

School of Hard Knocks

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On my dad's first day at the University of Wisconsin's law school, all of the students gathered for orientation to be addressed by the Dean. The Dean told the students to look at the person on their left and look at the person on their right, and said that only one of the three would graduate.

On my first day at UW law school, we also gathered for orientation. Just as he did 30 years earlier, the Dean also told us to look at the people to our left and right. But he then proclaimed that he and the faculty would do their best to ensure all three of us would graduate. Whew!

In my dad's day, college and law school was much easier to get into, but much harder to finish. When I went, getting admitted was far more difficult, but once you were in, you had a better shot at graduating.

Today, the competition for admission into prestigious schools is more cutthroat than ever.

As an example, Gerald and Lily Chow, citizens of Hong Kong, recently sued Mark Zimny and his education consultation company, IvyAdmit Consulting Associates, from Cambridge, Mass., after he failed to deliver on his promise to get their two sons admitted to Harvard, their "target university."

Educational consulting is a booming business, especially for foreign families.

According to the Chows, Zimny approached them at their oldest son's graduation from junior boarding school, claiming he was a professor at Harvard and that he could use his connections to help their sons get into New England boarding schools and Ivy League colleges.

Zimny promised to tutor the Chows' sons and assist with gaining their admission to Ivy League schools. The Chows' suit also alleges that he "promised to watch over their sons to ensure not only their educational success but also their safety and assimilation in the United States."

Being "very unfamiliar" with the U.S., the Chows enlisted Zimny's services. His fees started out at \$4,000 a month for each child, excluding tuition and board. However, Zimny eventually asked for a \$1 million retainer for each child, which the Chows paid.

"Zimny represented that this \$2 million retainer would be part of a big pool of money contributed by similar Asian, mainly Korean, families," the suit alleges. "He stated that the purpose of this pool of money was to help their sons and daughters to gain admission to colleges of their choice." Zimny purportedly used this money to make donations to universities on the families' behalf to improve the chances of admission.

After Zimny requested another \$1 million, the Chows refused and filed the suit, seeking to recover their \$2 million retainer. While their sons did get into Ivy League schools, they were not accepted at Harvard, as Zimny promised. They further allege that he lied about being a Harvard professor and about being a recruiter for the Loomis Chaffee boarding school in Connecticut.

Zimny's purported defense is that he gave it "the old college try."