New Building Opens to Rave Reviews

To the casual observer the most prominent feature of the new law building is probably its striking exterior appearance, but what will determine the building's success or failure in the long run will be the degree to which its internal environment supports and enhances the study of law for its users. It did not take long after summer classes opened in the new law building on May 27, 1986 for students and staff to begin grading their new academic workplace. The initial report card shows straight A's for the new building.

"The new building makes you feel like you're actually in a top law school now," observes Sid Taylor, a third year law student from Davenport. "The old school was a refurbished dorm with some classrooms and a library stuck onto it. This new one is so much superior."

The centerpiece of the circular five-story building is the law library, housing the College's splendid collection of research materials on four floors. The library occupies more than one-half of the building's 200,000 square feet of space. Distributed throughout the library are nearly 400 individual study carrels each with a locking bookshelf, and there are 250 seats at reading tables—sufficient seating to accommodate the entire student body with room to spare. Throughout the planning of the building, architect Gunnar Burkerts sought the advice of the building's various users on how spaces were expected to function. Kathie Belgum, executive law librarian who directs the day-to-day running of the library, gives Burkerts high marks. "I think the finished building shows that the architects listened closely to us. This is a beautiful, well-designed and functional structure," Belgum says. "In the comments I have heard, library users have said it is quiet, light and airy, comfortable, and the materials are accessible. It is like a great library should be."

The most significant aspect of the library is that it brings the College's 420,000 volume collection under one roof for the first time in over ten years. Prior to the
move to the new building in May, one-third of the collection had been in storage at two sites off campus because of lack of space at the old law building, a fifty-year-old former residence hall to which classrooms and a library were added in 1961.

Classrooms in the new building also are winning praise from students. Wendy Smith, a second-year student from New York City relates: 'Last term I had a course in a classroom we called the 'bowling alley'—a deep, narrow room in the old building that had poor lighting," Smith said. "It was a very unpleasant room and hardly anyone ever talked in class. This summer I have the same professor for another class, only we are in a classroom in the new building that is carpeted, air conditioned, properly shaped, and with excellent lighting. Now everyone talks. These classrooms have a much more intimate feeling and really make each class an active event."

The faculty is also delighted with the new building, according to Dean Hines. "It is a wonderful facility not just because it is new and modern, but because of the many special educational features that will help us to do better teaching and research," he said. "This building was intended to be very much student centered and it certainly came out that way. Student activities occupy the premium spaces in the new building in terms of amenities and vistas. But the faculty is well housed as well and they will derive great utility from the computer network and other teaching and research support technologies we are installing this summer."

Other special features noted by Hines:

—Unlike most law schools, the new building has no "large" classrooms. The largest regular classroom seats only 100 students. Small classrooms and special-purpose learning areas are distributed throughout the building to keep students and faculty working together in close professional interactions.
—Teaching space is built into every faculty office to facilitate the College's major commitment to faculty supervised legal research and writing.
—The building contains a special area for clinical education in which a "law firm" of thirty-two upper level students works with a group of four full-time clinical supervisors on live and simulated cases especially chosen to sharpen selected client-representational skills.
—An in-house computer network makes access to legal data bases and search systems available to students through terminals in the library and to faculty and staff through office computers.
—A professional quality audiovisual system, scheduled for installation in the fall, will link all of the teaching rooms to a central video control studio. Using this system students can record and play back individual skills-training exercises, such as Moot Court arguments, and faculty can not only critique taped student performances but can project both locally-produced and commercially-produced video tapes and computer generated displays in any classroom.
—Two full-scale trial courtrooms are located in the building, each with its own jury room and judge's chamber. The courtrooms will be used daily in the teaching of trial advocacy skills, and the jury rooms will be used whenever a mock jury trial is staged. The judge's chambers will house visiting judges and other professionals in residence.

Construction began in 1983 on the building, located on a 3.5 acre site on the west side of the Iowa River south of the Hillcrest Residence Hall. In addition to the library and classrooms described above, the building contains offices for forty-five faculty members, ample administrative space, specially equipped rooms for student organizations, and a 300 seat Auditorium—Appellate Courtroom for continuing education programs and special events. Dedication ceremonies are scheduled for October 18, 1986.