ALL WIRED UP AND READY TO GO

Marlene England

Summer can't get here soon enough.

Since summer 1999, staff and students have been anticipating that one extraordinary day next month when the School of Law's new building opens at last. No longer located in the temporary quarters at 515 W. Lombard, the School will return to its old address at 500 W. Baltimore St. to a remarkable structure poised to raise the standard for law school buildings and legal education in this country.

The exceptional design and architecture of the School of Law's new building are readily apparent. Equally impressive, but less obvious, is the state-of-the-art technology designed to function seamlessly and at blazing speed beneath the surface. From desk to desk and classroom to office, a powerful configuration of high-tech resources positions the new law school building as one of the most technologically advanced academic law buildings in the nation.

This achievement is no accident. From the earliest strategy sessions to final walk-throughs, administration and faculty remained committed to equipping the building with technology's best. Their collaborative vision, crafted from tireless research and planning, has shaped a building where technology is a cornerstone.

For Robyn Kirby, director of information technology, and Mary Cornaby, assistant dean of academic technology,

the countdown to the building's grand opening is a hectic but thrilling time—filled with the nuts and bolts of installation, training and more training, and seemingly endless to-do lists. Perhaps more than anyone on campus, Kirby and Cornaby can provide a realistic glimpse into the fully wired world that faculty and students will enter this summer.

Access Everywhere

Picture this. Students come to class carrying laptop computers, which they plug into data ports conveniently located at every seat. The professor stands behind a Smart Lectern, facing a sea of controls that looks, as Cornaby puts it, very much like the bridge of the Starship Enterprise. With the touch of a button, the professor summons high-tech teaching aids—PowerPoint slides, video clips, the Internet, live Web casts, video conferencing, even the content on an individual student's computer screen can be projected anywhere in the room. It may well be technology's finest hour.

"Access is everywhere," Kirby states matter-of-factly. With more than 1,800 active ports, connections outnumber students six to one. Every seat in every classroom is wired, as well as all seats in the new Thurgood Marshall Law Library.

And there's room to grow. Kirby explains the built-in capacity to accommodate an impressive total of 2,736 connections. "We've taken great pains to provide not just what we need but also to project ahead to what we may need in the future." As long as the infrastructure is there, Kirby says, the new law school building can "do it all"—and at lightning-fast speed. Connections between the law school, the library, and the outside world used to run at 10 megabits, then 100 megabits, and by summer will be 1,000 times faster. The gigabit connection will give faculty and students the fastest access to the Internet, which

paves the way for real-time, interactive discussions and classes with legal professionals and students around the world.

If guest speakers aren't available to travel, Cornaby explains, faculty can "beam them in." Classes can partner with law school students in other countries to exchange ideas and learn from each other. "The speed and the technological wizardry we've built into the new building allow us to bring the world into the classroom."

Kirby admits that planning for such speed, in addition to an adaptable infrastructure, was tedious, but exciting. Her personal goal was to leave no stone unturned. "We had to consider every possibility because if we didn't, the technology would be harder and costlier to add later."

"You're always hedging your bets when you plan for technology," Cornaby adds, "because it's changing all the time." What was the most advanced technology in the early planning stages is now considered obsolete. "It's the crystal ball approach," Cornaby continues. "We've had to predict where legal education is going to go, and we need to be able to continuously adapt. What we've tried to create is a facility that is capable of endless change."

