

Law School Ready For Downtown Move

Thursday, December 31, 2009, Vol. 124, No. 256
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The University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law will reach a huge milestone Jan. 11 at 8 a.m. when it opens for classes at its new location Downtown inside the former U.S. Customs House and Post Office at [1 N. Front St.](#)

With help from two local architecture firms, [Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects Inc.](#) and Fleming Associates PC, the school revamped the building, vastly increasing the law school's size and offering creative new amenities for students, faculty and staff.

[Dean Kevin H. Smith](#) said the law school is now in "a much more stately building," with state-of-the-art classrooms, study areas, library and even a functional courtroom.

Moving process

Moving the entire law school from the middle of the city to Downtown seems like a daunting process. However, Smith said great logistical planning by faculty and staff helped ease that transition.

"The move actually went incredibly smoothly," Smith said, noting the law library move alone entailed packing, unpacking and reorganizing about 5 miles, or more than 25,000 feet, of books.

"Our law librarian, D.R. Jones, did a truly masterful job," he said.

The law library move began Nov. 30, Smith said, the day final exams began.

"They just worked literally every day for two-plus weeks to pull together the books from three locations – our main law library and a couple of storage sites – and then that was completed around Dec. 14," he said.

On Dec. 15, 16 and part of Dec. 17, the faculty, staff and student organizations moved to the Downtown location.

Because the faculty and staff waited to move until after the final exams were over, students' class schedules weren't interrupted. Smith did say because the law library began moving on the first day of exams, "students needed to make a bit of an adjustment."

"Instead of studying throughout the library, they needed to study in the parts that weren't being moved on that particular day," he said.

But in general, students' schedules weren't disrupted, and faculty, staff and student groups will continue "unpacking with vigor" after the first of the year, Smith said, making the school ready to open Jan. 11.

New offerings

The law school's Downtown location is vastly larger than the previous site. The new library alone will be about 60,000 square feet, whereas previously, the entire law school occupied about the

same amount of space.

Having the additional room has allowed for more amenities, and Smith eagerly discussed some of those as he went through the floor plans, which are available online.

The five-story law school will have expanded student study areas and features a large student lounge on the north side of Level One.

“That (area) will lead out onto a terrace overlooking the Mississippi (River),” Smith said. The student lounge area will feature a place where students can get drinks and food from a Barnes and Noble inside the school.

Also, the TV and Social Interaction Room features large-screen TVs that will scroll information and news pertaining to the law school. The TVs also can be used during times such as March Madness to watch NCAA tournament games and to socialize.

“That’s one amenity that we certainly are looking forward to,” Smith said of the student study areas.

On Level Two, there are several horseshoe-shaped classrooms, a significant improvement from classrooms at the old location.

“Our former law school has long classrooms where you can’t hear anything,” Smith said. “The new building ... has well-designed classrooms – line of sight, and you can actually hear.”

Level Two also features outdoor roof terraces on the north and south sides of the building.

On Level Three, the former federal courtroom has been refurbished to become the Historic Moot Court Room.

“It’s a large, wonderful, state-of-the-art courtroom now, and it will be used for Moot Court and Mock Trial,” Smith said. “But also, we’re hoping to have courts come and hear cases there to make it a functional courtroom.”

Moving south from the courtroom is a jury room, a robing room for judges, a break room for the Moot Court Society and Moot Court practice areas.

Level Four features a large reading room and private study carrels, as well as expanded space for the Law Review staff and meeting rooms for student groups. This floor features a glass-encased reading room overlooking the Mississippi.

The bottom level, Level Zero, will house the law school legal clinic, which is held in conjunction with [Memphis Area Legal Services Inc.](#)

“For the past 20 years, the clinic has been housed in MALS, and we have had and will continue to have a great partnership with them,” Smith said. “But now we can bring the clinic into the school for the first time. In the clinic, (students) will assist on cases under the guidance of a clinic professor, in cases involving real clients. We’ll take clients that have come through MALS.”

The law library will occupy space on all five floors.

Level Zero will hold mostly compact shelving; Level One will house the main desk and a reading room; Level Two will have administrative offices, computer labs and study space; Level Three will

hold a large reading room; and Smith said “pretty much the entire (Level Four) is library of some form or another.”

Ready, set, learn

Moving the law school Downtown, just mere blocks from the Shelby County Courthouse, will benefit everyone at the school by bringing them closer to the heart of the Memphis legal community. Closer proximity to many law firms also could open up doors for clerkships, Smith said.

Also, he said the new location makes the school more attractive to prospective students and faculty.

Revamping the old Customs House was a huge project, and Smith gave props to the architects involved.

“They have been absolutely superb in every way,” he said. “I’m not just saying this because the project is complete essentially at this point, but we were incredibly lucky to have that kind of professional competence involved in the project.”

Construction on the building began in fall 2008, and Smith said everyone is more than ready to get into the new place.

Although classes begin on Jan. 11, a opening gala hosted by law school alumni will be held Jan. 16.

“It’s kind of a housewarming party,” Smith said. “We’re absolutely excited and very ready to be (operating) in the new building.

“The move just went off really, really well.”