

Economic Concerns Add Stress To Bar Exam Experience

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As the Bar Exam looms in many jurisdictions, some preemptive excuse making never hurts! Actually, it often hurts! But that doesn't stop this article from making its case.

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Bad economy can make taking the bar exam even more stressful

by Michelle Lore

The lack of sleep, quick meals, missed social events and late-night studying will soon be over. This week more than 830 would-be lawyers will flock to the RiverCentre in St. Paul for two days to sit for the Minnesota bar examination.

Test takers say that preparing for the exam has been stressful, in part because of the vast amount of information they must digest and to a lesser extent, the uncertain economic times. But for most, thoughts of anything but the exam have been put aside for the past eight weeks.

"All of the issues with the economy and employment have to be put in the back of my mind and all of my focus has to be on the law that I need to know for the bar," said University of St. Thomas School of Law grad Rasheen Tillman, who has not yet found employment. "If in the end I don't pass the bar I wouldn't have a job anyway, so it all comes down to passing."

Scott Swanson, director of academic achievement at the University of St. Thomas Law School, runs a dedicated bar review course that meets twice a week in the two months leading up to the exam. He said that despite the downturn in the economy, he doesn't think that the stress level of test takers is higher than usual.

"Bar exam stress is its own separate thing," he said.

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Living the law

Whatever study methods the law grads employ, it's a stressful time for them.

"Everything in my life came to a halt," said Tillman. "I live, breath, and sleep the law. I am trying not to burn out, but it is tiring studying day after day for such long hours."

While the stress is real for all test takers, those law grads who don't have a job lined up may feel it more keenly.

"There's this fear that you really do have to pass it or people aren't going to hire you," Swann explained.