But all these opportunities for growth, the blazing speed, and the state-of-the-art systems mean nothing, says Cornaby, unless the technology meets the primary missions of the School of Law: education, scholarship and public service. "The ultimate goal is to use technology to turn out the very best lawyers and leaders," she states. "Technology has to serve education."
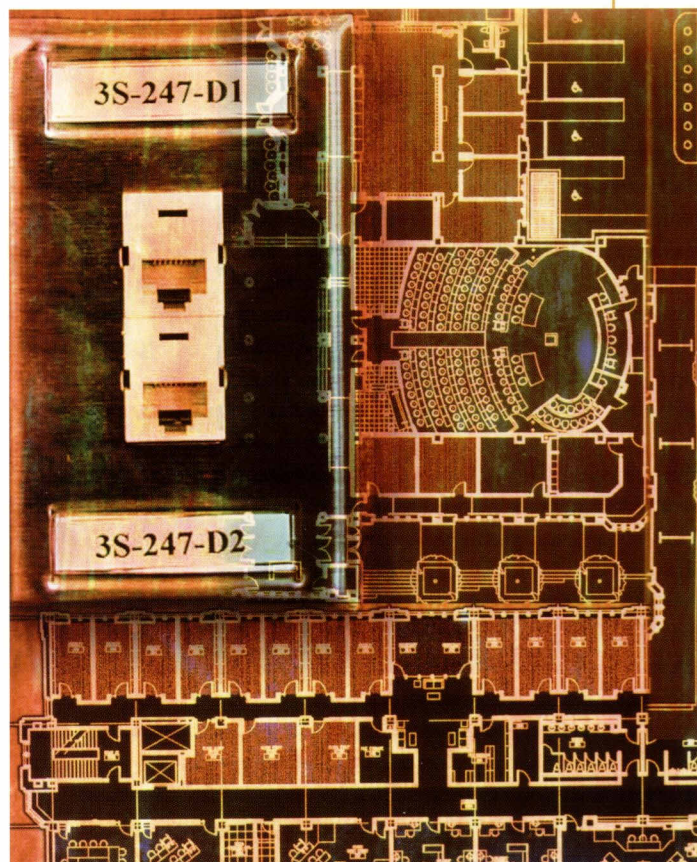
Cornaby sees endless possibilities for technology to better meet the needs of students, particularly those who learn differently. "Some students can understand concepts better when words and graphic interpre-

tations are used together. With PowerPoint, for example, both modeling and the use of color leave impressions on students for whom oral learning is less effective. The idea is to enable faculty to teach in as many ways and to as many senses as possible."

Often that means bringing technology already in use in the legal profession into the classroom. One example is LiveNote, the streaming transcription of court reporters that appears almost instantly on the laptops of lawyers and judges in the courtroom. "That same technology can be utilized here at the law school," Cornaby explains. "Not only does it make the lectures accessible to hearing-impaired students, but it also allows students to use the same technology they'll be using in court."

The new law school building is about

technology for everyone, Cornaby summarizes, so that all students who should be at the law school can be at the law school and learn effectively, whether they have recognized learning disabilities or not. "Often we find that technology assists students who are just shy," she explains. "They're less afraid to raise their hands online."

One of the new building's most promising high-tech educational tools is already in use by the majority of faculty and students. Blackboard (see sidebar) is an e-learning software platform that, among a long list of attributes, provides online access to course descriptions, class assignments, reading materials, links to the Internet and facilitates student/facul-

what everyone says, and my voice is as loud as anyone's.' Technology makes it possible for this student—and others—to participate and not feel isolated."

The faculty's willingness to embrace Blackboard and the somewhat daunting technological aspects of the new building is no surprise to Cornaby. In fact, it's one of the reasons she returned to the School after leaving her position as research librarian in 1998. "I have a very

Boot Camp or Bust

This summer, Cornaby will lead faculty where few have gone before: Boot Camp. This series of half-day, hands-on training sessions in the new building is guaranteed to make a technology road warrior out of anyone, Cornaby claims. She promises real results and, to sweeten the deal, a "significant graduation prize."

Every seat in every classroom is wired.

Look at the Board

It's a far cry from chalk and felt erasers, this innovative new Blackboard. The modern-day Blackboard is an e-learning software platform that has professors and students logging on in record numbers to access course descriptions, assignments and handouts, e-mail, library staff liaisons, online discussion groups and more.

Having made its School of Law debut in fall 2001, Blackboard is well on its way to becoming an indispensable tool campus-wide. And no one could be happier than Mary Cornaby.

"Blackboard is becoming a portal for

ty and student/student communication.

Cornaby tracks the usage of Blackboard and knows it is effective. Powerful proof came in the form of an e-mail from a student with a hearing impairment. "She wanted to tell me how much she liked Blackboard," Cornaby recalls. "She wrote, 'Now I can hear

strong belief in the teaching strengths of the School's faculty," she asserts. "The woods are full of new law school buildings that are not used well by faculty. I was convinced that this administration was willing to give the time and effort to support faculty in using educational technology to its fullest."

