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Designing Spaces: Planning the Physical Space for a Legal Writing Program

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Introduction

Very little has been written about designing new law school buildings or renovating existing law school buildings.¹ There are a handful of articles about the process of building a new law school,² or about a dean's legacy being reflected

in a building.³ Other articles have been written about designing law school libraries⁴ and about building law libraries for other patrons.⁵ Law school rankings often reflect student satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the school's physical plant.⁶ But almost nothing has been published about creating spaces for skills-based programs such as clinics⁷ and writing programs, despite the special considerations that apply to those parts of the law school's educational program. This article describes what went into the renovation of existing space within the Duquesne University School of Law to accommodate a new legal research and writing program, and offers suggestions to others who may be embarking on a similar endeavor.

Informal discussions among legal writing teachers about a writing program have most frequently addressed the location and size of the offices given to the faculty within the program, reflecting the historical second-class status given to writing professors. Clinicians often face the same issues.⁸ At the time Duquesne hired full-time

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¹ For a good overview of the history of architectural design issues associated with university campuses, see Rifca Hashimshony and Jacov Haina, *Designing the University of the Future, Planning for Higher Education*, January-March 2006, at 5. There is a website devoted to college design, with examples of recent projects and ways to find local architects for projects. CollegeDesigner.com, (accessed January 31, 2014).

² There is one article with a detailed overview of the process of renovating a law school. See Richard J. Wood, *Capital Improvements: A Guide for the Construction of a Modern Law School*, 27 *Cap. U.L. Rev.* 709 (1999). Others have written about the political and financial issues involved with construction of a law school building or renovating an existing building. See, e.g., Elliot S. Milstein, *Reflections in Brick and Mortar: Building a Vision, Realizing a Dream*, 45 *Am. U.L. Rev.* 947 (1996); Michael M. Greenfield, *Confessions of a Hard-Hat Junkie: Reflections on the Construction of Anheuser-Busch Hall*, 76 *Wash. U.L.Q.* 147 (1998); Robert H. Jerry, II, *A Brief Exploration of Space: Some Observations on Law School Architecture*, 36 *U. Tol. L. Rev.* 85 (2004). Of course, construction of a new law school building often leads to publication of one or more short public-relations pieces and Web pages about the project. See, e.g., John Kelly, *Eight-story Building Will Serve Business And Law Schools*, 22 *Colum. Univ. Record* 20 (1997), <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/record/archives/vol22/vol22-iss23/record2223.20.html> (accessed January 29, 2014); University of Chicago Law School, *Law School Architecture*, <http://www.law.uchicago.edu/school/architecture> (accessed January 31, 2014); University of Baltimore School of Law, *The New Angelos Law Center*, <http://law.ubalt.edu/about/news/newbuilding/> (accessed January 31, 2014).

³ Kristin Booth Glen, *To Carry It On: A Decade of Deaning After Haywood Burns*, 10 *N.Y. City L. Rev.* 7, 50-53 (2006).

⁴ See Paul Hellyer & James S. Heller, *A New Library for America's Oldest Law School*, *AALL Spectrum*, May 2008, at 16; Cynthia Kemper, *At the Heart of a Law School*, *AALL Spectrum*, May 2008, at 14; Jack McNeill, *Architects? We Don't Need No Stinkin' Architects*, *AALL Spectrum*, May 2008, at 18.

⁵ See, e.g., Sue Bellevue, *A Place of Our Own*, *AALL Spectrum*, May 2008, at 22.

⁶ The Princeton Review's annual publication, *The Best 169 Law Schools* (2014) includes reports on "Best Quality of Life" and asks students about "how aesthetically pleasing the school is" and to rate "the school's classroom facilities." The Princeton Review, *User's Guide to Our Law School Rankings*, <http://www.princetonreview.com/users-guide-law-rankings.aspx> (accessed January 31, 2014).

⁷ Philip G. Schrag, *Constructing a Clinic*, 3 *Clinical L. Rev.* 175, 222-225 (1996).

⁸ See Schrag, *supra* note 7 at 224 ("Physical distance between clinicians and other faculty members can contribute significantly to

faculty for the writing program, only the director was tenured (having been hired with tenure from another school). The other three positions were initially governed by short-term contracts, but that soon changed to meet the long-term contract requirements of ABA Standard 405(c) (eligibility for a contract of five years or more)⁹ and the additional requirements of participation in faculty governance. Within three years of their hiring, all three new writing professors were placed on the clinical tenure track, with all of the perquisites accorded other tenure-track faculty at the school.

