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# Mortuary school sues city to turn over cadavers for training

BY BARBARA ROSS, DENIS SLATTERY / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / Updated: Friday, March 6, 2015, 12:39 AM A A A

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The American Academy McAllister Institute of Funeral Service filed papers Thursday to order the city to turn over dead bodies for its students, per a long-standing agreement.

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Bring out your dead.

A Manhattan mortuary school short on bodies sued the city health department Thursday to demand more cadavers for its students.

The American Academy McAllister Institute of Funeral Service said in papers filed in Manhattan Supreme Court that the city Office of Chief Medical Examiner stopped providing stiffs to the school last summer — sending students scrambling to find the recently deceased.

The school is asking the court to order the city to resume its 50-year practice of providing cadavers. Without them, the school could lose its accreditation, it said in court papers.

“An indispensable part of the curriculum leading to the AOS (Associate in Occupational Studies) degree is embalming. All students, including those enrolled online, must actively participate in at least 10 clinical embalmings to



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earn their degree," the school's lawyer, Brian Sokoloff, said in court papers.

As a result of the policy change, "they're going around scrounging" for bodies at funeral homes owned by alumni of the school. "It's haphazard," Sokoloff said.

School officials have had to improvise and race to bodies available at funeral homes — often at night or on weekends. They then have as little as two hours to rush a student and a faculty member to the home so the student can get the practical experience required.



STEVE ALLEN/GETTY IMAGES/BRAND X

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Mary Margaret Dunn, the school's president, said the institution, one of the largest in the U.S. with 454 students, has trained most of the funeral directors in the city and its students — most of whom take online courses — come to New York for a two-week, hands-on training session required by the national accrediting agency.

"Dead bodies or cadavers are as vital to a mortuary school offering a degree as computers are to a school offering an IT degree," Dunn said in court papers.

Dunn's ex-husband, former funeral home director Joseph Nicelli, had his own way of raising the dead — he is currently serving a 24-year jail sentence for his role in a multimillion-dollar body-part harvesting scheme.

Court documents show the school has had a rough time since Hurricane Sandy washed out its embalming space in the basement of Bellevue Hospital, next to the office of the chief medical examiner.

The school relocated to Harlem Hospital, which had no room to refrigerate cadavers so they were returned to the medical examiner offices, which provided them from around the city — a process that took about four hours, according to court papers.



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Starting in June, the medical examiner's office stopped sending any bodies — a move the Academy said in court papers violates state law requiring the city to release cadavers to mortuary and medical schools promptly.

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