But things changed in higher education, beginning in the 1980s, and around the same time legal education took on critics posing the twin questions of relevancy and readiness. The basic issue was this: Lawyers in training need more legroom, better access to the latest instruments for doing their jobs, collegial relationships with talented and busy faculty members.

You’re looking at early drawings for a law school that will change the way lawyers are educated in Maryland and quite probably across the nation. It is a building that represents a new paradigm in the way students are introduced to the worlds of torts, criminal statutes, legal theory, and trial work—the vicissitudes of the lawyering life. Yes, the Socratic Method lives within these envisioned walls, but so do computerized casebooks, Internet-based research tools, and dedicated networks and spaces devoted to up-and-running legal practices. In the modern parlance, every University of Maryland law student inhabiting this structure over the next half century will be “jacked in”—that is, linked to a breathtaking array of technology and services. Information. Knowledge. Potential. Leadership.

From its frugal but honorable beginnings on Lombard Street to its present home one block north on Baltimore Street, the School of Law has operated on the assumption that leading students and teachers would gravitate to it simply because of the school’s stature in the larger community. Success Breeds Success, Inc.

How do you achieve all that in a tiny classroom stuffed inside a cinderblock building?

After years of working in deteriorating rowhouses and student spaces crammed beneath parking garages, the School of Law has decided to answer that question with a drafting pencil and a construction crew. A new, beautifully rendered, five-story structure will take root over the next two to three years. It will be a major highlight of the University campus, rising over its northern edge like a flagship. And like a flagship on the evening tide, other vessels—including yours, as an alumnus or friend of the school—will rise with it.

“When we’re done,” says Donald G. Gifford, dean and standard-bearer of the building effort, “we will have the best facility in the United States for students working directly with clients in a major law school facility. We simply will be the best.”
hat statement packs a wallop. Gifford, now in his seventh year at the school, naturally likes to talk about the institution in superlatives—nationally ranked programs in environmental law, health care law, clinical law; outstanding faculty; first-rate students; graduates who end up as senators, judges, and CEOs—but from his earliest days here he believed that the building containing all this excellence is among the worst he has seen.

“Our building is not us,” Gifford says with a smile. “It doesn’t reflect who we are or what we will be. But we’ve put up with it since 1966 because our predecessors saw legal education in a very different way. You can’t blame them for that. Still, everyone who passes through the dim hallways and under the low ceilings, especially in the clinics, knows that we’re better than this. The campaign to create a new law school proves it.”

Just completing its first year, the Critical Moment campaign for the new law school is progressing steadily, energetically, with one genuine surprise so far: faculty giving is nearly 100 percent—gifts are coming in at $25,000, $30,000, even the $40,000 range. These are major donations coming from law school professors.

Robert Percival, professor and director of the Environmental Law Program and co-chair of the faculty committee overseeing the internal campaign, said he is “astounded” by the level of success so far.

“It’s a unique story,” Percival declares. “Other fundraisers who looked at us said we would do well to get 70 percent of our faculty donating. But this is quite a collegial place, and the enthusiasm for the new building is so great that just about everybody has made a pledge. I’ve even had colleagues come up to me and say, ‘When are you going to ask me to give? I’ve been waiting.”

Talking about a new building appears to have freed something in the psyche of the law school, if you will: It reminds those who have experienced it how atypical the school is among its peers, how sharply it contrasts with the legal education of old. It also demonstrates that a graduate’s stock can rise or fall depending on the fortunes of his or her alma mater.

“I realized we needed a new facility when people started showing admiration for my undergraduate alma mater,” Percival explains. “My old school had made a lot of physical improvements since I’d left, and the word was getting around that it was on the rise. It made me proud that I’d gone there. I’d like to see the same thing happen for our graduates when we rebuild.”

“When we rebuild”—it’s a phrase that might have seemed unutterable only five years ago. Now that the commitment is looking solid, what will $38,286,000 in
And how will the new building look?

Mario Boiardi, partner in charge for Hartman-Cox and senior designer for the project, is working closely with Dean Gifford and the faculty to create a design that works with the rest of campus, but also has a distinctive appearance that says “law taught here.” As of now, that message is conveyed via the neo-Gothic style—dark red brick, tall, finely detailed windows, broad entryways.

Boiardi, who contributed to the architecture for the Georgetown Law Center’s significant renovations, says the appearance of the building is meant to make it easily identified as a major component of the Baltimore campus, but also appropriate for a neighborhood that is receiving renewed attention from development interests, private and public.

