A New Space for Ideas: Extensive Renovation Project Reinvents Baldy Center and Conference Facilities

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A new space for ideas
Extensive renovation project reinvents Baldy Center and conference facilities

A major renovation project — years in the making — is transforming the fifth floor of John Lord O’Brian Hall and creating bright new spaces for fellowship and scholarship.

The $1 million-plus project has created two suites of rooms, building on space that encompassed an old faculty lounge, storage closets and now-unused areas of the Law Library. The result: a suite with a major conference area and a smaller seminar area, and an elegant new faculty lounge attached to a faculty reading room.

The renovation is a collaboration between the Law School and the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy, which is headquartered on the fifth floor. “This project demonstrates the close working relationship between the Baldy Center and the Law School,” said Dean Nils Olsen, “and demonstrates our commitment to interdisciplinary study. We think it will be the best-equipped and most useful conference facility in the University.”

Olsen pointed out that the fifth-floor renovation is part of an ongoing effort to revitalize O’Brian Hall, an effort that has included major classroom refinishment and construction of the first-floor working courtroom.

The conference suite will accommodate large stand-up receptions and will be furnished with modular tables that can be configured for groups of any size. It includes a small working kitchen, accessible to caterers through an outside door, and an entrance that can serve as a refreshment area or a breakout room for small-group discussions.

Windows in the main conference room let in plenty of natural light. Glass doors open onto a little-known feature of the building: an open courtyard with plantings and other amenities. “Much of the planning evolved to take advantage of our ability to go out into the courtyard,” said Professor Lynn Mather, director of the Baldy Center. “It is a hidden treasure. Even in the winter, the amount of light in these rooms is tremendous.”

The conference room is fully wired, with PowerPoint projectors hidden in the ceiling, recording facilities and a drop-down screen for presentations.

“This project demonstrates the close working relationship between the Baldy Center and the Law School and demonstrates our commitment to interdisciplinary study.” — Dean Nils Olsen

The smaller seminar room, which also opens onto the courtyard, holds a large conference table and can accommodate smaller meetings and some class sessions, Mather said. Also, she said, faculty working groups will be encouraged to use the room, such as reading groups and workshops at which faculty and outside readers offer critique and suggestions on completed book manuscripts. “I want to encourage cross-University discussion,” Mather said.

The faculty lounge is furnished in the Arts and Crafts style, with hardwood floors and an Oriental carpet. Faculty mailboxes are located in the lounge; the expectation is that professors will drop by each morning for the mail and coffee, and stay for talk. Essentially it will be the “water cooler” of the Law School — “a very comfortable area to relax and share informal conversations,” Olsen said, encouraging the cross-pollination of ideas for which the Law School is well-known.

In the adjoining faculty reading room, the plan is to line the bookshelves with a copy of every book ever published by a UB Law faculty member, past and present. Current legal journals also will be supplied. “This gives the faculty an opportunity to have a quiet place to catch up on their reading,” Olsen said.

Also part of the project is new office space for the managing editor and student editors of the journal Law and Policy, published by the Baldy Center, and furnished offices for visiting scholars and for graduate students doing advanced work on legal topics. “I am particularly excited about the idea of having visiting scholars here,” Mather said. The office space can accommodate two scholars at any one time.

The entire renovation is done in shades of gold, green and persimmon, with decorative tile accents. The project was funded partly by income from the Baldy Center’s endowment, carefully set aside over a period of years, and largely through donations by UB Law alumni. In appreciation of a major gift by Thomas R. Bremer ’79, retired senior vice president and general counsel of U.S. Surgical Corp., the faculty lounge and reading room will be named in his honor.

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A faculty advisory committee will help develop policies for use of the space. Mather said. The new space was inaugurated in December with the annual Baldy Center retreat for faculty.

Those responsible for creating the new Baldy Conference Center are, left to right, Laura Mangan, Special Assistant to the Dean; Nils Olsen, Dean; Lynn Mather, Director of the Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy and Professor; and Cheri Tubinis, Executive Assistant to the Dean. Above, a Roycroft flower in the tile offers a custom touch.
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