Dean Robert H. Jerry II has noted, “At the risk of stating the obvious, architecture matters. The nature of the space in which we work, teach, and study is important. The design of our surroundings affects our attitudes, moods, self-esteem, efficiency, and sense of community.”¹⁰ This is particularly true for a group of faculty members who, along with their courses, have been relegated to second-class status within law schools. Until the recent improvements in the status of writing professors across the nation, it was not uncommon for teachers of legal writing to have no offices (if they were adjuncts or upper-level students) or to have small and subpar offices located in the basement or away from the rest of the faculty (if they were on short-term contracts). If the offices of legal writing teachers were the same size and quality of those given to other professors within a law school, then the discussion among writing professors often revolved around whether the offices should be dispersed among the other faculty, grouped together in a wing or other area of the school’s office space, or placed elsewhere in the building.¹¹ These discussions

lack of knowledge and appreciation by those other faculty members regarding what clinicians do, and how they contribute to the law school.”)

⁹ *Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools*, Standard 405(c), A.B.A. Sec. Of Legal Educ. & Admissions to the Bar. (2013-14), available at http://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/standards.html (accessed January 29, 2014).

¹⁰ Jerry, *supra* note 2 at 86.

¹¹ Association of Legal Writing Directors & Legal Writing Institute, *Report of the Annual Legal Writing Survey* (2013), available at <http://www.alwd.org/surveys/2004-2012-survey-report/> (accessed January 29, 2014) [hereinafter Survey]. Question 69 of the Survey asks “What is the size and location of LRW Offices?” *Id.* at 65. The question has been asked for many years, and the responses are remarkably stable for years, probably because a law school physical plant changes infrequently. For

then turned to the location of support staff, accommodations for the frequent visits by students to their writing teachers (usually for conferences), and the need for space to be available for dealing with yearly events, such as the distribution of hundreds of appellate briefs and administration of the appellate oral argument component of the program.

Arguments in favor of dispersed placement are that it tends to minimize distinctions among faculty and promote collegiality among all faculty members. Such dispersion, however, can create problems, such as complaints by other faculty about the frequent visits by students to the writing professors and the isolation of writing teachers from each other. Arguments in favor of grouped placement, regardless of the separation of the writing program faculty from other professors, are that it promotes collegiality within the program, facilitates discussion among the writing teachers, and permits more efficient administration of the program and the sharing of support staff (such as writing specialists and teaching assistants). Having a special location for grouped offices could serve to protect the program from

2013, 189 U.S. law schools and 1 Canadian law school responded to six Survey options for that question *Id.* at i. For the six possible answers, 126 schools (up from 109 in 2009) reported that the LRW offices were “Comparable to most non-writing faculty offices,” while 38 schools reported that the LRW offices were “Smaller than most non-writing faculty offices” (compared to 39 in 2009). *Id.* at 65. Nine schools reported that LRW offices were in a “More desirable location than most non-writing faculty offices” (up from 2 in 2009), while 35 schools reported that LRW offices were in a “Less desirable location than most non-writing faculty offices” (compared to 34 in 2009). *Id.* Seventy-four schools reported that LRW offices were “integrated among most non-writing offices” (up from 70 in 2009), while 42 schools reported that LRW offices were “segregated from most non-writing offices” (compared to 37 in 2009). *Id.*

¹² Writing specialists and teaching assistants need a place to work, and at many law schools this implies creation of a “writing center” for the nonfaculty staff. Question 31 of the Survey, *supra* note 11, asked if the school’s LRW program has a formal writing center, followed by asking for the number of professionals and teaching assistants on staff. Only 35 schools reported that they had a formal writing center in 2013. *Id.* at 22. Professor Terrill Pollman has described some of the functions of a student-staffed “writing clinic,” but noted that the “physical needs for starting a Clinic are few,” including conference space, a computer, a filing cabinet, and a telephone. [Terrill Pollman, A Writer’s Board and A Student-Run Writing Clinic: Making the Writing Community Visible at Law Schools](#), 3 *Leg. Writing* 277, 284 (1997).

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elimination or cutbacks, but might lead to faculty jealousy based on their perceptions that writing faculty might be afforded special privileges.

History, Planning, and Design

When Duquesne's faculty and administration decided to hire a director and several full-time faculty members for an expanded and enhanced writing program that had been composed of more than a dozen adjuncts supervised by a "regular casebook" professor, there was one obvious matter the school did not address when making the decision: Where was the school going to put all those new full-time professors? This may have been overlooked because the school did not previously have an experienced expert faculty member specializing in teaching legal writing, so no one was aware of the unique needs of a modern writing program and the ways in which such a program would require dedicated space within the building in order to perform optimally.

