person's confidence in approaching the bar. "If you've taken the course you feel as if you've done all you can do in addition to studying for the course on your own... You don't have any nagging doubts," says Mr. Harvis. The group setting helps. Mr. Bennett, who has taken three bar review courses, remarks, [bar review courses] put you on a schedule: you must be in class at a certain time; everyone is sharing a common goal. You get in step with everybody else. Every once in a while they give you a pep talk and at times, believe me, you need it. They want to see you pass; they're not interested in having you the second time around for less money. This common goal helps you to prepare and at times settle your nerves before you can go and sit and pass that Maryland bar."

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