FORDHAM BUILDS A NEW HOME

Fordham Law School's new building houses its entire community under one roof in the heart of Manhattan

By Todd G.E. Melnick

In his September 2014 speech dedicating the just-completed Fordham Law School building, Fordham University's president, Father Joseph M. McShane, S.J., quoted Proverbs 9:1 to the assembled audience of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and visiting dignitaries: "Wisdom has built herself a home."

This was a soaring metaphor to accompany one of the great optimistic moments in the life of a university president: an ambitious, expensive, and risky building project, the first construction on the Lincoln Center campus in 30 years, had been completed to the great satisfaction of the Fordham community. Of course, no triumphal metaphor uttered on a celebratory day can capture all of the dreaming, planning, toil, compromise, politics, craft, virtue, error, and excellence that go into raising an academic building in Manhattan in the 21st century. But the result of the endeavor, a broad-shouldered, nine-story building topped by a 12-story undergraduate dormitory tower, rising in a privileged space between the theaters of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts to the north and Fordham's Robert Moses Plaza to the south, is a home for Fordham Law School large enough to accommodate both its program and its dreams. Like all good homes, it is a place of comfort but also a place from which to look out at

Photos courtesy of Fordham Law School.

the world and prepare for the inevitable departure from home. It is a home that more than satisfies the aspirations of a law school that for more than 100 years has both sheltered its students and ushered them out into the great city of New York and beyond.

Fordham Law School's New Building

Once primarily a school of opportunity for Catholics and other marginalized groups in New York, by the turn of the second millennium, Fordham Law had succeeded in developing a national and international reputation. Having assembled a large and productive faculty, a broad clinical program, and a thriving roster of centers and institutes, the school had long since outgrown its Lincoln Center home, built in 1960 as

part of Robert Moses' grand and pitiless plan to construct a cultural citadel on Manhattan's blighted West Side and not renovated since 1984. In 2001, American Bar Association (ABA) site inspectors took note of the school's cramped quarters and minimally adequate facilities and recommended immediate remediation.

Preparations for the new building, including extensive meetings across all law school units with space planning consultants, began in earnest in 2005, and a design competition was announced in 2006 attracting submissions from many of the nation's most prominent architectural firms. The winning design was submitted by Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, the firm founded by I.M. Pei and responsible for an extraordinary

number of high-profile buildings in the U.S. and abroad, including the John Hancock Tower in Boston, the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, the East Wing of Washington's National Gallery of Art, the pyramids at the Louvre, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, and San Francisco's Main Public Library. Lead architects Henry Cobb and Yvonne Szeto envisioned an intersection of three simple volumes: a nine-story lazy S-curve in checkerboard travertine and glass; a glazed light-box emerging rectilinearly through the S-curve out toward Lincoln Center; and a thin, convex, obliquely angled 12-story dormitory tower. Matching the monumentality and materials of Lincoln Center's cultural temples and framed by them, the new building would announce its place in the cultural citadel of New York while also embracing the rest of Fordham's urban campus.

The 2008 ABA inspection report restated even more urgently the same concerns about space and facilities that had been expressed in its 2001 report. By 2010, the school had successfully completed a \$100 million capital campaign in support of the new building, and both the university and the law school were firmly committed to seeing the project through to completion.

Fordham University broke ground for the new building in May of 2011. With only occasional disruption to bar studiers during that first summer, the building was completed in time for the start of the fall 2014 semester.

The new building is functionally two buildings that share an entrance on 62nd Street: McKeon Hall, the 129,000-square-foot undergraduate dormitory, and the 339,000-square-foot home for Fordham Law School. The new law school is nearly twice the size of its

predecessor. It has 15 classrooms and 14 seminar rooms, each equipped with advanced audiovisual and environmental controls, smart whiteboards, and smart lecterns. New world-class public event space, the Skadden Conference Center, is already a sought-after destination for conferences, lectures, programs, and panels. The showcase Moore Advocacy Center, which includes a gorgeous moot court room and trial simulation suite, provides students with inspiring and impeccable stages upon which to practice their craft.

The main entrance to the building on 62nd Street opens into a terrazzo-floored, limestone-clad atrium flanked by dramatic stairways leading to a cafeteria, the public event space, and Robert Moses Plaza. On classroom and faculty floors, playful spiral staircases and informal lounges contribute to the flow of people and ideas through vertical space. The ninth-floor clinic area boasts seminar rooms, simulation rooms, conference rooms, and offices for the clinical faculty. Student organizations and journal offices are clustered together adjacent to Career Planning and the IT Help Desk. For the first time since Fordham's rapid expansion, all administrative units, student groups, centers, institutes, clinics, and journals can interact as a community under a single roof.