Duquesne went on to hire the author as the legal writing program director in 2006 and a year later hired three additional full-time faculty members. Adjuncts were retained in what was now a hybrid program, to teach approximately half of the enrolled students, and upper-level student teaching assistants played a significant role within the program. Furthermore, the new program involved alumni judging the students' appellate oral arguments in the spring semester, and the new director and writing program faculty began planning to host national conferences and teach new upper-level writing-intensive courses. Fortunately, as soon as the program was created and the director was hired, the publicity and dean's efforts led to the receipt of a generous gift to the program from an alumnus. This provided the resources to design and create a special place within the law school building for the new writing program, converting space within the law library to meet the new program's needs. The new "Bridget and Alfred Peláez Legal Writing Center," which opened in

2009, is named for a senior faculty member and his late wife, at the request of the donor.¹³

The planning for Duquesne's new writing center began with the creation of a committee composed of the director, three full-time writing professors, the law librarian, the law school's office manager, and a representative of the university's physical plant office. The decision was made to retain an independent architectural firm to develop a proposal for the new Legal Writing Center, and two architects from that firm came to all of the committee's meetings. The university did not have the in-house capability to do the kind of design and construction work needed for the project, which was all provided by outside contractors. The university did, however, provide oversight of the electrical, HVAC, and related matters.

When the planning began, the program director had an office on one of the two floors of the law school wing that housed the school's other faculty. There were no faculty offices available for the three new full-time writing professors, either dispersed among the other faculty or located adjacent to each other. The only available space was within the law library, directly under the two faculty floors of the school, accessible via stairs and an elevator from the faculty floors (or from within the library itself). That floor was partially on-grade with the street, and partially below-grade because of the hilly nature of the Duquesne campus.

The decision was made immediately to minimize any physical reflections of status differentials by matching the "look" and size of the writing professors' offices with those provided for other faculty at the school. That meant creating offices of the same size as those given to other professors, with matching trim, furniture, and fixtures. Of course, everyone had to have a window, and there was one wall of the available space that was on the same grade as the outside street, with several windows

¹³ See *A Lesson in Gratitude*, The Duquesne Lawyer, at 2 (Fall 2009). See also Duquesne University School of Law, Legal Research and Writing Program, <http://www.duq.edu/academics/schools/law/academic-programs/legal-research-and-writing-program> (accessed January 27, 2014).

having a normal outside view. Another wall was below grade, and had windows which were, on the interior, located near the ceiling of what were small rooms two or three students could reserve for studying. Because of the limited opportunities for admitting natural light in the writing center, and the relatively low ceilings in the library, we asked the architects to be profligate in the provision of recessed ceiling lights and to use as much glass as possible in walls and doors to maximize the effects of natural lighting and to avoid the feeling of being closed in.

The committee also made lists of other needs. The hybrid nature of the writing program staff meant that we wanted to have rooms for use by adjuncts, teaching assistants, and a possible writing specialist. Adjuncts are the orphaned children of the law school and typically have no office assigned to them, or even a shared one. But in a writing program, all teachers, including adjuncts, need to meet frequently with students to discuss work,¹⁴ whether those are required or optional courses. If no space is reserved for the use of adjuncts, then adjuncts have to use public spaces within the school or try to reserve small meeting rooms. Because there were approximately eight adjuncts within the program, we decided to create two offices for the adjuncts' use. That meant they would have a place to prepare for class, use a computer and printer, leave their coats and briefcases, and meet with students. The rooms would also be available to our upper-level teaching assistants, who need to meet with 1-Ls in private.

Because students usually arrive before a scheduled conference with a professor, we wanted to have an area where they could wait without disturbing faculty or other students. We wanted space for the meetings of the writing program faculty, where we could discuss common issues and hold training sessions, and which would be under our control so we would not have to search for, and reserve, a room. We thought this common space could also be used for preparing for special events, such as mailing briefs for oral arguments or preparing for national or regional legal writing faculty conferences;

we also wanted to be able to meet as a group for lunch. With at least three full-time faculty members and several adjuncts in a location one flight from support staff, we wanted to build in a work area for an administrative assistant to the legal writing program, even though the program had not been authorized to hire anyone, and a place for the storage of documents and supplies. Along those lines, we also realized we needed to have a program-specific photocopier included in the design. Furthermore, we wanted to create an informal place for discussions among all the writing instructional staff, whether full-time, adjunct, or student. Finally, we hoped we could use the space as a backup location for meetings of a small class section.

