I’ve been here six years, and I’m still having fun,” says Tomea Mayer about working in the Career Services Office (CSO). This year she became associate dean for career services and CSO’s director, succeeding Mark Smith, who has been named associate dean for student affairs.

The transition has been smooth in large part because of Mayer’s long-standing connections to Washington University. “It gets comical when I take incoming students on tours,” says Mayer, JD ’91, a St. Louis native. She can point out where she lived as a law student and the condo she purchased right after graduation, as well as share memories about her years as a student here. “I’ve been a student, an alum, on the faculty, and now an administrator. I can connect with what the students are experiencing.”

After receiving her law degree, Mayer was an associate in the St. Louis firm of Thompson & Mitchell, now Thompson Coburn LLP. She left in 1995 to teach Legal Writing at the law school for two years. Back at Thompson, she gave up practice to supervise the hiring of entry-level and experienced attorneys for the 300-attorney firm. Before long, Washington University lured her back; in 1998 she returned for good.

As CSO’s director, Mayer plans to build on the law school’s momentum. “The caliber of students keeps improving, and we’re working hard to make sure their employment opportunities continue to improve as well,” she says. For instance, this year Washington University will co-host off-campus interview programs in New York; Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles; and Atlanta. This effort supplements the growing group of employers who visit the School to interview on campus and the networking receptions with alumni held in key cities.

“Our students are interested in all types of employment in the legal field. The caliber of students keeps improving, and we’re working hard to make sure their employment opportunities continue to improve as well.”

We are lucky to have strong relationships with employers who have been with us for a long time. It is also important for us to build new relationships with private law firms, government agencies, and public interest employers all over the country,” she says.

In addition to offering dozens of career development programs and many individual counseling sessions, everyone in the office enjoys taking part in the “fun things” like joining students for happy hours and attending their formals. “Over time, we build up a rapport with many students,” Mayer says. “That is very important in helping each student develop a game plan to find a position where he or she can be happy and thrive.”

CSO provides students with positive reinforcement throughout the process. “We educate them about the practicalities of the search, brace them for disappointments, and assure them they can achieve their goals,” Mayer says.

It’s a great time for CSO, with a newly dedicated office space (see accompanying article), an excellent professional-to-student ratio, and new programs. The students’ options also keep improving. By mid-May placement statistics for 2004 were more than 10 percent ahead of 2003.

“The job market continues to be challenging,” Mayer says, “but we’ll keep working on creative ways to get students where they want to be.”