



Students study in the Hon. Delmas Hill Reading Room. Photo by Jeremy Wangler

A Modernized Library

New Law Library Brings Cutting-Edge Services to Students

By Annie Flachsbarth

The new Hon. Joseph C. Morris Library Suite, featuring a large reading room named in honor of the late **Hon. Delmas Hill, '29**, symbolizes an exciting new chapter in the school's history and recognizes the importance of evolving to meet the changing needs of students and faculty.

While the Washburn Law Library has always been much more than just a collection of books – often serving as a gathering point for students to study together – the new library is a vibrant amalgamation of spaces designed to foster collaboration, individual research, and multi-disciplinary learning. Despite a decrease in size from 35,000 to 10,000 square feet, the area has more than enough room to keep up with the needs of today's students and the ever-growing technological landscape.

From the moment visitors enter the library, they're welcomed by a modern circulation desk, self-checkout machines, and a common area equipped with movable furniture, offering students the flexibility to customize their learning environment and make the space more user-friendly. Nine online reservable study rooms equipped with the latest technology to screencast from laptops provide an intimate space for group work. In fact, the entire library design has been smartly planned to prioritize areas for student collaboration.

Professor Thomas Sneed, director of the Washburn Law Library, is particularly enthusiastic about the new space.

"In our old library, we had two study rooms, and they were probably our most popular spots," Sneed said. "We're excited to see these continue to be such a collaborative spot for students."

The library's collection has been strategically divided to ensure the most comprehensive materials remain in the new space. Sneed notes the smaller space usage has led to more efficient use of resources and a concentration on essential materials.

"We did weed some of our collection and then get rid of some things, primarily things that are widely available electronically," Sneed said. "So here we mainly have our monographs and Kansas research materials. The remaining materials will eventually find a home in the Carnegie building on Washburn's campus after a space has been slightly remodeled to accommodate the library's needs."

Optimizing the new space was a priority for library staff, which led to the need for a new rolling stack shelving system for the in-house collection. The innovative shelving eliminates the need for fixed aisles, allowing for ideal space utilization. With

the simple push of a button, stacks can be rolled apart, creating a single aisle. Sensors ensure the shelves aren't closed when someone is in an aisle.

"This allows us to have more shelving to use the space efficiently," Sneed said. "It's a technology that's not uncommon in libraries, but it's a new one for us."

New Spaces

The new building and space allowed for some changes that have both students and faculty excited. At the top of the list, the renowned Washburn Law Journal now boasts an office within library premises. The proximity to resources is expected to stimulate effective collaboration and enhance the quality of research for the Journal staff.

"A lot of libraries would probably be excited to have their journal in the library because they are some of our biggest users of our resources," Sneed said.

Leaping into the digital age, a state-of-the-art recording studio is a remarkable library addition. It serves multi-faceted roles, including the ability to record continuing legal education sessions and online classes. The studio, with its professional lighting, backdrops, and cameras, is also available to students for mock trials, job interview practice, and other video recording needs.

At the heart of the library is the reading room, a calm oasis designed for focused study. The artfully designed room boasts comfortable seating, built-in tables, and plug-ins, providing students a tranquil space to immerse themselves in their work.

Sneed credited the library staff for their work to make the move as seamless as possible.

"Our staff did an amazing job getting ready to move. We had to touch almost every book in the old library – it was a huge job, and I can't give them enough credit," Sneed said.



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Investment in the Future

Of course, the new law library wouldn't have been possible had it not been for the generous gifts of donors like **Kent Smith, '66**, and his wife, Karen, who gave \$500,000 to the law school's building project campaign to show their gratitude for the law school and to honor the late Hill.

Smith passed away only a few months after the opening of the new Robert J. Dole Hall. As a new attorney, he had clerked for Hill after law school and credited Hill for giving him a unique perspective on the law. Eventually, the two became close friends and colleagues and Hill even officiated their wedding. The fact that the reading room in the library was named after Hill was something Kent felt was well deserved.

In a previously published article, Smith, who passed away on Oct. 19, 2023, expressed his gratitude to Hill and to the law school:

"I understand they're going to continue having a room dedicated to Judge Hill in the new law school," Smith said. "I've been pretty generous with Washburn financially all along, but this time I decided to make a pretty special contribution, just to help the institution that's meant so much to me. Hopefully it will do the same for others, and I'm sure that it will."

The new Washburn University School of Law library is a potent symbol of modernization and innovation. With its versatile and thoughtfully planned spaces, the library is all set to enhance students' educational experience for years to come.