In a recent issue of *Connect: Teaching and Learning with Technology*, the Office of Academic Technology's monthly newsletter, Cornaby outlines her guarantee to faculty:

When you have completed Boot Camp, you will be able to

— Turn off the lights; close the curtains;

turn on the screen; connect the microphone; turn on the TV, VCR, or camera; turn on or off your (or student) Internet access; and run a PowerPoint presentation with the flick of a switch

– Make ELMO your friend [ELMO is the high-tech imaging equipment that will be installed in every classroom, enabling faculty to project any document or object anywhere in the room.]

– Create an effective PowerPoint presentation

– Use the new classroom space to teach to the best advantage

"We're going to teach faculty how to

Beyond Books

Just as technology supports the work of the classroom, it also maintains a strong presence in the new Thurgood Marshall Law Library. Although often invisible amidst the library's traditional setting and accoutrements, the very latest in technology stands ready for patrons wherever and whenever they need it.

Data ports and power outlets are located at every seat—368 connections in all. There are laser printers on each of the building's four floors. Library staff will teach research and technology courses in a new 30-seat classroom, out-

library services, considers the new facility a successful blending of the traditional library look and technology of the future. "In planning the renovation, our focus was to make this library a meeting place, somewhere people would come to collaborate, as well as to do individual research," she explains. "Libraries can't be viewed only as quiet study places any more. The nature of libraries is changing, and our new library opens up possibilities for students, faculty and alumni that haven't existed before.

"The new library will have less of that in-and-out atmosphere and be viewed more as a facility where students will come and spend a great deal of time—

students—giving them the ability to see every handout, stay in touch with their professors, meet with other students, access course and library resources," Cornaby explains, adding that faculty and student use of the system is expected to increase when the new building opens this summer. "With Blackboard, the law school is truly open around the clock."

Cornaby's own schedule is not far behind. On most weekday mornings, she's up at 5:30 a.m., logging onto Blackboard from her home computer to view what's happened in the last 24 hours. Cornaby keeps track of who's utilizing the system and how, and she is pleased with the results. Student reac-

tion has been extremely positive, and the same goes for faculty. Of the School's 110 full-time and adjunct faculty members, 90 are using the Blackboard system—and using it well.

"I find it fascinating to see how good teachers adapt to technology," states Cornaby, who highlights "Most Wired Faculty" in the Office of Academic Technology's monthly newsletter, Connect: Teaching and Learning with Technology. Some professors use the announcements section of Blackboard to post an open letter that students see upon log-in. The letters, written with warmth and humor, welcome students to the study of law and provide an overview of the course. "What is said in these let-

ters probably would not be written—or spoken—in a traditional class," Cornaby explains. "It is a very human element that technology has encouraged."

Faculty use Blackboard to introduce themselves, as well as teaching assistants and support staff working with the course. Professor Marina Hsieh has found Blackboard to be particularly effective in helping students get acquainted with each other. For her first-year evening class, Hsieh posts an informative contact sheet that introduces students to students. She promptly posts group feedback on assignments and offers discussion boards that cover a

teach in these new, state-of-the-art classrooms, so they're empowered—not frightened," Cornaby explains. "They will be in control and managing their classrooms before the first day of fall semester."

fitted with the same high-tech tools of law school classrooms. Equally equipped is a 40-seat computer lab with brand-new desktop computers. The library's eight study rooms are fully wired for laptops and video capabilities.

Barbara Gontrum, assistant dean for

whether they're studying alone, researching online or meeting with other students," Gontrum continues. She expects to see an increase in weekend and evening usage as patrons discover the many resources housed comfortably and conveniently within the new library.

For Gontrum, the experience of helping to create a new library is familiar. She came to the School of Law in 1979 and participated in the final plans for the original Thurgood Marshall Law Library. "It's so much more exciting this time around, to be involved from square one," Gontrum says. "Working with the architects has been a joy—even the construction process has been fun—and I'm looking forward to finding out how students use the new library."

Gontrum's enthusiasm is mirrored in other department leaders as well. Patricia Scott, director of admissions, is confident the new law school and library and the vast sum of their technological capabilities

program that streamlines the application process. "Once an application is entered, whether it comes to us online or on paper, we know within 72 hours whether a student is a viable candidate," she explains. The system tracks the application process and makes information on the applicant pool instantly available to the dean and the admissions committee. "The need to rely on paper just isn't there any more," Scott says, adding that admissions staff will continue to use technology to its fullest when they move to their new offices this summer.

