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A NEW LIBRARY FOR AMERICA'S OLDEST LAW SCHOOL

The College of William & Mary's updated and expanded library is designed for law students

by Paul Hellyer and James S. Heller

Nearly 30 years ago, in 1980, the College of William & Mary opened its original 36,500-square-foot library. By the mid-1990s, shelf space, work space, and seating were in short supply. The library looked dated and offered little support for today's technology—only a small portion of the library's carrels and tables had access to power outlets, its computer lab was carved out of former stack space, and its tiny “typing rooms” had long outlived their usefulness. During the sabbatical inspections that took place in 1995 and 2002, the American Bar Association (ABA) and Association of American Law Schools (AALS) both pointed to the library's

physical facilities as a serious weakness for the school.

Using a combination of state funds, private donations, and student fees, the law school budgeted \$16.8 million for an expansion and complete renovation of the library. The new library would not only be 60 percent larger than the old library, but would be much brighter and more inviting. Law Library Director Jim Heller worked on the plans with Shelley Dowling, who had recently joined William & Mary (W&M) as a part-time librarian. Heller had experience with two small renovation projects at the W&M Law Library; Dowling had been involved in renovations at the U.S. Supreme Court Library and

Georgetown's law library before coming to W&M.

“There wasn't much in this project that I hadn't dealt with before,” says Dowling. “Jim and I have a talent for being able to look at blueprints and visualize how the rooms would look, and having two sets of eyes working together was a great benefit.”

The school broke ground on the addition in spring 2005. Before this, however, Heller had to justify the need for a new library to various constituencies—the state, university and law school administrations, and the law school foundation board. The library's outdated look and various statistics helped make the case.

to win any beauty contests; prospective students were turned off upon seeing the library facility when they visited the school.

A Smooth Move

Construction of the addition took one year—from spring 2005 to June 2006. Other than some noise and vibration, the construction did little to disrupt those working in the existing facility. But when it was completed, everything and everyone in the old library had to move into temporary quarters in the new addition while the original part of the library was completely gutted and rebuilt.

During the renovation phase, which also lasted a year, library staff had temporary offices, the entire collection was moved into the addition (except for the bound journals that were moved offsite for a year), and students had to make do with reduced seating. Thanks to careful planning and very patient students, phase two went more smoothly than many expected.

After renovation was completed in June 2007, the library's staff and collections had to be moved again, this time from their temporary quarters to their permanent homes in the new library. Meanwhile, work continued on the project's final details, which in some ways were the most difficult.

The Results—More Natural Light and a Design for Students

The new Wolf Law Library, named in honor of alumnus and donor Henry C. Wolf, was dedicated in December 2007. The library has 568 total seats (for a student body of about 600), of which nearly 100 are casual seating. It has two reading rooms and 12 group study rooms. It does a much better job of accommodating technology, with a redesigned computer lab, a computer classroom, audiovisual equipment in study rooms and work areas, and access to power outlets at most table tops.

But the improvements go beyond just practical issues. The Wolf Law Library presents a very comfortable and inviting atmosphere, with six lounge areas, extensive use of wood paneling, and cork floors that reduce the noise of foot traffic. There is abundant natural light, with windows in the study rooms and offices, a skylight over the grand central staircase, and panoramic windows in the two reading rooms. Taylor Fitchett, law library director at the University of Virginia, commented that the new library “has perhaps the best use of natural lighting that I’ve ever seen in a library.”

A new rare book room displays some of the library's special collections, such as a first edition of *Blackstone's Commentaries* and the family bible of W&M Law School alumnus John Marshall, with handwritten notes by the Great Chief Justice. The room is open for student and faculty use.

But, above all, the new library is designed for students. A suite of offices for student groups and journals, as well as a small kitchen for them, is within the library footprint. “The new journal offices and cite checking room has made my life a lot easier,” remarks third-year student Shana Hofstetter, editor-in-chief of W&M's *Journal of Women and the Law*. A big hit with the students is the recreation room with ping-pong and pool tables.

Heller is now creating a library building Web site with links to the documents that were involved in the project. The site is designed to assist other librarians planning remodeling or construction projects. Look for a link on the W&M law library home page in the near future (www.wm.edu/law/library). ■

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photos by Christopher Cunningham

To see more photos of the new Wolf Law Library, visit www.aallnet.org/products/pub_sp0805.asp.



The east lounge features some of the nearly 100 casual seats in the new Wolf Law Library.



The new rare book room displays a first edition of *Blackstone's Commentaries* and the family bible of Chief Justice Marshall.

The W&M law library was among the smallest of the top 35 law schools ranked by *U.S. News*. With the library purchasing thousands of new titles a year, the need for shelf space would continue to grow. Moreover, a larger student body was spending more time than ever in the library, often using personal laptops or the library's computers, and the students needed more room. Furthermore, the library was not going

Often a general contractor will replace the construction manager with a less experienced person to manage the final phases of a project, which is what happened to W&M. On the bright side, the project was completed \$300,000 under budget, thanks to careful and close oversight by the building team—Heller and Dowling, the college's building managers, the architects, and the general contractor.