

Simpkins in dire need of renovation

By: Eddie Rybarski

Posted: 3/21/08

Simpkins Hall being haunted has been a rumor floating around for years. After four years of this journalism major's inspection, I would contest its problem lies not in the paranormal, but rather in the subnormal condition of the facilities.

According to the department of English and journalism Web site, the building was a result of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration as part of the New Deal. Constructed between 1937 and 1938, it served as a training school for college students studying to become teachers. For 30 years, classes from kindergarten through 8th grade were taught on the lower levels of the building, and the high school library occupied the 4th floor.

From the time of Works Progress Administration to the age of word processing, the building has seen many students come and go. In that time, its role in education has changed, and Western needs to strike a new deal of its own to reflect that.

In 1968, the school was adapted for use by the department of English and journalism. The high school library eventually turned into the Writing Center, while the auditorium, gymnasium and grade school library were modified for use by the theatre department. Act II, Scene I?

Conflict: Abandoned amenities remain to clutter classrooms. Chalkboards have become something to balk at as teaching technologies have advanced beyond the capabilities of compressed sticks of white dust. There is growing disdain for the old wooden speakers (having grown distained themselves) and the empty oak cabinets in each room. Hidden cloakrooms with coat hooks still eerily reveal children's names scrawled on masking tape.

The shrill screech that disrupts class has not to do with a banshee wailing; it's just a professor's cart of shared department resources, tweaked in its wheeling. Echoes fill hallways lined with lonely old lockers. They lead to lavatories where even the most courageous souls won't become squatters. The fear is not about hearing "boo!" but, while subjected to child-size stalls, being "peek-a-booed."

This antediluvian atmosphere is no longer conducive to learning. The majority of students are stuck with old-school, one-piece desks that provide a little more than a foot of writing surface. Not only are the desks randomly plastic, wooden, ceramic or broken, but many of the classrooms have them strewn about in a senseless jumble of disorganized furniture. Going to class feels like going to an antique shop where teachers struggle to sell you on their lecture. When surrounded by neglect, it is difficult to respond with attention.

Very few classrooms have received proper consideration. During Spring Semester 2005, Room 027 was renovated with the electronics and furnishings found in every classroom in Stipes. Additionally, Room 309 has limited electronic capability and Room 214 has full electronic capability.

I have class in Room 214, however, and for some reason, we still roll in primitive television sets to

watch VHS tapes. (Jinkies! A phantom projector?).

I understand the university has needs that may appear more pressing, but the aura in Simpkins still emanates the Great Depression. The lion heads on top of the building that have sharp teeth and long tongues sticking out are no indication of the gumption within.

The English and journalism department needs to roar, not howl, about its needs before the spirit of its students turns ghostly.