Images of increased global connections; ample funding; additional space; thriving interdisciplinary endeavors; technological advances; more clinics; faculty happily balancing scholarship and teaching; and students who will become accomplished, ethical, and creative professionals all sprang to mind during a School of Law retreat on April 30, 2004. As part of the ongoing strategic planning process, faculty members, administrators, and National Council members gathered at Washington University’s Charles F. Knight Executive Education Center to brainstorm about future directions for the School.

Association of American Law Schools-trained facilitators Carrie Menkel-Meadow, a law professor at Georgetown University, and Todd Rakoff, a law professor at Harvard University, led the retreat. They challenged participants to stretch their imaginations in formulating visions for the School for the next five years. Menkel-Meadow and Rakoff divided the group into smaller teams, who were asked to express themselves through sketches, list their ideas and specific goals on large flip charts, and report back to the entire group.

“The overall atmosphere of the retreat was characterized by a strong sense of energy, enthusiasm, and commitment toward moving the School forward,” says Joel Seligman, dean and the Ethan A.H. Shepley University Professor. “The School has clearly evolved beyond wanting to amplify existing programs to pushing ourselves to be better and different. We have rising expectations, and the challenge will be to find the right balance. As we move forward with our next Strategic Plan, we will build on this sense of momentum.”

Thoughts voiced at the retreat included ways to make Washington University a “first-choice” law school, the need for more physical space, and ways to foster greater connections with alumni. The group also discussed how to encourage the intellectual environment at the School; how to augment its already strong clinical, international, and interdisciplinary programs; and how best to counsel and assist students with career placement and planning.

After initial idea gathering, Menkel-Meadow and Rakoff categorized the groups’ suggestions into eight areas of focus:

- Clinics
- Life of the Mind (intellectual and scholastic culture)
- Curriculum Enhancement
- Interdisciplinary Enhancement
- Long-term Life in the Law (career services and continuing legal education)
- International Enhancement
- Education Outside the Legal Box
- Strengthening Alumni Connections

After further small group sessions and overall discussion, retreat participants considered specific proposals, including removing institutional barriers to interdisciplinary collaborations, hosting international scholars to teach short courses, creating an in-house Center for Clinical Studies, launching a laboratory program on urban revitalization, and offering certificate programs in certain areas.

The next step in the planning process will be to build consensus on various proposals and then draft the actual document, which will encompass input from various constituencies. After several rounds of review, the plan will be presented to the law faculty and National Council for approval later this fall.