The Maloney Law Library

New construction in Manhattan costs about three times what it costs almost anywhere else in the United States. Those constructing new academic buildings in the recent economic climate do not build what they do not need, and what they need, they minimize. So the new Maloney Library measures about 44,000 square feet (5,500 square feet larger than its predecessor) but has 15,476 fewer linear feet of shelving and

On classroom and faculty floors, spiral staircases contribute to the flow of people and ideas through verticle space.

approximately 250,000 fewer volumes than the Leo T. Kissam Law Library in the old Fordham Law School building. Those volumes, older and seldom-used materials, now reside in compact shelving in Fordham University's Quinn Library, only a short covered walk away. These volumes are freely circulated out of the Quinn Library. A dumbwaiter diminishes the cart-pushing distance between the two collections. In place of seldom-visited book stacks, the library created a spacious, wired, well-lit environment for individual and collaborative work including seating for 715 patrons (compared with 486 in the old library) comprising tables, carrels, plenty of soft seating, and twice as many group study rooms as in the old building. The library has two technologically sophisticated library classrooms, a café serving coffee and light snacks, and an After Hours Study Area that stays open 24 hours a day during the regular academic year.

The new library, officially the T.J. and Nancy Maloney Law School Library, named for Fordham Law alumnus and private equity firm CEO T.J. Maloney and his wife, encompasses the fifth and sixth floors of the new law school building. During regular business hours, patrons enter on the fifth floor and take the stairs or an internal elevator to reach the sixth floor. After 1 a.m., the building elevator bypasses the fifth floor and patrons enter the After Hours Study Area portion of the sixth floor.

In the old library, the reference and circulation desk sat prominently and unavoidably on either side of a narrow entrance to the main reading room and stacks. In designing the new space, we wanted to maintain the prominence of the service desks, especially the reference desk. The reference desk sits just inside the library's entrance, and, during regular

The fifth floor features comfortable seating near the Circulation Desk in Maloney Law Library.

business hours, the first face that any visitor sees upon entering the library is that of a reference librarian. While the new reference desk is, perhaps, longer and more bulwark-like than we had hoped, it retains the old desk's innovative "down-view" monitor configuration, situating computer screens under glass below the surface of the desk and clearing the site line between librarian and patron. Two self-checkout stations directly across from the reference desk are seldom used, perhaps due to their distance from the circulation desk. Five fully functional work stations and three catalog stations sit on counters to the right and left of the reference desk. Behind the reference desk is the shrinking but still valued ready reference collection. The circulation desk stands further from the reference desk than in the old library but still within sight of it, permitting communication between the two desks by pantomime and the occasional shout. The small reserve collection, primarily current periodicals and study aids, is next to the circulation desk.

To promote communication and collaboration among staff, all office and staff work areas in the new library are on the fifth floor. Offices for the circulation librarian and circulation supervisor are behind the circulation desk, as is a spacious, naturally lit workroom with room for up to eight workstations. The Document Delivery/Interlibrary Loan office opens into this space as well. This arrangement gives us the flexibility to use the common workspace efficiently as demand for library services shifts, for example, from circulation to document delivery and interlibrary loan. A much-diminished microform collection is housed adjacent to the circulation/document delivery work area and also has a public entrance.

Unlike the dark retrofits and afterthoughts that some technical services staffs are forced to endure, cataloging and serials staff in the Maloney Library share a large, high-ceilinged work area featuring three offices that enjoy borrowed light from nearby windows and a workroom with space for six ample workstations and a central counter. The receiving/mail room opens off of this room. The proximity of cataloging, serials, and acquisitions staff—to one another, to the receiving room, and to the nearby freight elevator—enables significant efficiencies. Technical services staff is also within easy reach of the reference staff offices and the circulation/document delivery workroom and offices.

Offices for reference librarians, as well as the library's head of systems and technology, head of electronic services,

head of instructional services, head of reference, and associate librarian for public services, line the fifth floor's south-facing wall adjacent to the fifth-floor stack area. These offices situate reference and teaching librarians close to print materials primarily used in legal research instruction, close to the library classrooms, and close to the administration suite, and they are easily accessible to students and to the rest of the library staff.

The Barkett Family Reading Room.

Across the hall from the reference librarian offices is the Weinstein Library Administration Suite with offices for the library director, the director's executive assistant, and the deputy director, as well as a small file/supply room, a glass-walled reception area with a work station for the executive secretary, and a library conference room. If any architectural component of the new library best conveys its professionalism, seriousness of purpose, and prestige within the law school community, it is this suite. The conference room, with its floor-to-ceiling

windows overlooking the plaza at Lincoln Center, might be the most inviting meeting space in the new law school building.

Next to the administration suite is a workroom where Bloomberg Law, LexisNexis, and Westlaw vendor representatives and their student helpers can prepare presentations, store materials, and meet students. Offering the vendors a foothold in the library supports the notion that they are neither competitors nor purely salespeople but can be partners in furthering the mission of the library and the law school.

Near the stacks holding primary legal materials and the reference librarian offices are two library classrooms/training rooms, each with 24 student workstations and fully equipped with the same classroom technology installed in classrooms and seminar rooms throughout the law school. The Maloney Library staff has a strong teaching mission and offers all of its advanced legal research courses in these rooms. The rooms are also used for vendor presentations and interactive hands-on training of library and law school employees.

