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University of Wyoming

## Law school expanding amid 100th anniversary, expecting Neil Gorsuch to visit

By DANIEL BENDTSEN [dbendtsen@laramieboomerang.com](mailto:dbendtsen@laramieboomerang.com) May 30, 2019



A statue of Socrates sits in front of the west entrance to UW's College of Law. The university plans to renovate and expand the college building to coincide with the school's centennial celebration next year. DANIEL BENDTSEN/Boomerang staff

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The University of Wyoming is planning a \$10 million expansion of the College of Law to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the college, which was founded in 1920.

The law school's dean, Klint Alexander, told the board of trustees this month that fundraising for the project has occupied much of his time in the last year.

During the trustees' budget hearings, Alexander said that UW has raised \$4 million for the project since November, and he hopes to have \$8 million raised within a year of the start of fundraising.

The College of Law is planning a major celebration of its centennial for September 2020. The Wyoming State Bar has also coordinated to have its annual conference hosted in Laramie around the same time.

"I know as dean, I've been waiting this moment for the past four years and now it's finally approaching," Alexander said. "Much of what we've done the past four years has been geared around this special event as a way to bring more attention to the College of Law, to reinvigorate our alumni base to reconnect with the College of Law, and really to elevate the college's profile throughout the state and region."

The main purpose of the renovation is to bring the college's various clinics into the actual College of Law building.

The American Bar Association, the college's accrediting agency, has said the clinics' current facilities are inadequate. While the college's Defender Aid Clinic is housed in the college's main building, most are housed in the UniWyo Federal Credit Union.

The law school has a number of clinics that provide the state with \$3.5 million of free legal services each year.

Alexander said the state is unusual in its reliance on UW's law school for free legal services, but that established reliance is becoming fortuitous.

"Especially in this age of federal cuts to legal aid coming out of Washington, schools that have laid the groundwork for clinical and experiential learning are now looked to more and more to provide free legal assistance for their citizens, and we've been doing that since the late 1960s, and it's really a strong feature of our law school," Alexander told the trustees.

In March, the trustees approved a Level II study for the expansion and renovation. In Wyoming, Level II studies are one of three studies that are defined by statute and typically occur before the construction of public buildings. Under Wyoming statutes, Level II studies focus on the construction's "feasibility."

Matt Kibbon, director of facilities construction management, told the Laramie Boomerang that the Level II work should wrap up around the end of 2019. The renovation is expected to be done in December 2020, though "substantial completion" should be done before the September 2020 centennial celebration.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch is also expected to speak on the university's campus for the celebration of the law school's centennial in September 2020.

The Colorado native served as a judge for the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals from 2006 to 2017. The 10th Circuit is the appellate court for Wyoming's federal cases.

Gorsuch has said that one of his most significant decisions as a judge involved a Wyoming case, in which a prisoner sued the state of Wyoming over the right to engage in certain religious practices in prison.

In that case, Gorsuch wrote the three-judge panel's decision that ruled Wyoming must allow access to a sweat lodge for Andrew Yellowbear and other American Indian convicts who wish to engage in traditional religious practices.

Long before the 10th Circuit determined in 2017 that Riverton no longer lies on the Wind River Indian Reservation, Gorsuch also had to weigh in on the case of the reservation's boundaries when Yellowbear had argued that state prosecutors did not have jurisdiction to prosecute him for torturing his 1-year-old daughter to death in Riverton.

The expansion of the law school comes amid some challenges for UW's legal program.

While there was a 16% increase in the freshman class for 2018's fall semester, Alexander said it's been a "pretty tough decade for law school admissions."

Alexander told trustees that 2018 brought the first "significant increase" in applications since 2010.

The dean continues to ask administrators to not raise the law school's tuition at 4 percent each year, especially the college's out-of-state tuition.

While the college's out-of-state rate will increase for the 2019-2020 academic year, Alexander has said "it is critical" for out-of-state tuition rates to be frozen for the following three years to keep the university competitive with other law schools in the Rocky Mountains.

Alexander also requested that trustees ask legislators to appropriate, in the 2020 budget session, \$15 million to create a \$25 million endowment for the College of Law to fund scholarships, the college's clinics and faculty needs.

With the college's centennial approaching, Alexander said he's hopeful UW would be able to raise \$10 million in donations for the endowment.

"We think we can succeed at that," he said. we will have the attention of the alumni."

## At a glance

The University of Wyoming is planning a \$10 million renovation of the College of Law to be mostly completed by September 2020, when the college will celebrate its centennial and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch is scheduled to speak at a celebratory dinner. The renovation's main purpose is to have the college's clinics housed in the main college building.

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