

## A future written in the past

*University of Idaho officials in the 1900s envisioned medical school facilities on campus; new WWAMI building will be built near that planned site*

MOSCOW — University of Idaho officials discovered they were fulfilling a nearly 110-year-old plan as they set out to expand the school’s medical education program recently.

Site planning from the early 1900s called for a hospital-medical school district near the site of two of the university’s newest additions: the WWAMI Medical Education Building and dedicated space inside Gritman Medical Center that will house the school’s anatomy lab.

The Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho regional medical education program is based at the University of Washington, in Seattle. Students spend part of their time at their home campus and the rest at UW.

Recent growth of the WWAMI program at UI and the school’s subsequent partnership with Gritman essentially made the early planners’ proposed medical complex a reality — albeit a century later, said University of Idaho President Chuck Staben.

“Took us a while,” he said as he stood on the third floor of Gritman’s new building, looking out toward the new WWAMI building — which previously was home to the university’s business incubator.

The UI will utilize about half the third floor for classrooms, conference spaces and an anatomy lab through a 30-year, \$250,000 annual lease with Gritman, approved by the Idaho State Board of Education this spring.

Washington State University’s departure from the WWAMI program as it opens its own medical school in Spokane this fall means UI eventually will lose some of the resources the schools had shared. Students at UI currently study anatomy at WSU, but that agreement will end in 2020.

“So we felt we needed to have sort of our own (space),” Staben said. “This was a unique opportunity to do that in a new facility.”

Because the hospital campus is “landlocked” within its current space near downtown Moscow, Gritman CEO Kara Besst said the latest building was intentionally “overbuilt” to create additional room for future needs.

“When we were approached by the university, it was a natural that we would look at this space,” Besst said.

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11623 Lake Shore  
Nampa, ID 83686  
(208) 880-9814

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Whereas the program once included 20 seats per year, with students spending one year in Moscow, UI now gets 40 seats per year, and the students stay on the Palouse for 18 months to two years. That means UI is home to as many as 80 WWAMI students at a time.

“Five years ago, we had 20 students on campus,” Staben said. “So our facilities needs increased quite dramatically.”

Meeting that need by partnering with the hospital made sense for both entities, Besst said, as the WWAMI program boosts Gritman’s ability to attract physicians to the Palouse.

“It’s a lot easier when they’ve been here for two years in our community to recruit them back,” she said.

The WWAMI program has historically been the only in-state option for Idaho students attending medical school. A private, for-profit medical school, the Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine, is slated to open next year in Meridian, but Staben said it’s unclear how many Idaho students the school will serve.

Rather, he is focused on continuing to nurture the relationship with the University of Washington that brings medical students to the UI.

“We’re associated with the No. 1 (medical) school in the nation,” he said of the partnership with UW.

Another recent change at UI, the addition of a medical science undergraduate program, is expected to help recruit students who are inclined toward careers in medicine.

The first medical science students will begin in the fall, some of whom may go on to medical school, but others of whom likely will explore other medical professions, such as physical therapy.

About 50 percent of pre-med students earn biology degrees, Staben said. This new degree offers another solid pre-med option while also serving those headed for other areas of medicine, he said.

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