Bar Buddies Program helps graduates prepare for bar exam

by Tracy Carbasho

Preparing for the bar exam can be an overwhelming task, but local law school graduates are easing their burden by participating in a special mentoring program.

The Bar Buddies Program, launched in 2012, represents a collaborative effort among the law schools at Duquesne University and the University of Pittsburgh in partnership with the ACBA’s Young Lawyers Division. The concept is to pair graduating law students with volunteer attorneys who help them prepare for the bar exam.

This year’s Pennsylvania Bar Exam will be held July 28-29 and graduates will be expected to understand 22 different areas of the law. Each law school matches graduates with attorneys who are willing to volunteer their time, expertise and patience to help the individual prepare for and hopefully pass the exam.

“These young lawyers can vividly recall studying for the bar exam and are able to provide specialized insight into this uniquely stressful experience,” said Kirsha Weyandt Trychta, assistant professor of clinical legal skills and director of academic excellence at the Duquesne University School of Law. “Essentially, a Bar Buddy serves as an experienced guide for the graduate, freeing up crucial time and allowing the graduate to focus on his or her studies.”

Richard Gaffney, interim associate dean for administration and director of bar services at Duquesne, said young lawyers who volunteer to be a Bar Buddy are contributing not only to the graduate’s immediate success on the exam, but also to their own development as a mentor and role model. He believes the program epitomizes the professionalism and collegiality that are the hallmarks of the Pittsburgh legal community.

All law school graduates at both universities are encouraged to participate. Last year, 43 Duquesne graduates and 35 Pitt graduates were paired with a buddy.

For more information about the program or to volunteer, contact Trychta at trychtak@duq.edu or 412-396-4617 at Duquesne. For details about the program at the University of Pittsburgh, contact Jaclyn Belczyk at jbelczyk@pitt.edu or 412-648-1386.

The University of Pittsburgh will host a reception on March 24 at 5 p.m. to give its students a chance to meet their mentors. Duquesne held a similar event for its students earlier this month.

Both universities will hold a joint event on May 14 at the downtown office of Clark Hill to let graduates from the law schools mingle and interact with young lawyers in a relaxed atmosphere.

“Students learn about the bar application process and commercial bar preparation courses and hear answers to frequently asked exam-day questions in a relaxed, supportive setting,” said Trychta. “Attorneys who remember receiving support and encouragement before sitting for the bar exam have the opportunity to pay it forward and assist a student in the weeks leading up to the bar exam.”