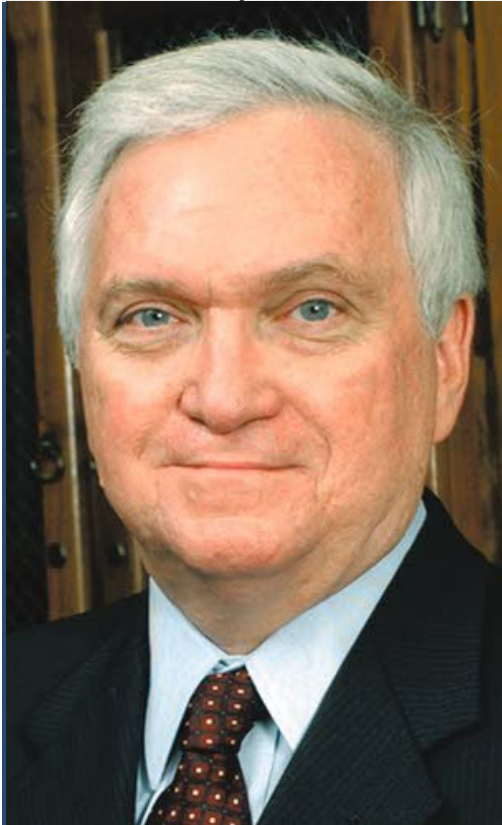


UI law school set to begin Boise foray

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- (0) comments

By Joel Mills of the Tribune

Dean says college will go it alone in offering 3rd-year classes as it waits for bar association's 'acquiescence'



Don Burnett...

MOSCOW - With fundraising on track and a student fee increase all but a done deal, the University of Idaho hopes to start offering third-year law classes in Boise this fall without state financial support.

UI College of Law Dean Donald Burnett said the only remaining hurdle is what the American Bar Association calls "acquiescence." The process is designed to ensure expanded programs in different locations don't detract from a law school's home location.

"We're going to go ahead, subject to the ABA's acquiescence," Burnett said.

The new approach is a dramatically scaled-back version of the law school's original plan to open a full three-year branch in Boise that would focus on business and commercial law. The State Board of Education rejected that approach as too expensive, but gave the UI permission to teach third-year classes in addition to offerings already available in Boise.

The Legislature didn't appropriate the \$900,000 needed for that expansion last year, however, leaving the university to go it alone.

Since then, the law school has raised about \$400,000 in multiyear commitments from alumni toward the Boise expansion, Burnett said. The first-year budget of \$455,000 will be covered with about \$150,000 from the alumni donations, and the rest will come from student fees.

Twenty students have been selected to be in the first group this fall, and there is room to accept a few more, plus some transfers from other law schools, Burnett said.

Portland-based Concordia University's private law school is also laying plans for a Boise branch, but that won't open until at least 2011, according to previous reports. Calls and e-mails to a Concordia representative for an update were not returned on Tuesday.

Burnett said the third-year offerings will expand each year for three years if fundraising stays on track. One professor has been hired for this fall, and another will be added next year. The law school will probably hire an additional faculty member for Moscow to help handle increased enrollment there, he added.

Nationwide, applications to law schools are up 5.5 percent Burnett said, while applications to the UI law school were up 16 percent, he said.

And the university isn't giving up on its original vision of a branch in Boise at the old Ada County Courthouse that housed the Legislature while the capitol was renovated.

"We do intend to go back to the State Board of Education, which they have invited us to do, and engage them in further discussions about plans for a full, three-year branch program," Burnett said. "It will be a splendid location for our students, to take classes with the state Capitol building on one side, the Supreme Court on the other side, and the Idaho State Bar across the street."

But renovations to that building to create the "Law Learning Center" will cost about \$7 million, funding that won't likely materialize from the state in the near future, Burnett said. So he will keep raising private funds toward that end, he said.

"We need to maintain our progress in order for this to be feasible."

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