“In one of the first meetings I had with Dean Gifford, I asked him what he wanted the building to look like, and he pointed to Westminster Hall, the former church that abuts the school. That made sense to me—it’s a beautiful structure, evocative of Oxford. It was also clear that he did not want the school to appear alien to other buildings in the neighborhood.”

In the end, economics will influence the overall design of the structure. But suffice it to say that Boiardi and Gifford are determined not to allow so-called “functional rationalism”—that cardboard-box style of architecture that swept through American campuses in the post-war period—to get even a toehold in the new school.

Boiardi: “The intention is to create a state-of-the-art learning environment for students and teachers of the law.”

Gifford: “We’re going to put up a structure that offers maximum interaction between student and faculty.”

Clearly, the two principals of this project are on the same page of blueprints. Around the middle of the 21st century, some member of the next generation of bright young lawyers may find a dusty copy of this JD in his mother’s collection of alumni memorabilia. He’ll pore over the article about the new school, about the hopes and dreams of those who will occupy it for a few precious years of their lives. He may look out a window of the handsome structure at 500 West Baltimore Street, and think back to those days when it existed only as sketches and models.

“They cared about us,” he’ll say. “They cared about the law.”

Donated and matching state funds get for the School of Law?

Current plans, being labored over by architects at Hartman-Cox of Washington, D.C., and Richter Cornbrooks Gribble, Inc. in Baltimore, call for the following features:

• A 50 percent increase in the overall size of the building, with most of the structure devoted to classroom and clinic activities;
• Hardwired computer networks, with full Internet and distance-learning capabilities;
• A first-floor 88-seat moot courtroom;
• Extensive classrooms on the first floor—space devoted to continuing education, bar reviews, etc., when classes are not in session;
• A cutting-edge clinical law facility;
• Numerous small-group discussion and study rooms;
• A writing center;
• A legal skills classroom; and
• Devoted space for student-edited publications such as The Business Lawyer and Maryland Law Review.

In addition, the Thurgood Marshall Law Library will receive modest renovations to increase room for the stacks and make better use of current facilities. The courtyard behind the L-shaped school will also grow slightly and be more welcoming.
Frankly Speaking...

There’s a term in old English law—the “frank-pledge.” It refers to the commitment made by English freemen toward corporate responsibility and good behavior for all free-born citizens over the age of 14. Black’s defines it as a “pledge of surety to the sovereign for the collective good conduct of a group.”

If ever there was a time for friends and alumni of the School of Law to make a frank-pledge, this is it. As we focus on the look and content of our new building—a building that will pay for itself in terms of high-quality students, teachers and programs well into the next century—we are facing a looming deadline: We must meet or exceed $8 million in campaign gifts and pledges if we are to capitalize on the state legislature’s offer to triple that amount.

The opportunity is staring us in the face. It’s the judgmental, yet hopeful look of great legal scholars like David Hoffman, who got the school off to a solid start in 1816. It’s John Brumbaugh, Wharton, Levin, Ehrmantraut Klein, & Nash Distinguished Service Scholar and Emeritus Professor of Law, and mentor of perhaps more great lawyers and leaders than any other single person in the history of Maryland. It’s teenagers and residents in Park Heights, Baltimore, where our students and teachers have established a significant presence in the search for legal ways out of the chaos of urban poverty and strife.

Many eyes are trained on the School of Law. Some already know what we can accomplish; others have great expectations. If they pass by the school, they might wonder: All that good work is being done in there? How long can they keep it up?

It’s a legitimate question. While we provide clinical expertise in hundreds of cases every year, and while our students find creative and astounding ways to meet their extensive public-service requirements, only so much can be accomplished with a couple of rooms and some PCs. For those of us who know the school well, it sends a bit of a chill: Will Maryland’s best law students search elsewhere for their ideal school, because the school in their backyard could not measure up in terms of facilities and study space? And, even tougher to swallow: Will we, as products of the University of Maryland, be satisfied with such a prognosis?

At the date of this publication, gifts to the building campaign total $5.8 million. That’s well over halfway to the goal, but still too little for us to get comfortable.

In fact, none of us should feel comfortable. We should be agitated, even righteous—concerned about the long-term future of training and education for Maryland’s lawyers, its principals in business, politics and other keystone institutions. If these talented people don’t earn their JDs in Maryland, how are we going to keep them in Maryland or bring them back to Maryland?

There is no sly and sophisticated way to say this: We need your help. The competition could be gaining on us.

So, the next time you crack open the Maryland Code, or wrap up a business plan you’ve labored over or edit a computer file that contains your latest patent application, think about the School of Law. Give a second thought to those who gave you a shot. And make a frank-pledge that will free up the men and women of the law in the future. They’re waiting to hear from you.
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