

BUILDING PLANS AT THE SCHOOL OF LAW

Imagine a top ranked law school where . . .

- It is difficult or impossible to schedule newly approved courses such as Legal Drafting because of the lack of available classrooms.
- Student attorneys in one of the nation's best clinical programs are forced to conduct settlement conferences with opposing attorneys in crowded student lounges because no other rooms are available.
- Student law reviews and journals are housed in offices no bigger than broom closets or in old houses where the walls and floors slant and the paint peels.
- Visiting deans from other law schools conclude that the physical facilities of the law school probably violate the accreditation standards of the American Bar Association and pose a serious impediment to the school's achieving its objectives.

Could this be the same building at the University of Maryland School of Law that those who graduated in the 1960s and before describe as the "new building"? Could this be the same building that visiting attorneys and judges usually see at its best when they use the Thurgood Marshall Law Library? Is there really a need for a substantial addition and renovation to the University of Maryland School of Law?

Ask a current student or a recent graduate who has worked in the clinical program, in which 250 students at a time now work in space that was designed for 42 students!

Few who graduated before 1980 recognize the dramatic changes in legal education since that time, and that those changes have created a physical facilities crisis at the University of Maryland School of Law. Typical legal instruction 30 years ago, when the existing building was completed, consisted of a faculty member teaching 90 students in a large classroom. Today, legal education has been transformed by experiential learning or clinical education. The School of Law has positioned itself as one of the national leaders in the field.

The school's clinical program, directed by Jacob A. France Professor of Public Interest Law Michael Millemann, is bursting at the seams. In 1983, the School of Law cannibalized space in its

faculty wing to house the clinical program. The space was designed for 42 students, six full-time clinical faculty and six support staff. This year, during a single semester, more than 250 students, 15 full-time faculty and five part-time clinicians will use this space.

Millemann comments, "Our clinical facilities are more

Health Care Law Seminar, Problems in the Law and Finance of High Technology, and Housing Development for Low and Moderate Income Individuals, courses not offered two decades ago.

The McCrate Report of the American Bar Association stresses the need to train future lawyers in skills such as trial



crowded than the worst legal aid office I've ever seen." He warns, "This situation sends all the wrong messages to students about professionalism and competence. One interview room is available for several hundred clients a year. Most clients are interviewed in crowded hallways."

It is not just the clinical program that eats space. Increasingly, law firms and other employers expect our graduates to "hit the ground running." Accordingly, the law school offers a much broader array of highly specialized courses such as Antitrust and

practice and counseling and negotiation. These courses must also be taught in smaller groups, instead of the 80 or 90 students that might have been typical in a torts or contracts class during the 1960s.

The lack of classroom space makes it difficult or impossible to schedule needed courses, such as the legal drafting courses approved by the faculty in spring 1995. A team of three deans inspected the premises last year and described the classroom scheduling situation as "saturated." Mark Sargent, associate dean for academic affairs and Piper &

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“A new building will create an enriched, efficient learning experience for the students. Studying the law requires a great deal from a person—the surroundings have a big impact on one’s learning experience.”

Obi Linton
Second-year day student



The current building was designed in 1965 for 17 faculty and 300 day-division students. Today the building is home to 53 faculty and 600 day division students. The interesting fact is that the School of Law has actually *decreased* in size since 1987, despite dramatically increased numbers of applications, the only major law school in the Baltimore/Washington area able to claim that distinction.

Since last fall, consultants from the architectural firm of Cho, Wilkes and Benn have been talking with the students, faculty and staff of the School of Law to determine the school’s needs and to design an addition that is functional, cost-effective and attractive. The proposal is to add approximately 44,000 net assignable square feet to the existing law school structure, while preserving the law school courtyard and Westminster graveyard. This addition would increase the usable space in the school by 50 percent and add another 14,000 net assignable square feet of space to be used by the School of Social Work, UMAB’s most rapidly expanding school.

*Ray LaPlaca ’83
heads the planning
committee
for the new building.*



The School of Law’s Board of Visitors recently established a committee to assist the school in obtaining the necessary public and private funds for the new renovations and addition. Raymond LaPlaca of Greenbelt, Maryland, a 1983 graduate and adjunct faculty member, chairs the committee. “We need to educate the public about the drastic changes that have occurred in legal education over the past 20 years and how those changes affect the physical facilities of the law school,” says LaPlaca. “A state-of-the-art law school facility is critical to providing a first-rate legal education into the twenty-first century.”

Dean Don Gifford of the School of Law and Dean Jesse Harris of the School of Social Work have made a commitment to raise \$9 million in private contributions to support the project, a virtually unprecedented commitment in the University of Maryland System. It is anticipated that the bulk of the funding for the building, however, will come from the state of Maryland’s capital project budget.

Although the need for the building is imminent and critical, the timing of its construction is still in question. According to Assistant Dean for Administration Linda McDonnell, who is responsible for the law school facilities, as recently as five years ago, additions and renovations for the School of Law were a high priority on the list of proposed building projects for UMAB. “During the next several years,” recounts McDonnell, “as the UMAB campus went through several leadership changes, a significant number of health sciences projects were placed ahead of the law school project.”

It was not until this year that newly installed President David J. Ramsay recommended that the School of Law receive partial funding for the proposed building project. By this time, many other projects on the UMAB campus and throughout the University of Maryland System had become established as higher priorities.

After 180 years, the University of Maryland School of Law has built a “cutting edge” legal education program that is envied by schools throughout the country. It would be a shame if these outstanding programs were jeopardized by inadequate physical facilities.

David Carrera contributed to this article.

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Marbury Professor of Law, who is responsible for scheduling classrooms, notes, “We are doing a serious disservice to our students by operating under the current building restraints. Because of the lack of rooms, courses—particularly in the clinical area—must be offered at times conflicting with other courses that students need and want to take. We are out of room.” According to Sargent, faculty members are unable to assign simulation or drafting exercises in which students work together in teams, because there is no place for these teams of students to work.

A crowded school impairs the quality of student life. Second-year day student Obi Linton, who is a member of the school’s Building Committee, underscores the need for space from a student’s perspective. “During inclement weather,” notes Linton, “over 800 students are confined to three student areas in the school that have a combined maximum capacity of roughly 120.” Linton believes, “a new building will create an enriched, efficient learning experience for the students. Studying the law requires a great deal from a person—the surroundings have a big impact on one’s learning experience.”