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Liberty University

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## **An ever-expanding vision: renovation expands, upgrades School of Religion**

February 29, 2008 | Tara Maxwell

Liberty University co-founder Dr. Elmer Towns sees himself teaching 900 students in a classroom, while simultaneously teaching 9,000 students from all over the world using the Internet. His vision will be nearer to reality this fall when construction is completed on the Towns/Alumni Ministry Training Center.

The center, an expansion of the existing B.R. Lakin School of Religion on Liberty's main campus, will include a 900-seat "smart" lecture hall and interactive classroom with cutting-edge computer technology. A renovation of the school's exterior includes an addition of columns and steps to create a Jeffersonian-style façade similar to the Arthur S. DeMoss Learning Center.

Liberty University officials, including the late Dr. Jerry Falwell, broke ground on the site behind the School of Religion, next to U.S. 460, on April 25.

The Liberty University Office of Alumni Affairs is spearheading a three-year, \$2 million campaign, started in September 2006, to cover the cost of the project. At the end of 2007, \$713,367 in cash and pledges had been given by 433 donors. Project donors include alumni, churches and various organizations.

"We've had some substantial gifts from churches because the whole basis of building this smart classroom is to accelerate the vision of Dr. Falwell and Dr. Towns to train 10,000 new pastors and missionaries in the next 10 to 15 years. You can train more in a larger classroom setting and through the Internet they don't actually have to be here," Andy Barrick, director of alumni affairs, said.

Liberty's spring 2007 fall resident enrollment stood at more than 10,500 students and the Distance Learning Program has an increased enrollment this year of 19,013 compared with 11,501 last spring.

Religion training, pastors and missionaries keep religion the most popular major at Liberty.

“With enrollment skyrocketing, this is a much-needed facility for classroom space. It allows us to have bigger classes, and that’s why we’ve got to complete it by the fall,” Barrick said.

The project also includes an additional classroom called the Hall of Ministry. It will feature murals of founder Dr. Falwell and Thomas Road Baptist Church.

Towns, dean of the School of Religion, said the center must be completed by fall because the school has already planned classes for the new facility.

“Ever since we started teaching large classes in [Rooms] 1113 and 1114, each side will hold right at 400 students, and I’ve always had right up the edge of 400 students,” he said.

Dr. Towns, who says he “has been here from the beginning and taught a little bit of everything,” began teaching in 1971, when the first group for the school consisted of 14 students. Over the years he has taught more than 5,500 students in classes ranging from Philosophy to Western Civilization. He continues to teach hundreds of students each year as a professor of religion.

He says what makes LU different from other higher learning institutions is its founding principle to establish a Christian college that acts as an extension of the church.

“We’ve called the School of Religion the rudder of the university so that the word of God will keep everyone straight, but [the Rev.] Jonathan Falwell has recently changed it from ‘the rudder.’ He calls it ‘the lifeblood’ of the university,” Towns said. “The word of God, theology, Christian life, evangelism — that’s the lifeblood; that’s why Liberty was started.”

To help in the construction of the Towns/Alumni Ministry Training Center, call (800) 628-7973, e-mail [alumni@liberty.edu](mailto:alumni@liberty.edu) or visit <http://www.liberty.edu/development/alumni/> and click on Support LU.