

# The Money Pit

## Richards Hall suffers from years of neglect, lack of funds, officials say

By Mark Harms  
Staff Reporter

In Richards Hall, the roof leaks, ventilation is poor and the paint is old and chipped.

No storm windows keep out the cold, and there is no central air-conditioning.

Built in 1909, Richards Hall is one of the oldest buildings on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. It also is one of the worst in terms of maintenance, Douglas Ross, professor of art, said.

Richard McDermott, director of UNL's Facilities and Management Department, agreed.

"It's by far the worst building on City Campus," he said.

But John Benson, director of Institutional Research and Planning, said that since the joint Academic and Central Planning Committees placed Richards eighth on their list of priorities for capital improvement last month, it probably will not be renovated any time soon.

"To be realistic, if reports from the (Nebraska) Legislature are true, we're going to be in a tight situation financially," he said.

Chances are slim that Richards will get an overhaul within the next two years, Benson said.

"A lot of projects are competing for a limited amount of funding," he said.

Projects ranked above Richards on the joint committee's priority list include: asbestos removal in Burnett Hall, hazardous waste removal and storage on East Campus and an addition to Love Library.

Neither Benson nor McDermott would estimate the cost of renovating Richards, but a 1990 estimate put it at more than \$9 million.

McDermott said Richards had been on the priority list at least three years and "probably a lot longer."

Despite his doubt that it would be renovated soon, Benson said Richards stood a pretty good chance of getting maintenance money for fixing leaks in the roof and installing storm windows.



A view into the wax room through a hole in a wall.

Among its other problems, Ross said, Richards is inaccessible for people who use wheelchairs.

If a disabled student wants to take an art course, he said, the department must move the class to another building. Disabled students also have no access to art equipment in Richards that cannot be moved, he said.

Joseph Ruffo, chairperson of the

Department of Art and Art History, called the situation very serious.

"If you can't get into the building, that's pretty serious," he said.

"I'd like to see immediate attention given to handicapped accessibility and ventilation and air conditioning in some rooms," Ross, who has taught classes in

Richards since 1974, remains skeptical of the administration's efforts to fix up the building.

"They do this every few years, and nothing ever happens," he said.

"I bet nothing gets done at Richards Hall before I retire."

Staff reporter Rainbow Rowell contributed to this story.



When a person enters the painting studio a wave of heat and paint fumes hits them in the face. Deb Oden, a junior art major, says the ventilation is very poor especially in the area where paintings are dried. The Art League is pushing to make conditions safer and more comfortable.



The outside of Richards Hall hides an interior that is falling apart, students say.



Right: The bowels of the basement are dark, dirty space. Below: Tom Towater, a senior art major, works in the wax room before casting a bronze sculpture. The wax room is probably the worst room in Richards Hall, he said.



“It's by far the worst building on City Campus.”

Richard McDermott,  
director of UNL's facilities and Management Department

Photos by Julia Mikolajcik



There is only one women's restroom in Richards Hall; it has only one toilet. Students say it is a tiny room that is usually about 91 degrees because the heater is always on.



The most noticeable flaw in Richards Hall is the constant high temperature, students say. The heaters are always on, winter or summer. Students say the building is always hot even in the winter.