There were other important matters to put on the table at the start. We began planning in the fall semester, with the goal of having a contract in place to have the work done over the summer and having the writing center open for the start of the fall semester. We were working with a \$500,000 budget;¹⁵ although we wanted to spend less so we could have funds reserved for things we missed, and for future needs of the program, we did not design to a particular price. Our goal was to see if we could get everything we wanted before we started cutting back on spending. We also wanted to make sure that security was addressed in the design, because there were no other faculty members or staff in this area of the building; this was particularly important because some of the legal writing program faculty, notably adjuncts, would teach evening classes.

During the series of meetings to develop our "wish list," every member of the committee contributed ideas, with suggestions from one or more members leading the others to further develop and elaborate the ideas. The librarian reminded us about the security needs, while the director knew what other writing program offices looked like; the director also focused on the likely future needs of the program. We learned from each

¹⁴ See, e.g., Sourcebook on Legal Writing Programs, at 60 (Eric Easton gen. ed., 2d ed., ABA 2006).

¹⁵ The project ended up costing approximately \$375,000. The remainder was set aside as a special fund for the program, and we often have drawn on that account for purchase of furniture and technology.

other about how computer screens should not be oriented to reflect venetian blinds, the best ways of laying out furniture to promote effective student conferences, and what kinds of document and supply storage would be needed. The collaborative spirit of the legal writing program faculty, and our positive relationship with our law library, were greatly enhanced by the planning of the center.

After reviewing a series of preliminary architects' drawings, we realized that we could have only three offices for full-time faculty. The limiting factors were the sizes of the offices and the available windows, which meant the director's office could not be relocated in the writing center. All of the plans also included a dedicated space for a writing program administrative assistant (the position did not exist at the time, but was authorized later). The plans provided us with two large shared offices for the eight adjunct legal writing professors and teaching assistants, and another office and kitchenette that could be used by the approximately ten teaching assistants (and a future writing specialist). The construction of three full-time professor's offices, with four additional offices and the common area, meant that there would never be a need to seek additional locations for student conferences held by the faculty and teaching assistants. The common area was designed around a work area for an administrative assistant modeled upon a law firm receptionist's station, with a large counter for a computer and other office equipment. A special alcove was built for a photocopier. The architects created a kitchenette for program faculty and teaching/research assistants, and drafted a plan with seating that could be configured for multiple purposes. The offices and common areas all included built-in storage space for coats, papers, supplies, and equipment. Unfortunately, we learned that we could not have running water in the kitchenette because of structural limitations imposed by the distance from existing plumbing in the former library space.

The architects' plans maximized the transmission of natural light, avoiding the feeling of a basement, by putting glass transoms at the top of all the interior walls, using frosted glass doors in all the

offices, building a large glass window adjacent to a library skylight in one office, and creating a huge glass entry area to the library. Fluorescent light fixtures were all recessed into the ceiling, so they were flush and created a feeling of a higher ceiling. High-hat halogens were placed through critical areas for accent and flood lighting, and under-counter lights were put into the kitchenette. Additional accent lighting, connected to dimmers, was placed over the administrative assistant work area, and all offices had dimmer switches for overhead lighting. The plans included locations for electrical outlets, light switches, and network and telephone drops.

The architects brought in an interior designer, and we held several meetings to pick out specific light fixtures, flooring, wood stain colors, countertop materials, window treatments, wallpaper, paint colors, fabrics, and furniture. The starting point was the color scheme and materials used for the fairly recent renovation of the faculty wing of the law school. The cherrywood used for faculty offices, wainscoting, and furniture, as well as the design of support staff areas, were all duplicated in the writing center plan. That meant custom wood stain had to be mixed, and wood trim and molding patterns had to be duplicated. To separate the entrance meeting areas within the common area, and address traffic patterns, two different types of flooring were used; the entryway and high-traffic areas were designed for easy-maintenance faux-wood-plank flooring, while the portion of the common area to be used for meetings and all offices were carpeted.

The architects and interior designer helped us choose furniture for all areas outside of the faculty offices that we could easily move and reconfigure for various purposes. This meant that the adjunct offices and common area each had two tables that could be moved around, along with 16 chairs, a dozen of which would have casters, that could be used interchangeably throughout the center. The full-time faculty offices had wraparound desk areas and built-in cherrywood bookcases like the other faculty offices in the school, but we also planned for separate round conference tables and two additional chairs for student conferences. The common area furniture included three overstuffed

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chairs for students to sit in while waiting for their professors, with end tables for lamps.

