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9-29-1979

Merging Law Schools: A Game of Politics

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Recommended Citation

Pattiz, Denise, "Merging Law Schools: A Game of Politics" (1979). *Douglass Boshkoff (1971-1972 Acting; 1972-1975)*. 36.

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opinion

Ind. P. St. 9/29/75

Merging law schools: a game of politics?

THE I.U. Law School-Bloomington faces a great danger. There is talk of merging the state's two law schools into one institution and a lot of people in Bloomington feel threatened — with good reason.

The talk has surfaced after articles in the Daily Student, Indianapolis Star and Louisville Courier Journal appeared two weeks ago explaining Trustee Carl M. Gray's resolution that the I.U. School of Law-Bloomington and I.U. School of Law-Indianapolis merge under one dean with cooperative faculties and a single curriculum.

There are more reasons not to merge than to merge and Bloomington law school-affiliated individuals seem more aware of this than do those connected with the Indianapolis school.

The basic reason given for merging is to eliminate the competition between the two law schools and to establish a stronger legal education system in the state of Indiana.

Ironically, merging will do just the opposite.

The two law schools are as distinct as the cities in which they are located. Because of this, the schools also have different approaches towards legal education. Indianapolis stresses practicing law within Indiana with a great emphasis on internships. Bloomington's law school offers a wide inter-disciplinary curriculum involving sociological, economical and philosophical legal education.

Students studying law in Indiana are fortunate to have this choice. To sweep the alternative from them would be absurd.

Adding to the ludicrousness of the schools consolidation is the suggestion that the merger will increase the "cooperation" between the two legal education systems. As two autonomous schools,

Bloomington law faculty members have taught at Indianapolis (and vice versa) when necessary, students at each school are permitted to take classes at the other school and the libraries have almost daily consultation.

According to Douglass G. Boshkoff, competition does exist between the two law schools, but the interaction is healthy.

Then, why merge?

President John W. Ryan is appointing a committee composed of judges and lawyers to investigate the possibility of merging the two schools in order to "devise the strongest legal education structure possible for the state."

But there seems to be more to it than meets the eye. A general sentiment among most people interviewed is that if merging will not "devise the strongest legal education," there must be a political power struggle behind the talk.

There are many circulating rumors that blame several people in Indianapolis for trying to weaken Bloomington's law school while strengthening the Indianapolis law school's reputation and academics.

Whether these rumors have any substance or not is hard to determine. What is evident, however, is that periodic talk of merging will eventually hurt the reputation of Indiana law schools.

The idea of merging was discussed and vetoed last fall, and now that Dean Boshkoff is resigning in January, the topic has become prime beef again.

Ryan has approved a second committee to fill Boshkoff's position. But if the idea of merging is defeated this time, or if the new Dean favors merging, the idea will inevitably be brought up again in the future. Also, if there does exist some political struggle

in the state, the motives behind the power hunt are not going to be diminished until a merger is complete.

Any education system that is so unsteady it has to be "re-evaluated" every few years, is not going to be very appealing to other lawyers, law students and legal educators.

It would be very unfortunate if Indiana's legal system gradually decreases as Indianapolis tries to find ways to make it "the strongest possible structure."

In the eyes of many people the state's legal education system has already suffered from the enactment of Rule 13 in 1974.

Rule 13 requires anyone wishing to take the Indiana bar exam to study 54 stated hours. This restrictive rule was supposed to "offer guidance" and increase the amount of people passing the bar exams, but according to a study done by Boshkoff, "the only possible predictor of success is law school grade point average. . . Course selection is definitely not a factor."

Individuals at Bloomington are unhappy with the restrictions of Rule 13, and if Boshkoff's study is accurate, the question again arises.

Does a political struggle exist that is forcing these changes on Indiana's legal education system?

If the answer is "yes," something must be done to prevent this cheapening of an otherwise strong educational structure.

And if the answer is "no," then it is about time some of these persons who are professionally trained to think — begin doing so.

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