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New society takes fresh look at law

By Jennifer A. Daniel
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The new dean at the IU-Bloomington School of Law is wasting no time initiating his new policies and ideas.

A brain child of Bryant Garth, who was named law dean last week, the Law and Society Association is a new group on campus involving all interested professors from various schools on campus.

"The goal is really nothing more than to find a form to make the network of people with common interests be able to learn from each other and initiate good research projects at the University, which will translate into possibly some new courses and some new teaching links as well," Garth said.

The group members will look at the law more as something social rather than just a list of rules.

"The group pays attention to the law in action instead of the law in books," said Dave Pritchard, assistant professor of journalism.

"There is not much evidence that law in the books affects society directly," Pritchard said.

"In theory, a person's race should not make a difference in whether or not the person is put to death or not, but it does," Pritchard said in an example.

Still in the preliminary planning stages, the group is looking for funding and membership expansion, Garth explained.

"It makes it sound like some kind of gimmick that will work magic, and really all it is an effort, certainly to find funds to create an institution, but the institution is really an effort to build on what is already here," Garth said.

"It is really an initiative that comes from a lot of different people on campus, not just the law school," he continued.

About 15 professors are involved with the Law and Society Association, he said. The professors come from schools such as West European studies, education, journalism, business, political science and criminal justice.

"There is no guarantee that we will get funding or will become a separate institution, but just on the basis of our discussions, we have already strengthened the network of people with common interests," Garth said.

"I think we certainly wouldn't start any classes next year but maybe the year after," Garth said.

Pritchard explained the group might initiate some classes on campus and could become a minor, similar to women's studies.

"To me this is not a brilliant or new idea. This is really something we probably already should have had on campus," Garth said.

"Well, I think what happens is that you have a number of people with comparable interests that have not been consistently learning from each other and cooperating in kinds of ways that would have strengthened everybody's work," he added.