As a final step in the design process, the architects created a computer-generated 3-D movie that gave us a feeling of a walk-through of the center. This was incredibly helpful, leading to several design changes, and proved to be remarkably faithful to the final results. It was also placed on the legal writing page of the law school website, so it could be viewed by others. The cost of the entire project was within our budget, and nothing had to be cut back or eliminated to save money.

A timetable for construction was part of the architects' final proposal, and demolition began right after the spring semester's final exams. The summertime construction work was completed on schedule, several weeks before the start of the fall semester. The writing program faculty, particularly the director, visited the construction site every day during the summer, which seemed to make the contractors more appreciated (and probably more careful). This monitoring also helped everyone resolve questions and problems in a speedy fashion, but, apart from the relocation of some lighting fixtures because of what was learned after the existing walls and ceiling were removed, there were no major issues to be addressed.

Details, Details . . .

One scholar has noted, "Sweat the little things. It is impossible to pay too much attention to apparently minor details. Little touches can make a difference in how well the facility functions."¹⁶ The writing center is located on the main floor of the law library, in an area where there are study carrels but no shelving. The study carrel area has no windows, but it does have a large skylight, and one of the nonfaculty offices in the writing center has a very large window (with a privacy shade) that forms part of the channel for that skylight. The writing center spans the width of the study area, and there are two doors to the center. The main entrance is on the left side, part of a floor-to-ceiling, nine-foot-

tall glass panel with a swinging full-glass door. The door handle is a vertical bar with a concealed locking bar that goes into the floor. A vinyl decal was used across the entrance glass to display the name of the writing center and has a horizontal accent strip to alert people to the presence of the glass. The secondary fire exit is on the right side, about 15 feet away, with a frosted glass half-panel door. The exterior wall of the entrance is faced with cherry stained wood wainscoting matching the wainscoting used in the writing center and throughout the faculty wing of the law school (the fire door also matches that color).

Adjacent to the entry is a panel listing the faculty and staff members of the program, their office numbers, and telephone extensions. Beneath the panel is a wall-mounted telephone that can be used to call into the writing center. The administrative assistant's workstation uses design elements common to a framed entry to a law firm office. It is located between two floor-to-ceiling pillars (inside of which are structural steel beams) and is visible from outside the glass entryway, showing off the internal cherrywood wainscoting. Above the workstation are three dimmable halogen light fixtures, which come down on poles from the ceiling, and on the wall behind the workstation are large metal letters displaying the name of the center.

The administrative assistant's work area is set up like a law firm receptionist's station. There is plenty of desktop area, which is made of a solid-core faux-marble material in an L-shape that doesn't chip or show wear. The counter-height front piece of the desktop is curved to span the two pillars, just as it was done in other parts of the law school, and prevents the worktop from being seen. The desktop houses the administrative assistant's computer, to which two printers are attached; one is a high-speed black-and-white laser printer and the other is a wireless color laser printer, available to all the program's faculty and staff. Under the desktop are two filing cabinets that can be wheeled out when needed for cleaning. After the center was built, we added a color sheetfed scanner, a paper shredder (on wheels, placed under the desktop), a label maker, and a lockable hidden key

¹⁶ Greenfield, *supra* note 2 at 158.

case with keys to all the center's offices. Adjunct professors, teaching and research assistants, full-time faculty, and our administrative assistant all have keys to the center (a single key will open the fire door we have marked for "staff" and one of the interior shared offices), and if someone needs to get into another person's office, we all have the combination to the key case. This arrangement has saved us from carrying multiple keys and has meant we need not trek to the law school main office to retrieve a key to someone else's office.

Flanking the administrative assistant's workstation, attached to one of the dual pillars, is a wall-mounted magazine/literature holder that matches the cherrywood stain used throughout the writing center. We also bought smaller matching brochure holders to place on the countertop. On the other pillar is a 2' x 4' framed print. Hidden behind one pillar is a water cooler that was installed after the center was completed; it cannot be seen from outside, and the three-gallon jugs are small enough to be stored under the adjacent desktop of the administrative assistant.

The workstation has been used as the background for a photograph of the assembled LRW program faculty taken for the school's website¹⁷ and a program brochure. The workstation has also done double duty. After the removal of the computer equipment, it has been transformed into a server-staffed open bar for receptions, including those held at the close of "Colonial Frontier" legal writing conferences hosted by Duquesne.¹⁸

Between the administrative assistant's workstation and the entry is a large area with comfortable stuffed chairs for students and other guests to use while waiting to see one of the program's professors (or for anyone to just relax). The interior designer had planned for three chairs, but we ordered a

fourth a year after the center opened. Between each pair of chairs is a cherrywood end table, on top of which is an incandescent lamp with dark shades, for indirect lighting. We bought coasters to protect the tabletops, and some extra brochure holders are placed on the tables. Above and behind each pair of chairs is a wall-mounted magazine/literature holder matching the cherrywood stain. Wood wainscoting covers all of the walls below the chair rail, and linen-look wallpaper was used for all of the interior walls. A cherry coat tree rack is located next to one pair of chairs.

