

Growth has UR eyeing expansion of Warner School

By NATE DOUGHERTY

After a decade of steady growth, the University of Rochester's Warner School of Education needs a larger space to accommodate its programs and increasing faculty and students.

Since 2000 nearly all measures of size for the Warner School have increased, and to meet the anticipated 20 percent increase in faculty still to come, UR officials are planning a \$25 million to \$30 million facility for the school.

The building of roughly 60,000 square feet would be one of the few new projects on the university's River Campus in the last decade.

"Our trajectory has grown significantly because we doubled most of our operations, and that experience has given us the interesting problem of now not having enough space," said Raffaella Borasi, Warner School dean.

The number of graduates from the Warner School increased from 55 in 2000 to 140 in 2010. Credit hours, which school officials use to measure the course loads of the mostly part-time students, have increased to 11,443 from 4,428 in 2000.

A new facility would allow the Warner School to increase its faculty to roughly 40 individuals, up from 34 now. Ralph Kuncl, UR provost and executive vice president, said there is no definite time frame for the project, but the hope is to break ground within a couple of years.

For now, the track of the project will be determined largely by the amount of money the school can raise, he said.

"This is not a great era in which to seek public funding, but it is an era we can expect funding to come through philanthropy," Kuncl said. "We will be able to finance this through philanthropy and investing the university's own equity, the resources built up through the years through the Warner School itself.

"But the most important area to climb over is a major gift, and we hope someone in the city or region steps forward with a major gift to put their name on this project."

Kuncl said the school's growth has been the result of conscious planning to meet student demand in the region and also to increase the school's national visibility and local reach in

partnerships with school districts. Because of the school's output of graduates—especially the large number of doctoral students—the effect on regional school districts has been great, Kuncl said.

"The growth we've experienced is going to have a high and amplified effect on the region because these are graduates who will become leaders in their school districts and people who make policy," he said.

In the past few years, close to 10 graduates of the Warner School have become superintendents, Borasi noted. The school itself has come a long way since the 1980s, when a financial crisis left its viability in question, she noted.

"We're not just growing for the sake of growing," Borasi said. "My vision as dean was that it's important for us to get to critical mass to allow us to be competitive on national levels to do research and have a doctoral program, and you need a certain amount of quality faculty to do that."

The school's reach into the community depends largely on the level of outside funding it can bring in, Borasi noted. On that front the Warner School has nearly tripled its performance, increasing from \$470,000 in external grant funding in 2000 to \$1.4 million in 2010.

The school's advantage lies in its ability to conduct interdisciplinary work with the other departments at UR, Kuncl said.

"To be able to teach the next generation of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) teachers, we need our graduate school of education to partner with those same departments here," he said. "Warner has built partnerships with those schools, and that's why we can be competitive with larger schools for those grants.

"Our experts are matched up with the very best physicists in the country, the best institute of optics and one of the leading biomedical engineering programs."

Within the school there is a strong culture allowing faculty to be successful in grants, Kuncl noted. Borasi created a mini-grant program using the school's resources, which provides funding to professors for seed projects that can then be used to apply for federal grants.

A major focus for the Warner School has been on collaborations with local school districts to deepen understanding of mathematics among teachers. In the last 20 years the school has received \$6 million in grants to focus on projects in this area, including a two-year professional development program to support more than 40 mathematics coaches who work with teachers on improving instruction.

Another project, the ScienceStart! curriculum, uses science as a vehicle to develop language, literacy and school readiness among preschoolers. Students in this program have shown significant gains in language skills, Borasi said.

These professional development efforts have reached more than 2,000 teachers in the past decade, Borasi said. It is important for the Warner School that this work is not being done in isolation but through a range of partnerships with community and non-profit organizations, she added.

"We think of the Warner School as a resource in the community for those organizations with an interest and commitment to work to support school children, especially in the Rochester City School District," Borasi said. "We have the experience but not always the funding, but we can help other people and organizations do more with what they have."

A new building would give the Warner School a space that can become a community resource of sorts, she said.

"Our goal is to have a place that is a catalyst for the community to come for professional development or events, bringing together the many people in the Rochester region who care about education," Borasi said.

An improving Warner School will continue to have ripple effects through the education community, Kuncl said, helping to improve student outcomes and teacher competence even if these measures are difficult to quantify directly.

"Everyone knows that improving education is a difficult task, and you have to be constantly investing in it and improving in it, but there is no substitute for having the top teachers," Kuncl said. "The better the teachers we can create, the better off society will be, and I think the Warner School is key to that goal."

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