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Dean's Message

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Dean's Message

I have happy news to share with the alumni and friends of our Law School. The Commission on Higher Education (HEC) by unanimous vote awarded a planning grant of \$145,000 to the School for the preparation of site plans and schematics for a major addition/renovation of the Law Building. This award is of particular significance for several reasons. For one, it represents a reversal of the position taken a few years ago by the HEC, when it was unconvinced of our need. I welcome the HEC's support. For another, assuming the State Budget Committee releases the funds promptly (at this writing this has not occurred,) it means that we should be ready this fall with detailed plans for the new addition and renovation, for presentation to the appropriate legislative bodies so that we can be included in the appropriation process of the 1980-81 Indiana Legislature which meets next spring. The architects for the project have been designated, and Professor Craig Bradley has been appointed to chair the Law School's Building Committee during this critical phase. Professor William Oliver and I, assisted by Assistant Dean Arthur Lotz, will be enlisting the support of public officials and others who share our concerns about quality legal education in Indiana. We welcome your participation in this effort. If you are ready to help before we call on you, call us at 812/337-0258.

The new addition and renovation are keys to a number of puzzles. One is, how do we keep from getting back into trouble with the accreditation authorities for not having adequate seating in the Law Library? The new addition is planned to be basically an addition to the library; more than adequate seating space will be provided. Another is, what do we do about the fact that we have virtually no shelving available for book acquisitions? Again, the addition will give us ample room for expansion of the collection for another ten or possibly as long as twenty years.

Related, but not quite as directly, is the question, how do we recruit and retain a first-rate faculty? Salaries are of course a part of that puzzle, and we have made significant gains in the last two years, although inflation tends to neutralize a major part of every gain we make. The depth of our research collection and the overall quality of our library are also important considerations when we are being considered by a potential faculty member. In the case of one faculty recruit for whom we were competing this year, the recruiting schools were competing less on salary than on what proportion of their book acquisitions budget they would earmark for this faculty member's area.

On the subject of faculty, I viewed the greatest challenge facing me when I became Dean in 1977 to be the rebuilding of a faculty hit by a series of losses of middle and senior rank personnel. We were successful in 1977-78 in replacing three people; in 1978-79 we replaced five; and I am pleased to report that in 1979-80 we have succeeded in replacing yet another five. As a result, this fall we will be able, for the first time since I became Dean, to staff all required first-year courses using permanent rather than visiting faculty. In addition, we will be able to offer a wider range of seminars and other electives.



Dean Sheldon Plager

The people who have joined the faculty are first rate. Along with the continuing faculty, they comprise a cadre of strong teachers and scholars of extraordinary potential. I expect that in the next five to ten years we will see new levels of scholarly productivity and of service to the public, the bench, and the bar.

And we will do a better job in meeting the needs and expectations of our students, whose credentials for admission in terms of undergraduate grade point averages and law school admission test scores remain very high. Applications for admission also remain high—after what looked for the past year or two to be the beginning of a nationwide slump in applications for law, this year the numbers are back up. Since the planned addition and renovation are for library and program improvements and not to expand the size of the student body, it looks like the competition for a seat in the entering class will remain keen for yet a while.

In addition to a strong faculty and student body, we now have in place an administrative staff of professionals qualified to do the jobs assigned to them. And we are well along in the process of building a library staff of vigorous and trained individuals ready and able to take advantage of new directions and opportunities.

The process of growth and maturation in an academic institution like a law school is not dramatic, but incremental; it is more like accretion than avulsion. The work of the School in the period ahead is to consolidate the gains we have made and to continue the process of making ourselves the best law school we can be.

Sincerely,
Sheldon Plager
Dean

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