

Role for Gays in new law school

With the opening of the People's College of Law of the National Lawyers Guild in Los Angeles, first of its kind in the country, gay people have a major shot at self-determination in an important educational effort.

But the extent of the opportunity depends on how many Gays enroll in the People's College of Law, which opened its doors on Sept. 3, at 2227 Seventh St., Los Angeles. In addition to the basic law courses required for the California bar examination, the school will offer minority-oriented courses geared to demand.

If a large number of gay people enroll, there will be more gay courses offered. Likewise with other minority enrollments, explained Lee Solomon, the college's administrator.

For many years there have been so-called "people's law schools" offering a limited number of specialized courses in various communities throughout the country. But they have not offered a full program that would qualify students for state bar examinations.

Minority Focus

The National Lawyers Guild, an association of progressive, liberal attorneys who have fought for black, Chicano, native American, and women's rights, among others, has started the People's College of Law in collaboration with minority groups to train law students who are committed to returning and working for their communities when they pass the bar.

Gay rights is a new area of minority concern for the guild, which has ignored the gay community until only recently. The issue of gay rights was raised at the guild's national convention in Minneapolis last month, and a resolution supporting the gay movement passed unanimously.

The resolution not only supported gay rights but also pledged the guild to take "an active part in opposing gay oppression."

In its statement of purpose, the People's College of Law says: "We are a working coalition of the Asian Law Collective, La Raza National Law Students Association, the National Conference of Black Lawyers, lawyers from the gay community, and the National Lawyers Guild."

Growth Forecast

The college expects an initial enrollment of between 35 and 45 students. Its prospectus projects an enrollment of 150 students by 1975, 225 by 1976, 300 by 1977, and a class of 500 by 1978.

"Of course this seems ambitious, but we're doing it," Solomon said. If you told someone three months ago such a school might come into existence by this date, that someone would have said you're ridiculous."

The college has a tuition of \$350 a semester. "That's cheaper than state law schools," noted Solomon. While law schools under the California state system don't charge tuition, they do charge fees that amount to more than \$350 a semester, she added.

Entrance requirements are: (1) 60 semester or 90 quarter college credits, or (2) passage of the state's college equivalency examination.

The People's College of Law, which will have as instructors members of the National Lawyers Guild, including some of the nation's most prominent attorneys, is not accredited.

Two Hurdles

This means that it has a four-year rather than a customary three-year law curriculum. After the first year of study, students are required to take a "baby bar" exam before they can go on with the rest of the curriculum, which would ultimately qualify students for the regular bar exam.

Los Angeles attorney Al Gordon, who has devoted his practice almost exclusively over the past two years to defending gay clients and gay rights, is offering an annual scholarship to a gay law student enrolling

in the college.

The scholarship of \$750 will cover two semesters of tuition and books. Gordon, who said he has already chosen someone for the first year, said a committee will select the recipient in the future.

Solomon said loans are also possible. For further information on financial assistance and late enrollment, call the guild office, 380-3180, in Los Angeles.

Still Formulating

For the first semester, all classes will be at night. And until the college has an idea of the minority composition of its enrollment and the demands of the students, it will be offering only basic law courses.

But the college is committed to covering gay concerns. Attorney Tom Coleman of Los Angeles has been named to the college's advisory board as a representative of the gay community. And gay leaders, as

well as lawyers working with the gay community, have been urged to recommend prospective students.

Courses that might interest gay people, in addition to a gay rights course, and which the college is contemplating offering, include police brutality, juvenile law, immigration law, and women's rights.

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GAY LAW STUDENTS . . . Step May, Julie Gaviria, Ron Grayson

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