School of Law Climbs in National Rankings

by Ann Nicholson

For the first time, U.S. News & World Report ranks Washington University School of Law in the nation's top 20. To be precise, the School holds a three-way tie with George Washington and Notre Dame law schools for 20th place. Starting from an overall ranking of 32nd five years ago to its current ranking, the School has experienced one of the most significant improvements in relative position among the 178 law schools that participate in these rankings.

In rankings released April 2, 2004, the School also received its highest historical rankings, 21st, in reputation among academics and among lawyers and judges.

Additionally, the School of Law progressed in several specialty areas, attaining its highest rankings ever in three programs: the clinical program, which now ranks 4th in the nation; international law, 15th; and intellectual property, 22nd.

While I do not want to exaggerate the significance of a magazine's rankings, it is gratifying to see several aspects of the School recognized,” says Joel Seligman, dean and the Ethan A.H. Shepley University Professor.

The rise in the rankings, he says, is indicative of overall progress as the School completes its current five-year Strategic Plan (1999–2004) and prepares the next Strategic Plan: “We have been working hard for many years to make an outstanding law school even more outstanding. Each of the aspirations for our students in our current Strategic Plan has been achieved. We have also made major strides in hiring outstanding faculty, increasing our full-time faculty from 32 to 40.”

Other noteworthy achievements over the past five years include:

• doubling the number of professionals in the Career Services Office;
• creating smaller class sections for all first-year students;
• instituting the clinical guarantee, under which every second- or third-year student is entitled to participate in one of the School's clinics;
• adopting a three-year commitment to scholarship aid;
• increasing Admissions Office staff and focusing on using the Web as a recruitment tool;
• revamping the Legal Research and Writing Program; and
• launching the Student Advising and Counseling Program.

The School also initiated the Mel Brown Family Loan Repayment Assistance Program and the David M. Becker Public Service Fund, as well as revamped the Trial and Advocacy and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Programs.

Additionally, the School continued to see excellent results in 2003–04 as a consequence of its concerted efforts to become more student-centered. Applications for the JD program reached a record 3,476 in 2003–04, which compares to 1,850 in 2000. Total LLM applications also have increased each year, up from 173 in 2000 to 263 in 2003–04.

Concurrently, the School has achieved significant accomplishments in its specialty areas: launching the Whitney R. Harris Institute for Global Legal Studies; adding several new areas, including a new Appellate Clinic (see related article on page 8); increasing its commitment to interdisciplinary collaborations through such initiatives as the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies and the Workshop on Empirical Research in the Law; and expanding its intellectual property offerings through a new LLM specialization as well as a new center and a clinic being established this academic year (see related article on pages 6–7).