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Law School remodeling to begin

by Kevin Scionti 1DS 8/25/78

This is the first of two stories about physical improvements in the I.U.-Bloomington Law School. This story discusses the remodeling that will begin Monday. Part II will examine the possibility of major expansion or construction of a new building in the future.

To comply with accreditation standards that have not been met, three floors of the I.U. Law School will begin crumbling Monday as workers begin an interior remodeling project.

Sheldon Plager, law school dean, said the $98,000 project is necessary because the school is not meeting standards for library and faculty office space. The project will be financed by funds from I.U.'s capital building account, said Sonja Johnson, assistant to the dean.

The project will create seven new faculty offices, a law library reading room, a new student lounge and a room that probably will be used as a research center, Johnson said.

While the research center is not an accreditation requirement, Plager said it will be used to conduct advanced research in new legal areas.

The school is jointly accredited by the American Bar Association and the American Association of Law Schools. The Law School was accredited most recently in 1975. At that time, the accreditation committee recommended the creation of more library space for students.

The ABA requires an accredited law school to have library seating for at least 50 percent of its regular students, said Betty LeBus, head of the law library. The AALS recommends 65 percent seating capacity.

The law school has an average enrollment of about 550 students, but library seating space for 278, about 50 percent. After the remodeling work is done and new furniture purchased, the library should be able to seat 362, four more seats than required by the AALS, LeBus said.

The school does not have separate offices for each regular faculty member, another ABA requirement. This requirement also will be met when the seven new offices are created, Plager said.

Although student seating will be adequate in the library, space for new materials will be sacrificed. "We will just barely meet accreditation standards for the library, but we will be using space (originally) reserved for new collections," Plager said. Many of the present volumes will have to be kept in storerooms, he added.

While the library now is well-equipped for basic, practical research, the new research center will assist advanced law students and faculty who conduct sophisticated and long-term research, Plager said. Such research will help the school maintain its good reputation, he added. He also said more research in new legal areas, such as environmental law, will be conducted after the center is established.

Students will have to do without the lounge for part of the first semester, but additional construction on the ground floor will result in an expanded snack room and new student lounge, Johnson said. The dean's office also will be re-located.

While completion of the project means the library will meet accreditation standards, overcrowding of students and books still will be a problem, LeBus said. Overcrowding has been one of the library's major problems for several years, she added.

While the ABA and AALS requirements for the number of faculty offices will be met, the problem of faculty office space may not be solved. Plager said the law school recently had to obtain a building at 618 E. Third St. to use as an annex.

In April, the I.U. Board of Trustees requested funds from the Indiana Commission For Higher Education to begin planning for major expansion of the law school or construction of a new building. The HEC has not yet acted on the request, Johnson said.