Educational Tragedy
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All Virginians should be immensely pleased by the high rating that the University of Virginia law school received in a recent issue of Change magazine, a publication that specializes in matters pertaining to higher education. Among publically-supported law schools, the university ranked number three, behind only the University of Michigan and the University of California, Berkeley.

But while this is pleasing news, the high ranking of the University of Virginia law school indicates that the state's only publically-supported law school at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg is in danger of losing its accreditation.

This should not be. On the contrary, the William and Mary law school should be one of the model educational institutions in the nation. It was founded in 1782 at the initiative of Thomas Jefferson, then governor of Virginia, and the distinguished George Wythe was its first professor. Chief Justice John Marshall was one of Wythe's earliest students.

Through the years, the William and Mary law school has had to struggle to keep up, and it is in doubt now because of a lack of adequate physical facilities. Unless William and Mary soon receives money to construct a new building, funds that the state has promised but never provided, the American Bar Association may withdraw the school's accreditation.

The need for a new building has been clearly demonstrated. During the last three years, approximately 3,000 persons have applied for admission to the William and Mary law school, but it has been able to accommodate only 45, or at least 75 per cent of those Virginians. Even for this number, present facilities are inadequate and fail to meet ABA standards. This is the important point. After all, it would be unrealistic and even undesirable to have any law school attempt to provide space for every single applicant.

Gov. Mills E. Godwin Jr., the State Council of Higher Education and the General Assembly all have recognized William and Mary's need. The legislature has appropriated $25,000 to finance the construction of a new building, and it has conditionally appropriated $5 million for the building itself. But because of the state's financial problems, this money is not now available and the project is in peril.

The General Assembly should do its utmost to provide these funds. Of course, the state has other pressing educational needs, and the legislature cannot finance all of them. But the William and Mary law school should stand at the very top of the priority list.

This institution, whose chief law dean is former Sen. William B. Spong, Jr., has the history and the leadership to become one of the nation's great law schools. But unless the General Assembly enables it to retain its accreditation, it may soon cease to be rated even an acceptable law school. And thus, in our opinion, would be an educational tragedy.