

Arizona law school striving for financial self-reliance

Karen Sloan, *The National Law Journal*
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Many public law schools are struggling with declining state support, but the Arizona State University Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law is taking a dramatic step in response to the financial uncertainty.

The Tempe, Ariz., law school hopes to wean itself off public funding during the next five years, Dean Paul Schiff Berman said Tuesday. If all goes according to plan, ASU will be one of just a handful of public law schools that receive little or no state support for their operating budget. That group includes the University of Virginia School of Law, the University of Michigan Law School and the University of California, Berkeley School of Law. The plan has the approval of the university president and provost, Berman said.

"This is my plan, but it's in response to the clear writing on the wall, which is that this state — and most other states — are less committed to funding public education than they once were," Berman said.

Being buffered by from the ebbs and flows of state funding will help the law school to make long-term plans, he said.

ASU law's operating budget includes about \$6.5 million in state funding, down by about \$2 million compared to two years ago. Student tuition accounts for the largest portion of the school's budget. Officials hope that increasing the number of students at the law school and raising tuition will fill the gap left by reduced public support. Even with an increase, Berman said, the school's tuition will remain low compared to most other law schools ranked in the top 40. Tuition for in-state students is currently about \$22,000 per year, and will rise by between \$1,000 and \$1,5000 a year, he said. Current out-of-state tuition is about \$35,000.

The law school's entering class now comprises about 195 students; the plan calls for increasing that number that to about 225 within five years. The number of students will also grow outside of the J.D. program; the school recently expanded its LL.M. program for foreign students and its one-year master of legal studies program for non-lawyers.

"We're expanding the scope of legal education," Berman said. "This is not being driven by revenue concerns, but it will have revenue implications."

Berman is not concerned that increasing the J.D. class size will make it harder for graduates to secure employment; the increase will be modest, he said, and there are only three law schools in the state.

Cutting out state funding isn't the only big change on the horizon. ASU is moving forward with plans to move the law school from Tempe, Ariz., to downtown Phoenix. The university has purchased land for a multi-building expansion, but the law school has not yet started raising money for its new facility. Berman hopes to have the necessary financial commitments in hand by the end of this academic year.

"The move will benefit students because we are the major law school in the fifth-largest city in the country," Berman said. "We have about 80 students each semester who do externships, and their access to law firms, courts and the seat of government would be greatly improved."

The new building would also serve as a hub of justice in the city, where nonprofit legal organizations would be housed alongside law school facilities and state bar association functions, Berman said.

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