

KRESGE RESOURCES

Not Your Parents' Law Library

BY WILLIAM SCHMITT

Upon completion of the current construction and renovation project, the Kresge Library will occupy the lion's share of the school's current building. The dramatic increase in space carries with it exciting challenges to use the space wisely, difficult decisions regarding prioritizing the growth of resources, and enhanced needs for financial support to capitalize on opportunities for innovation.

"The heart of a good law school is its library," says Thomas, who has been with the Kresge Library for 18 years. Under the leadership of Ed Edmonds, associate dean for library and information technology, a dedicated group of library faculty, professionals, and support staff members work hard to maximize the library's effectiveness.

This is an especially dynamic time for law libraries as they seek to respond to the explosion of information, while juggling the financial challenges of providing top-notch service to outstanding faculty and students with the highest research aspirations. "It's an exciting time to be in the information business" says Thomas.

The need to match the breadth and depth of research collections at peer institutions, coupled with the mandate to embrace an ever-growing agenda of topics that interest the Law School's faculty and students, presents significant budgetary pressures. Spiraling inflation rates in the information marketplace and the shift from books toward more expensive electronic databases with high recurring costs tax the budget for new

acquisitions.

"Our endowment funds have been really terrific in helping us make this transition," Thomas says. When Thomas arrived in 1990, the Law Library had only six endowed collections. Today that number stands at more than 30. The library is very grateful for the growing amount of external support, Thomas says. This critically important lifeline must continue to increase amid the changes faced by Notre Dame Law School.





HERE ARE SOME OF THE CHANGES:

- Faculty, including new faculty who bring their own areas of specialization, look to the library for historical and current information to support high-level research and policy discussions. “More of our faculty are doing interdisciplinary work,” Thomas notes. This requires increased collaboration with the Hesburgh Libraries and cooperative purchases of resources that are a win-win situation for legal scholars, as well as for faculty and students of other units at Notre Dame.
- Many Kresge patrons now have a more international focus to their research, requiring primary sources from a larger number of countries on a variety of subjects. Some of these materials can be difficult or very expensive to obtain. This international focus parallels the University goals, and is a *sine qua non* in attracting and retaining professors on the cutting edge of globalization in the legal profession.
- When the Law School was last renovated, books were the primary medium of research; other resources—primarily microfiche—were a supplementary system. Today, the situation is reversing rapidly due to the improved ability to search online products. Electronic databases take a big bite out of the annual acquisitions budget. One product, titled *The Making of Modern Law*, includes approximately 20,000 legal treatises from the 19th century. Essential to historical research, it came at an initial cost of more than \$100,000, plus annual maintenance fees. An electronic version of U.S. Supreme Court records and briefs cost about \$75,000. Many other databases that are standard for student and faculty use carry price tags of \$10,000 annually. “This trend will grow,” says Thomas. At the same time, the library must continue to purchase hard-texts to address historical backfill problems from earlier years. “We’re trying to be responsible stewards of information,” aware of the need for a comprehensive, historical, and permanent compilation of legal knowledge, says Thomas.

The challenges faced by the library require reliable and flexible sources of financial support. The law library looks to endowments as a key to unlock this information for the law school of the 21st century. Discretionary endowments will play a particularly important role. "About half our endowments are geared toward specific kinds of collections," says Thomas. These are of great value to the library. At the same time, in a world where information needs, new directions of learning, and opportunities for collaboration are emerging at a rapid pace, endowments targeted for general or discretionary use are especially valuable.

The availability of world-spanning, user-friendly information that empowers tomorrow's interdisciplinary and international leaders is a perfect "mission fit" for the Law School. This new kind of support serves as a bridge between faculty and students, between the Law School and the University, between the campus and the world, and between the past and the future.



Ed Edmonds
Associate Dean for Library and
Information Technology

Associate Dean Ed Edmonds joined the Notre Dame Law School in 2006. During the course of his career, Edmonds has served as director of three law school libraries—William and Mary, Loyola-New Orleans, and, most recently, the University of St. Thomas School of Law in Minnesota, where he was the founding director.

He responds to the question: "What do you see as the biggest challenges on the horizon to fulfilling our mission?"

"As Joe Thomas outlines in the accompanying article, increasing the endowment is an essential component in supporting greater reliance on digital information while balancing that use with access to traditional print resources. Responding to the cost of acquiring the information necessary to support a scholarly and prolific faculty and a vibrant student body is a great challenge. Happily, we are supported in meeting these challenges by priorities set in the University's latest capital campaign.

"Furthermore, like all great law libraries striving to be the intellectual hub of their schools, we want to create an atmosphere where patrons are comfortable and intellectually engaged in seeking and using information, thus the Law School's capital expenditure to refurbish the library. During the period from the opening of the new Eck Hall of Law until the completion of the existing building's renovation, we will be challenged to deliver our resources and to support research and study with limited physical space. I am confident, however, that we will meet all of these challenges to create one of the truly great law school libraries in existence today."