With U.S. Economy in Dumps, UCI Looks Overseas for Funds

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IRVINE - With the economy in the tank and the University of California cutting its budget by millions, leaders of the university's new law school have had to re-adjust their approach to fundraising.

One approach that is paying off is to seek money from outside the country.

Just last month, UCI School of Law announced it is opening a Korea Law Center to "promote practical solutions to problems arising at the intersection of U.S. and Korean law," according to a press release.

By early next year, the school should be running programs to teach Korean lawyers about U.S. law on intellectual property and dispute resolution, according to Dean Erwin Chemerinsky. Eventually, UCI law students and Korean law students may swap places for a semester, he said.

The center will be the first part of UCI's International Commerce & Law Institute, a joint project of the law and business schools. Chemerinsky said other projects in the works are connections with universities and businesses in Spain and China.

"We are working on [obtaining] major gifts" for the Spanish and Chinese operations, Chemerinsky said. He could not yet disclose the amounts or sources, he said. The school also is not yet able to identify who has given how much for the Korean law center, spokesman Rex Bossert said.

While the UCI law school will be offering a joint MBA-JD program with the business school and has long planned on a major emphasis on international law, the decline in the economy at home has made foreign money more attractive.

In May, the school received a $2 million gift to fund an environmental law clinic from "an anonymous foundation of global reach," according to a news release.

Separately, the law school is continuing to pursue the last leg of funding for the full scholarships it wants to give all the students in its inaugural class. Development dean Charles Cannon said UCI has brought in enough now to cover the students' tuition this year and next and is working on their third year.

The school also is hoping for a major gift to give scholarships to next year's entering class. "We are working on a very creative solution to provide significant funding for the second class," Cannon said last week. In particular, the school is "seeking one or two individual donors with vision."

In October, at the start of recruiting for next year's class, Cannon said the school hopes to announce that it has lined up scholarships covering "a significant portion" of tuition for that class.