The architectural focal point of the library's fifth floor is the double-height Barkett Family Reading Room, a grand space with tall windows looking out onto Lincoln Center. The architects were quite insistent, even where floor space is scarce and acoustics challenging, that the reading room extend up into and through the upper floor of the library. What they created is a chapel of focus where students seem to enjoy partaking in the age-old ritual of exalted collective travail.

In the old library, books were arranged on low-ceilinged stack levels with narrow aisles grandfathered into ADA compliance. In the new building,

The library conference room overlooks the plaza at Lincoln Center.

book stacks stand widely apart and are brightly lit and sensibly arranged. Federal and New York primary materials and basic secondary sources are shelved conveniently near the reference desk, librarian offices, and the library classrooms on the fifth floor. The majority of the print collection, primarily monographs and treatises, is on the sixth floor, which also features a large area of soft seating, a computer lab, the collaborative study rooms, and the Cronin Café. Study carrels are distributed throughout the library, but the largest concentration of them is on the sixth floor in a lightly traversed area between the stacks and generous north-facing windows.

Soft lounge chairs comprise 18 percent (134 chairs) of the seating in the Maloney Library. Arranged in groups of two or four surrounding a low table to encourage quiet conversation and collaboration, most of the soft seating is near the service desks and the Cronin Café, where silence is not expected. Students seem particularly to prize soft chairs placed near windows.

Back in the planning stages of the new library, students asked that it be open for 24 hours. Concerned about the security risks that would accompany keeping the entire space open overnight, a system of three sliding doors was designed which allows security staff to close off the sixth-floor stack area and prevent access to the entire fifth floor. This creates a secure After Hours Study Area on the remainder of the sixth floor with access to carrels, comfortable seating, printing and photocopying, the computer lab, and, of course, bathrooms and emergency exits. After 1 a.m., the fifth-floor entrance to the library is closed, the sixth-floor elevator bypass is removed, and students can enter the After Hours Study Area by taking one of the core building elevators to the sixth floor. A guard checks IDs in the sixth-floor elevator lobby.

Unlike many other library cafés shoehorned into a lobby or basement, the Cronin Café is integrated into the library's space and program. Rather than writing off the generation of students who, fueled by caffeine, find comfort and focus amid a café's sounds and smells, the Maloney Library calls them back to the library and makes room for them. The popularity of the café and its proximity to stacks and carrels has required some improvised noise suppression. One of the sliding doors that closes off the After Hours Study Area from the rest of the library after 1 a.m. has been pressed into service as a sound damper during hours when the café is in operation.

Twenty collaborative study rooms, ranging in capacity from four to 16

The new Fordham Law School building, situated on Manhattan's West Side.

occupants, are arrayed around the sixth floor, primarily near the stacks. These popular rooms are bookable online for periods of two hours by Fordham law students, though unbooked rooms are open to any library visitor.

Other library amenities include two printing alcoves as well as a book scanner and a multifunction photocopier on each floor. Students swipe IDs to tap into their printing allowance; visitors can purchase a copy card. A surprisingly popular 15-seat computer lab serves visitors, alumni, and students who cannot or prefer not to use their own laptops. Reliable wifi is available throughout the library. Restrooms, including several unisex facilities, are conveniently located on both floors.

What is most profound about the new Maloney Library is the windows that bring the city into the library and deeply into the consciousness of those working there. One of the library classrooms shallowly cantilevers over the sidewalk below, its floor-to-ceiling windows framing Lincoln Center and the skyscrapers beyond, encouraging both student and teacher to look past themselves and reminding them that they play a part in the life of the city. Staff office and work areas, almost all of which enjoy natural or at least borrowed light, motivate and energize. Sitting in this library, one imbibes the energy of the city, its complexity, its diversity, its excellence, and its huge force.

Challenges

Adapting to life in the new building was not without challenges.

Elevator capacity in the building can be less than sufficient during times of heavy use. The technology budget was trimmed just before fall semester teaching was to begin, and the library had to pick up the unexpected bill for outfitting one of the library

classrooms. Automatic shades in the library classrooms were not installed on day one, and bright sun faded our early fall PowerPoints. Light-harvesting overheads sometimes turn off without warning. The library has eight emergency exits that were neither locked nor alarmed until well into the semester and then only after a soul-crushing round of emails, phone calls, and meetings. Now the doors are alarmed, but the alarms scream maddeningly whenever impatient students choose to breach the emergency exits rather than wait for an elevator. The new cappuccino and smoothie machines are surprisingly loud, and their owner, an institutional hospitality conglomerate, has motivations not entirely in sync with those of the academic law library.

Most of these challenges, however, resolved themselves within the building's first semester of operation.

Onward and Outward

At Fordham Law School, after years of anticipation and preparation, Wisdom built herself a lovely, spacious, prestigious new home. The entire community is now under one roof, feeling comfortable for the first time in many years and gazing outward in ways it was never able to before. As for our post-recession, 21st century law library? The New Reality built herself a hot rod: we are heavy on technology, light but smart on books, flexible, connected, light-filled, caffeine-fueled, and open all night. We are ready for whatever comes next. ■

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