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Accreditation report gives Montana State University Law School high marks

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The latest accreditation report on the Montana State University Law School gives the school high marks on the quality of its faculty and student body and the soundness of its curriculum but notes a need for improvement in some areas, especially faculty salaries, physical plant, and staff assistance.

The report states that recent action to provide a new building will satisfy "what has been the greatest need of the school."

Lack of funds shows up throughout the report as the primary reason for inadequacies mentioned. The Law School has not been adequately financed in past years, and it is not adequately financed today, according to the report. Considering these limitations, the school has been doing "an outstandingly good job," it says.

The 27-page evaluation report was prepared by Dean William B. Lockhart of the University of Minnesota Law School, who conducted the accreditation survey in November for the Association of American Law Schools.

Citing the action of MSU President H. K. Newburn committing \$435,000, to be made available from bonds, for a new building, Dean Lockhart says, "This is not dependent upon appropriations, and Dean Robert Sullivan and President Newburn assure me that the building will move forward just as fast as planning and architectural work can be completed."

The report calls the faculty "exceptionally well balanced in educational and experience background" and says, "Within the limits of time available with heavy teaching loads, the faculty appears conscious of its obligations to engage in scholarly research as well as community service activities."

(more)

Dean Lockhart warns, however, that the school "cannot hope to maintain a stable faculty over the long run without more adequate salary support." Salaries are "grossly inadequate" either to hold the present faculty or to attract other good faculty members, according to the report.

President Newburn, in talks with Dean Lockhart, pointed out that insufficient resources to provide adequate salaries was a problem common to all University departments and was not limited to the Law School. Dean Lockhart called President Newburn's awareness of the urgent necessity to improve the salary structure at the University "a bright note."

Dean Lockhart notes that the Law School has "a highly developed method of screening applicants on moral grounds," and adds that as the school gains more experience with the Law School Admission Test, it will develop more certain means of screening for potential scholastic success.

In a section on scholarship standards, the report states, "It is quite apparent that the school provides adequate incentives to insure that the students take their studies seriously ... Judging from the paper records, the grading practices at Montana are sufficiently exacting to prevent any tendency to relax and rest on the laurels of previous achievements."

Dean Lockhart is satisfied that for a tight curriculum, Montana has an essentially sound program of instruction, but he suggests the addition of a faculty member to allow more flexibility in planning a program. "This need is recognized by Dean Sullivan and the faculty," he says, "but lack of financial support for expanding the faculty prevents a broader offering of courses now."

(more)

Calling the students "exceptionally mature and serious," the report continues, "With such a student body, a serious professional atmosphere is encouraged, and Montana has that atmosphere. A visitor quickly gets the impression that this group of 68 students are hard at work, all day and well into the night, preparing themselves to be good lawyers."

In other sections of the report, Dean Lockhart commends the "extremely attractive living and study facilities provided by the Law House; the Montana Law Review, published semi-annually by the students, and the close working relationship between the school and the Montana Bar in recent years through a program of continuing legal education and service. He cites Dean Sullivan's "excellent job in public relations with the practicing lawyers of the state."

"Giving consideration to the limited resources available, the Law School has been doing an outstandingly good job," the report concludes. "Certainly, it well deserves its membership in the Association of American Law Schools and its accreditation by the American Bar Association."

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