Looking Good! Basement Renovations Create New Tech-Enabled Classrooms

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Looking good!
Summer basement renovations create two new technology-enabled classrooms

The cavernous basement of John Lord O’Brian Hall – as Vice Dean for Administration James R. Newton puts it, once a place “where furniture went to die” – underwent an extreme makeover this summer. The renovation, which created two new attractive and technology-enabled classrooms, is the latest chapter in a five-year project that has dramatically improved the Law School’s home.

Students take most of their classes either in the basement or on the first floor, Newton says, and research had indicated that many students felt the ambiance left something to be desired. “To remain competitive, we thought it was important to have a building that is attractive and had the technology that students are accustomed to and will use in practice,” Newton says. On the heels of last year’s major renovation of the first floor, the new Classrooms 10 and 12 downstairs are meeting that standard.

Much of the work was structural, with the installation of new walls, ceilings, flooring and lighting, as well as aesthetic, with hanging artwork. Seven security cameras also were installed.

But for effective teaching and learning, perhaps most significant is the installation of audiovisual technology in both classrooms, bringing them up to the standards of the first-floor O’Brian lecture halls. This includes document cameras, projection screens, video and DVD capability, and a wall mounted camera with room microphones for Skype and similar communications.

With the additional tech upgrade to one of the fourth-floor classrooms, Newton says, seven of the 11 Law School’s primary classrooms are now fully technology-enabled. The most recent installations have been funded by a generous gift from Harvey L. Kaminski ’77, a member of the Dean’s Advisory Council, for whom a first-floor classroom was named in recognition of previous major gift. Kaminski’s most recent gift, totaling $200,000, includes $100,000 designated for educational technology upgrades.

Overall, the Law School’s renovations to O’Brien Hall – the first building constructed on the University at Buffalo’s North Campus – have totaled about $2.5 million since 2009. The University has paid over half that cost; the Law School’s share has come from fundraising, the annual operating budget and tuition income.

Also this spring, restrooms on the fifth and seventh floors were renovated to fully comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.