

Makerere sued over law pre-entry exams

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Written by David Tash Lumu

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A group of lawyers have filed a case in the High Court challenging Makerere University’s new policy of subjecting people who wish to enroll for the Bachelor of Laws to pre-entry examinations.

Led by Ntenjeru South MP Patrick Nsanja, the group argues that Makerere University acted in breach of Article 21 of the Constitution when it subjected prospective students to an examination whose mode of setting, grading and marking is unknown. They further argue that pre-entry examinations will exclude many people that qualify for the law course.

“It is unfair for someone who has passed his or her examinations at advanced level to be subjected to another examination, which is not set by the national body (UNEB) but by individuals at the university,” Nsanja said.

To sit for these pre-entry examinations, each student had to pay Shs 80,000, a fee the petitioners argue was not justifiable, especially since students in high school paid Shs 1,600 for Joint Admission Board (JAB) forms. They view this as some kind of duplicity. The lawyers, as such, want court to declare the pre-entry examination policy discriminative to high school students.

“For example, in my constituency, there are two students who scored 25 points at A-level, but they didn’t have the money to pay for the pre-entry examinations. What justification will the university give?” Nsanja wondered.

Makerere University recently examined up to 1,600 prospective students wishing to study law in the 2012/2013 academic year. Two other universities, Uganda Christian University Mukono (UCU) and Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), offer similar pre-entry examinations for prospective law students. But the lawyers are not turning their guns on them because, unlike Makerere, these are private universities. The lawyers further contend that as a public institution, Makerere should be all-inclusive and non-discriminatory.

Last month, Makerere University’s Academic Registrar Alfred Masikye Namoah said results of the pre-entry examinations shall be the sole criterion for admission of students to the Bachelor of Laws programme. Namoah also said the examination shall be the basis for selecting students for government sponsorship, something that the petitioners strongly contest.

Namoah, nonetheless, says the decision to institute this examination was based on findings from a study that set out to ascertain the high failure rates in the law school. The move followed concerns that the Law Development Centre registers high failure rates from students who appear to have passed their A-level, but cannot deal with the intricacies of law.

The view of Makerere University is that the examinations are intended to eliminate students that qualify for the course, having scored highly, but are incapable of analysing and comprehending the complex issues that law studies and the legal profession entail.

dtlumu@observer.ug

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