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Paul Rumschlag
Indiana Daily Student

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Law library's stacks packed

by Paul Rumschlag
Ids Staff Writer

A law library without a complete set of books available is like a chemist without test tubes. Yet that is exactly the situation the I.U.-Bloomington law school faces.

The library can buy the books it needs, but has inadequate room to store them. Solutions such as storage of some books and construction of a new law building are being considered as means to end the problem, which has reached "crisis" proportions, Associate Librarian James Mullins said Tuesday.

The present structure, first used in 1956, was designed to hold 150,000 volumes. It now holds 178,000 volumes.

Last summer, 135,000 of these books were shifted within the library to make room for more. The additional space gained will hold 20,000 books, enough for two years worth of expansion, Mullins said. The library buys 10,000 to 12,000 books each year.

Preliminary planning for remodeling and expansion of the present building and the construction of a new structure was authorized Feb. 14 by the I.U. Board of Trustees. The expansion project would cost about \$9.7 million, and a new building would cost roughly \$17 million, according to figures released at the trustees meeting.

The library's stacks cannot be increased in number or moved closer together because floor supports are not built to hold more, Mullins said. Other areas in the school are unsuited to hold books unless floor supports are added,

he said.

Even if supports were added, there is no space available elsewhere in the school for the books. The building is presently seven offices short of providing enough rooms for its faculty members, said Sheldon Plager, law school dean.

The expansion project for the law school may take five years to complete, so the school is considering temporary storage of some of the lesser used books, Mullins said.

Storage, however, has its own problems, Mullins said. "The difference between us and other libraries is everything is used at one time or another. It's all primary research material," he said.

If books were stored, people would have to be hired to retrieve them, cutting into the library's already tight budget, he said. Also, there is no building on campus set aside for storage and no room in the main library, Mullins said.

The books likely to be moved into storage are the records of U.S. Supreme Court decisions. I.U. is one of only eight or nine schools in the country with such a set, Mullins said, adding, "It'd be a shame to lose them or move them out," he said.

As the number of books has increased, seating has become a problem. While actual seating capacity has not been lost, study carrels have been moved from locations on the first floor to the basement and second floor.

New seating standards set by the American Bar Association and the

Association of American Law Schools in 1977 raised the minimum capacity of law libraries from 40 to 50 percent of the school's enrollment. The I.U. library does not meet these standards according to last year's accreditation report, Plager said.

One solution to the crowding is the use of microforms.

But Mullins said to put the library's 21,000 volumes of state court decisions on microform would cost \$50,000, an estimate which is five years old. The library's yearly budget for new books is \$165,000.

The library is also experimenting with a computer subscription service of court decisions. One terminal is already in use but because the technology is new, the number of decisions available is limited, Plager said. Such a system is likely to be major form of storage in 15 to 20 years, he said.

These types of storage will be needed if the library's quality is to improve. "I would rate it as a sound, basic library but lacking in some areas as a major research institution. And one of the goals I've set for myself is to build such a library," Plager said.

Maurice Holland, associate professor of law and head of a committee studying how the law library should grow in the future, said the collections are well balanced, but lacking in areas such as environmental law, consumer protection and employment discrimination.

"It (the library) is just not as extensive and detailed as we would like to have," he said.