As the program has matured and we have hosted conferences, we have framed three dry-mounted conference placards that the university prepared for each of our conferences, and they hang strategically throughout the writing center. In addition, we have framed another poster that recognizes the program's U.S. News and World Report ranking, and we have one more framed item which is described at the end of this article. All of these items on the walls were sized the same, and all have been framed to match. The materials on the walls remind students and other visitors about the program faculty's work outside of the classroom. We also bought a very large wall-mounted clock, which is centered on the longest wall in the room.

To the left of the administrative workstation and down a short corridor are two offices to be shared by adjuncts and teaching assistants; the corridor ends with an office for a full-time professor. Across from the second adjunct office is a set of built-in storage cabinets above and below built-in mailboxes. The mailboxes match the solid-core countertop for the administrative assistant workstation, and we planned for enough individual mailboxes for all faculty (full-time and adjunct), the administrative assistant, and some extras. One mailbox is used for the writing specialist who was hired after the center was built, and one mailbox is shared by teaching assistants and research assistants (it always has blank timesheets for them). The storage cabinets are for supplies that are frequently needed by everyone in the program, such as envelopes, pens,

¹⁷ Duquesne University School of Law, Legal Research and Writing Program, <http://www.duq.edu/academics/schools/law/academic-programs/legal-research-and-writing-program> (accessed January 31, 2014).

¹⁸ See, e.g., Duquesne University School of Law, Legal Writing Conference 2013, <http://www.duq.edu/academics/schools/law/academic-programs/legal-research-and-writing-program/legal-writing-conference-2013> (accessed January 31, 2014).

paper clips, tape, staples, toner cartridges, etc. We also store spare light bulbs, extension cords, doorstops, and similar items in the cabinets.

Each adjunct office has two three-foot square tables with four chairs, which accommodate class preparation. The chairs and tables fit through the doorway in case we need to bring them into the common area. These offices are partly below street level, but there are casement-style windows across the top of the back wall, right under the ceilings of each. Matching glass transoms at the top of the inner walls of these offices and frosted glass full-length panels on the doors permit transmission of natural light into the common area but preserve the privacy of anyone in the office. Each office has a large whiteboard on the wall for use in student conferences, a telephone, and a printer. We also bought magnetic clips for use on the metal doorframes for holding notices about room reservations.

The full length of the exterior wall in each adjunct office houses desk-height storage cabinets that are one foot deep. The top of the cabinet is a solid-core countertop material. These cabinets are used for long-term storage by the program and hold materials for our national conferences and the administration of the spring semester appellate oral arguments, as well as reams of printer paper, soft drinks, and bottled water. Research assistants also store their work product in the cabinets. Our administrative assistant has labeled each cabinet to help us remember what has been stored in each location.

In the spring semester, one of these rooms is put to use as “Appellate Brief Central,” where we store, sort, and prepare for mailing appellate briefs used by alumni for judging our students’ appellate oral arguments. Extra briefs for faculty are kept here until after the argument period is over, and we also store all items used for the oral argument receptions in the room.

To the right of the administrative assistant’s workstation is a hidden alcove, behind the second pillar, for a networked photocopier/scanner/printer, to which all program faculty and staff can print via the wireless network. The flooring in all of these offices and areas is a faux-wood-

plank material for ease of cleaning, and because the traffic is heaviest there. The other, larger portion of the common area is carpeted.

That large section of the common area holds two three-foot square tables and eight movable chairs, which we reconfigure as needed. The area can accommodate 18 people and has been used for program meetings; training sessions on Westlaw, Lexis, and Bloomberg research tools; lunch gatherings; class meetings; and receptions. On one end of the common area is a wood bookcase we ordered after the center was completed; it was stained to match the cherrywood color and holds examination copies of all available legal research and writing texts, several volumes of computer help books, and copies of our publications. On top of the bookcase, we have placed a teaching award the students gave to the senior faculty member for whom the center was named.

