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Professors start new law firm

By Lainie Block
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

Beginning this fall, the litigation arm of the University law school's Western Environmental Law Clinic will move off campus to reduce costs to the school, provide more opportunities for student participation and diffuse external pressures on the clinic.

University environmental law professors Mike Axline and John Bonine have started a regional public interest law firm in Eugene to expand the clinic's work capacity by building upon its reputation of the past 10 years.

The non-profit organization, modeled after such groups as the Southern Environmental Law Center and Trustees for Alaska, will be funded by grants from private foundations and attorney fees from citizen suits.

Axline sees the firm as a terrific development for the environmental program and clinic.

"The firm will expand the number of forums for students to participate in litigation, possibly joining with the U.S. attorney's office and the district attorney's office to prosecute environmental crimes," Axline said.

Axline intends to hire three attorneys to handle more citizen suits and broaden opportunities for student involvement.

Many law students have been disappointed with the limited opportunities to participate in a hands-on clinical environmental program, as opposed to more passive classroom instruction.

Although a 1992 Student Bar Association survey found that nearly half of the student body was in part attracted to the University because of the notoriety of the Environmental Clinic, only 10 students per semester are selected by lottery to participate, with another 10 rotating into the Advanced Clinic.

The Environmental Clinic has been more costly per student than the law school's prosecution, and civil and defense clinics. These other clinical programs function off campus by working with the district attorney's office, legal aid and the federal public defender.

The move off campus will save the law school

money in salaries and administrative costs. The school will reduce Axline's salary to half-time for his supervision of clinical work without the litigation component. The law school will continue to offer a strong environmental curriculum.

With private funding, the law school will be less vulnerable to the caprice cuts from 1990's Ballot Measure 5. The Environmental Clinic suffered a near extinction in May 1992, when faculty convened for an emergency meeting to cut 20 percent of the law school budget.

"Many of the faculty have a negative view of the environmental program and clinic," said Student Bar Association President Chuck Mundorff. "They feel the spotted owl litigation has antagonized the business community and dried up funds available to the school."

Dave Evans, former co-director of Land Air Water, a student environmental organization, agrees.

"Potential sources of funding from the private business sector are more likely to step forward with the clinic de-coupled from the law school," he said.

Law school Dean Dave Frohnmayer and the law school's development coordinator, Eloise Stuhr, have brought in a record \$2.5 million in donations and grants, including a \$500,000 endowed professorship in business law from the president of Bohemia Inc., a major wood products company.

Other aspects of the environmental program stand to benefit from this funding infusion. Mundorff credits Frohnmayer for making a conscious effort to end antagonism within the school by lending administrative support to the *Journal of Environmental Law and Litigation* for the first time in nine years.

Although some question the politics of the off-campus move, Advanced Environmental Clinic participant Mike Wach is quick to recognize the advantages of an independent environmental litigation clinic.

"The clinic will have the opportunity to take on more cases and have more students involved, along with the opportunity to generate new and more sources of revenue, rather than being limited by Measure 5," he said.

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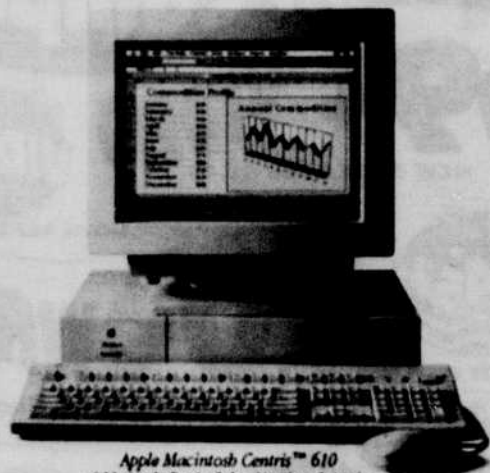
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