For career development staff, the move to new offices will make it possible to provide enhanced recruitment and

carefully designed to maximize accessibility, confidentiality and efficiency.

"Looking for a job is work, and we don't want to make it any harder. It's all about convenience, and time is of the essence," states Dana Morris, assistant dean for career development. That's one reason the new office is located on "the main drag" along Baltimore Street and near second-floor classrooms—and it's certainly the reason technology plays a starring role inside the office itself.

The resource library features computer terminals and data ports for online job researching, as well as an array of printed materials. The conference room is fully wired for meetings between career devel-

"The ultimate goal is to use technology to turn out the best lawyers and leaders." — Mary Cornaby

wide range of topics, including requests for a class social event. As Cornaby notes in a recent issue of Connect, Hsieh "is well on her way to turning a group of disparate first-year evening students into a community."

Another enthusiastic proponent of Blackboard is Professor Edward (Ted) Tomlinson, now in his 33rd year of teaching at the School. Tomlinson posts his

course syllabus and distributes reading materials via Blackboard and finds the system particularly useful for keeping in touch with evening students, whose schedules often cannot accommodate office visits. "The time it takes me to respond to e-mails is time well-spent," he comments, adding that he plans to develop online discussion groups in the very near future.

Before each of his classes, Tomlinson posts a lecture outline that helps students focus on the material to be discussed. After class, Tomlinson uses Blackboard to send summary messages to students. "I give them the main points of the lecture and add things I wanted to say in class but didn't," he explains. "Students appreciate this approach. It helps them pull their thoughts together

will be a drawing card for new students. She says the high-tech campus will attract students who have been part of the technology surge over the last five years.

Scott points out that, in the admissions department, technology is already in full swing, thanks to the new AdmitM

hiring services to students and alumni. With four interview rooms, a resource library, a conference room, and administrative space—all fully equipped with high-tech tools and connections—the new career development office offers a wealth of wonderful resources in a space

opment staff and visiting employers, among other uses. And the state-of-the-art interview rooms dramatically improve connections between employers looking to recruit law school students and alumni. Each interview room is equipped for laptop use and phone access, so the space

can double as a calling area during alumni phonathons. More than 100 firms recruit on campus, and Morris expects the high-tech interview rooms will increase that number. "Now we'll be able to teleconference with employers from across the country who may not be able to come to campus for interviews," she explains. "This is a wonderful way for us to encourage more students to go where the best opportunities are." Morris plans to boost students' interviewing skills by conducting mock interviews on video.

Morris and her staff are thrilled about developing creative and fresh new ways to provide career advice to the law school community. "We're going to

and is also good for those students who learn differently."

Tomlinson asserts that technology is no substitute for coming to class, and there will always be situations when face-to-face discussions between professor and student are more appropriate than e-mails. But Blackboard has a multitude of merits. "It's so easy to communicate with students now," Tomlinson reflects. "I think Blackboard and all the technology we'll have access to in the new building make teaching much more effective than it was 30-some years ago. Learning is better today, and technology has made that possible." ■

can to ensure that technology helps us create opportunities to communicate."

High-tech But in Touch

Even Cornaby, a self-described "missionary for technology," knows the limits. "We have to be responsible," she advises,

engage students from face-to-face interaction, Cornaby and others affirm that technology can create community.

"Technology is alienating only if we allow it to be," states Cornaby. "What we're going to see in the new building are increasingly inventive ways that people can use technology and interact with it to create community. Everything we do should bring faculty, students,

The technology of the new building will facilitate interaction among faculty, students, administrators and members of the legal community.

make the most of our new technologically enhanced space," she assures, acknowledging at the same time that individual career counseling remains a priority. "Technology can't replace one-on-one contact, but it can facilitate it," Morris explains. "We do as much as we

"and that means recognizing that technology is not always the best way to communicate with students or with faculty."

While some may look askance at the technology of the new law school building and worry about its potential to dis-

administration and the legal community together, giving us more information, enabling us to share that information with each other." ■

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