Between the small office for our writing specialist and our kitchenette is a 50-inch high-definition plasma display recessed in the wall, with a connection panel for all conceivable computer and audio/video inputs, and ceiling-mounted hidden stereo speakers. This area was originally going to be used for artwork, but we realized we could extend the common area’s utility by substituting the plasma display. We had a glass shelf fabricated and placed under the wall-mounted display to hold an iPad® or our networked Blu-ray player. The purchase and installation costs of adding the plasma display have been the largest amount spent from the reserve we held for post-construction additions, but it has been worthwhile.

Having this display in the writing center has allowed us to hold training sessions for program faculty right in our center, without having to find and reserve a classroom. Furthermore, we have held many classes in the center itself, ranging from smaller sections of the first-year course to our upper-level seminars. The presence of the display and the layout of the writing center itself have allowed one series of upper-level seminars, a law office simulation course, to have a meeting location that is very much like that of a small law firm. After hours, we have had students gather for semester-ending “legal writing

“The presence of the display and the layout of the writing center itself have allowed one series of upper-level seminars, a law office simulation course, to have a meeting location that is very much like that of a small law firm.”

movie night,” to watch law-related films that the library has purchased. We set up a semicircle of chairs, and the entry area serves as a snack bar.

The third wall of the common area is an eight-foot coat closet, in which we store robes and signs for the spring semester appellate arguments, associated paraphernalia such as timers and easels, boxes of holiday decorations, a vacuum cleaner, and a hand truck for bringing in refreshments and moving boxes of appellate briefs. We also store extra paint, wallpaper, and flooring in there.

Between the coat closet and plasma display is our kitchenette. Although we do not have a sink, the room has a wall of built-in cabinets. The counter on the cabinet wall holds a coffeemaker, microwave, and toaster oven. The program’s faculty and staff use an under-counter refrigerator, and we store all sorts of reception-related items in the upper cabinets. The room houses a small table that can accommodate two people for lunch or a student conference. One short wall is taken up by a whiteboard, and located on the wall opposite from the cabinetry is an armoire in which we store paper, loose-leaf binders, folders, and electronics. Our Blu-ray player is on one shelf, along with two video cameras and two tripods we, and the appellate moot court students, use for recording practice sessions (the recordings are usually played back on our plasma display). We also have plastic containers in the armoire, holding every conceivable cable and adapter to permit connections to the plasma display. After the center was finished, we purchased two additional items usually found in the kitchenette: a library kick-step stool so we could reach the top cabinets throughout the center and a wheeled laptop cart to be used by program faculty for class or for use in the common area. The kitchenette has three independent types of lighting: under-counter lights, high-hat accent lighting, and a motion-controlled fluorescent ceiling fixture that can be set to turn itself on when someone enters the room and shuts itself off a while later.

The writing specialist’s office is a small office off of the common area, on the other side of the plasma display. It was originally intended for use by teaching assistants, so they could study or meet

with 1-L students, but starting a year after the center opened, it has been used primarily by the program’s part-time writing specialist. The room holds one table and two chairs, and one wall has built-in cabinets for storage. On the table-high counter, there’s a printer and telephone, and there is a whiteboard on one wall. The room is very bright because one wall is made up of a huge glass panel that allows the entry of natural light from the adjacent library skylight. A privacy screen can be pulled down over that glass panel when the room is in use. Outside of the office is the center’s fourth wall-mounted magazine/literature holder, which holds handouts and exercises developed by the writing specialist.

This side of the center includes the entryway to two of the three offices for full-time faculty. Each faculty office has one or two large windows facing the street in front of the law school. The wood trim, built-in wood bookcases, and L-shaped desk are similar to those in the other faculty offices in the building. Each room also holds a round table for student conferences. The rooms are slightly different from each other, but comparable in size to those of other faculty offices. These rooms have frosted glass panels on the doors, but no glass transoms near the ceilings.

Aftermath

The writing center has encouraged a high esprit de corps within the program for all faculty and teaching assistants. Having three full-time faculty together has provided many impromptu opportunities for discussion and collaboration. The director usually visits the center in the morning and afternoon, often joining the other program faculty in the common area, and the central location has made it very easy to hold group meetings without any advance planning or notice required. Other members of the law school administration and day division writing program adjuncts often meet the full-time faculty for lunch in the center, because our classes usually meet after 1:00 p.m. Our teaching assistants frequently eat in the center along with everyone else, and they enjoy their ability to hold private conferences with 1-Ls. Many teaching assistants use the center for their own private studying during the afternoon and evening, especially when exams are looming.

“Having three full-time faculty together has provided many impromptu opportunities for discussion and collaboration.”

