

UW Madison: Transformative \$20 million lead gift to help realize vision of new Letters & Science Academic Building

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A building that will play an integral role in educating generations of future University of Wisconsin–Madison undergraduates will now become reality, thanks to a generous gift from a family with a long history of UW–Madison support.

Irving and Dorothy Levy Hall is made possible with a lead \$20 million gift commitment from their sons Jeff Levy '72 and Marv Levy '68, JD '71.

The new College of Letters & Science academic building will create a unified home for the Department of History and nine other L&S academic departments, programs and centers that currently are spread across eight facilities on campus. It will provide 1,800 seats in 19 state-of-the-art classrooms, replacing the aging Humanities Building's classrooms, in part.

“We are proud to help make this building a reality. We hope it will be a central educational location for the undergraduate experience at UW–Madison,” says Marv Levy. “Our hope is that by honoring our family legacy of charitable giving with this gift, we can offer to future generations some of the opportunity that the UW has provided us.”

The gift and plans were announced at an event at Bascom Hall today. Construction will begin in 2023 and is expected to be completed in 2025.

The Levy brothers' commitment was contingent upon the Wisconsin State

Legislature and Governor including the project in the 2021-23 state budget with \$60 million in state support, which they did earlier this year. That will be complemented by \$35 million in gifts, which includes \$20 million from the Levys and additional \$15 million to be raised from friends and alumni.

The Levy brothers, who own and operate Phillips Distributing Corporation in Madison, said their parents, Irving and Dorothy Levy, inspired their commitment to philanthropy and were steadfast in their support of the Wisconsin Idea.

“We offer this gift in honor of our parents, who established our family foundation in 1958,” says Jeff Levy. “We also recognize and remember our late brother Phillip ‘64, who joined us in being a proud UW–Madison graduate.”

The Board of Regents last week approved the request to name the building “Irving and Dorothy Levy Hall.”

Irving Levy attended the University of Minnesota and helped manage the family business, Phillips Distributing, in the La Crosse, Wisconsin, area. As the company grew, Irving and his wife Dorothy moved to Madison to operate the business, establish a specialty store and ultimately guide the family’s foundation. Irving and Dorothy were generous donors to UW–Madison, supporting UW Hospitals and Clinics (UWHC), the School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) and UW–Madison Athletics. The couple had four sons — three of whom graduated from UW–Madison. Marv Levy, Jeff Levy and their recently deceased brother, Phil Levy, have all generously supported UW–Madison over many years, including Athletics, the Law School, UWHC, the School of Human Ecology and SMPH.

“We are grateful for the generosity of two generations of the Levy family. This latest gift is yet another example of how their philanthropy has helped transform the UW–Madison campus,” says Chancellor Rebecca Blank. “This new building is a reinvestment in liberal arts classes that are the core of a UW–Madison education and the future of Wisconsin’s workforce.”

In addition to being a significant upgrade for departments within L&S, a key aspect of the new building will be to provide a space where students can gather and interact informally with each other and their instructors to maximize collaboration. Nearly two-thirds of all undergraduate credit hours are taught by L&S faculty, meaning this collaborative space will drastically enhance the foundation of the UW–Madison educational experience for all students.

“We envision this vital new facility as a highly collaborative and state-of-the-art learning environment for all,” says Eric Wilcots, dean of the College of Letters & Science. “We are immensely grateful to the Levy family for their support of this vision. Our students deserve classroom space that enhances interactive learning and engagement through cutting-edge technology. They also deserve a building that inspires, rather than intimidates. The Levy family’s gift will reverberate through future generations, touching many lives.”

The five-story building will include 26,000 square feet of classrooms, along with offices and support areas for each department. Classrooms will range in size from a large auditorium-style lecture hall to small seminar rooms.

It will be located at the southwest corner of Park Street and West Johnson Street, and involve the demolition of two residence halls: Susan B. Davis Hall and Zoe Bayliss Co-op. Susan B. Davis Hall has about 40 residents, and Zoe Bayliss is a co-op managed separately but owned by UW-Madison Housing.

“The removal of Davis Residence Hall and the Zoe Bayliss Co-Op will represent a small loss of beds for student housing, but this was expected,” University Housing says in a statement. “We are looking at long-term plans for growth in University Housing to absorb this loss and address the increased demand for on-campus living.”

Blank says that the last time UW-Madison built a classroom/office building for the College of Letters & Science was nearly 50 years ago, when there were 13,000 fewer undergraduates on this campus than there are today.

“Our students, our instructors, and our outstanding departments in L&S deserve a facility that is worthy of a top-ranked university – a building that not only provides modern classrooms that engage students and invite collaboration, but that also says something about how we value these core courses in humanities, social sciences, and the natural and physical sciences,” Blank says.