Adjuncts who teach in the evening division usually arrive at the center 30 to 60 minutes before class, to prepare or talk about class. This means that the full-time faculty and director know when and where the adjuncts will be on those afternoons, so informal monitoring and discussion happens very frequently. Our administrative assistant works late those days, too. The center has also meant that the adjuncts are integral parts of the program and no longer feel isolated; because they have their own offices, they don't need to worry about seeking out rooms for conferences.

The center's location in the library has also forged connections with students that would otherwise not exist. Because the writing program faculty, unlike other members of the law faculty, are located in the library and often walk through the library, we are constantly seen by our students, and when we see them, we often stop to chat. Many of our best students study right outside the center, and the offices of the student journals and appellate moot court board are on the same floor. Other faculty have started to come downstairs more frequently, particularly the junior faculty and the dean.

A visit to the center has become a piece of the tour given to prospective students and to alumni, and it highlights the importance of the writing program by demonstrating the investment the school has made in skills training. As noted earlier, the center has also been a boon to our upper-level writing courses by serving as a "law firm office" and a place for presentations by students to outside guests, such as members of the state legislature.

The downside of the center's location and grouping of faculty is that the program faculty are somewhat isolated from other faculty members, which is the same problem faced by faculty in many clinical programs. Although the center is not located on one of the two faculty floors, it looks identical to the rest of the faculty wing and is actually the most attractive and well-designed portion of the building, which ameliorates any sense of the program being segregated or being composed of second-class faculty (particularly now that the writing program faculty are on tenure-track appointments). The law school's clinic is undergoing renovation and is located several

blocks away, so the writing program faculty are less isolated than the clinicians. However, the other faculty are often unaware of the constant presence of the writing professors in the building. They are not cognizant of the volume of student traffic to the writing professors' offices, so they often are ignorant of how busy the program faculty are with individualized teaching and review of student work, although the writing faculty take the same path to get to their classes. The director's office is on one of the two main faculty floors, however, and his office is visited by students frequently, so there is one reminder of the importance of student contact for an effective writing program. On the other hand, the other faculty do not complain about the presence of students near their offices at conference time. We have found, however, that in the afternoon our conversations in the center can disturb students in the nearby carrels.

The architects' designs have worked out very well, but our current photocopier is noisy, and because it's in the common area next to two offices, it can be bothersome, although we are not sure that any other option would have ameliorated the sound. The center's heating and air conditioning is very dependent upon the library's settings, and because it is at the end of a trunk line, sometimes it can be very cold or very warm. We found that the small under-counter refrigerator is too small for the large number of users, and probably should have planned for a full-size unit. And we wish that we could have built two more offices in the center, for the director and a possible additional teacher in the future.

Conclusion

When the writing center construction was complete, the law school dean and university president held a reception to inaugurate the center. The event was the cover story in our alumni magazine¹⁹ and further showcased the importance of the writing program to the school. Because Duquesne is a Catholic institution

“The center's location in the library has also forged connections with students that would otherwise not exist.”

¹⁹ See *A Lesson in Gratitude, The Duquesne Lawyer*, at 2 (Fall 2009).

founded by the Spiritan Order;²⁰ the center was blessed by a priest at the dedication ceremony. We all thought his words were so wonderful that we had them turned into a framed poster on the wall of the center. Here is what he said:

Let us pray ...

Life-giving God

You are the Inspiration of creation,
the Maker of all good things in our lives.

Bless now this space and place dedicated to you,
and bless all who will teach, study, research,
and write here.

Let this place of learning
Welcome all sincere scholars with truth and integrity,
opening their minds to a deeper understanding of your law
and opening their hearts to new hope.

Inspire all who gather here
to move beyond narrow interpretations of the law and life;
to resist being bound by hopelessness or despair,
and to refuse striving for resources and wealth
for personal gain alone.

Let them instead build upon and expand the precedents of the past.
Ever mindful of the needs of your world
let your Holy Spirit open their eyes to new possibilities

and thus discover new opportunities for service.

And remind all of us always
that your first law is always a law of Love:
a guiding beacon of your Spirit Who loves us all
and calls us all into a deeper relationship with you.
We pray all of this with profound thanksgiving,
in the name of the Father, and the Son
and the Holy Spirit. Amen.²¹



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²⁰ Duquesne University, Who Are the Spiritans?, <http://www.duq.edu/life-at-duquesne/spiritan-campus-ministry/who-are-the-spiritans> (accessed January 31, 2014).

²¹ Rev. James McCloskey, C.S.Sp., *Blessing for Dedication of the Bridget & Alfred Peláez Legal Writing Center* (August 28, 2009).