Members of the School of Law’s Class of 2003 have come from 36 states and four other countries. As undergraduates, they majored in everything from music to biochemistry, Spanish to Russian. They are in their 20s, their 30s, and even older. About 54 percent are men; 46 percent, women. Minorities comprise approximately 21 percent of the student body.

“I am really impressed by the first-year class that arrived this year,” says Joel Seligman, dean and the Ethan A.H. Shepley University Professor. “The numbers were impressive, but this is a terrific class—really interesting students with very diverse backgrounds and ambitions.”

“They seem to be an exceptionally enthusiastic group of students,” says Janet Bolin, assistant dean for admissions and financial aid. “Faculty members who teach first-year students have made a point of telling me that they are really impressed with the group. The students are prepared for class; they’re highly motivated, very articulate. They’re excited about being in law school.”

David M. Becker, the Joseph H. Zumbalen Professor of Law of Property, observes of the students in his Property class, “They are diverse and talented throughout. And above all, law school has not eliminated their sense of humor.”

“I have really enjoyed teaching Torts this fall,” says Dorsey D. Ellis, Jr., the William R. Orthwein Distinguished Professor of Law. “They are an incredibly diverse group. They are not just conscientious in preparing for class, but intellectually engaged and excited about the human issues that underlie their cases. Their enthusiasm is infectious; it makes teaching them exciting.”

Bolin also noticed a shared characteristic among the School’s newest class: “They appear to be the type of class that wants to get involved. They seem to feel and enjoy the strong sense of community at the law school. We tried to convey this atmosphere both in our admissions materials and through our interactions with these students during the admissions process. In the end, we attracted students who were looking for this environment.”

Students were also drawn to the University, Bolin says, for other advantages. These include small class settings and accessible faculty. The Institute for Global Legal Studies and the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, new centers of learning that appealed to students looking for an intellectually stimulating environment, were also cited. The School’s commitment to educating students in the practical aspects of law through clinical education was another selling point. Students also tell Bolin they were attracted by the School’s public interest programs, three-year scholarship commitments, assistance in career services, and technological capabilities, as well as by the School’s affordable St. Louis setting.

For all these reasons, Bolin says, “a very bright, very motivated group of students” chose Washington University School of Law.

Three students reflect the diversity of the Class of 2003.
Curiosity is Khara Coleman’s intellectual guide. It’s what led her to major in French and English as a Washington University undergraduate, to serve in Student Union, and to represent students on the University’s Board of Trustees. Curiosity is also why she worked on the student newspaper, Student Life; participated in the Association of Black Students; and pursued dance.

“I figured if I was going to spend all that money on an education, I might as well do whatever interests me most,” she says.

After graduating she was awarded a Coro fellowship in public affairs. This national program provides intensive study and work that focuses on government and civic issues. Coleman worked heavily with Gateway Trailnet, where she researched how 18–20 other urban cities turned their riverfronts into greenways and trails. She wanted a research project that didn’t sit on a shelf after she left, a project that helped inspire people to revitalize riverfronts.

The Coro program also took Coleman to a minimum security prison where she assisted with alternative-to-violence workshops. “It gave me a completely different view of prison and the need for prison reform,” she says.

“Understanding how law and policy affect real lives made me want to study the law myself,” Coleman continues. “I hope to include public policy in my career someday.”

Still, Coleman is not ready to choose a specialty within law. But she does have a direction in mind. “I would like to be a judge,” she says. “I’m fascinated by the work they do—how they listen and interpret the law.”

Coleman grew up in New Orleans, but visited St. Louis often to see family living in this area. Her parents have now moved to St. Louis, and she lives with them “because I want to, and because it saves time and money.”

Her parents are both artists: her mother as director of Laumeier Sculpture Park and her father as a painter who teaches adult education through the St. Louis Public Schools.

Coleman received a Chancellor’s Graduate Fellowship for African Americans to attend law school. “I love this place,” she says of Washington University. “I love my classes, my teachers. I really enjoy the new intellectual challenges of law school. For the first time I’m seeing my interest in politics and government from inside the classroom. I love every minute of it.”
Before she enrolled in law school, Lopamudra Mukherjee spent her days with an unlikely crew of characters: fearless space girls, talking bones, sword-wielding superheroes. This exciting group of characters were part of her work with the United States office of Japanese comic-book publishers.

She stumbled on this career after graduating from Columbia University in 1990 with a political science major. She was toiling around San Francisco when she answered an ad for an Asian-friendly office manager. Mukherjee landed the job and was soon working her way up the ranks of the company, which marketed and distributed Japanese titles throughout this country.

“I did not grow up reading comic books. Education was a strong focus in our household, and my parents would never have bought them,” Mukherjee says. In Japan, however, comic books constitute more than 40 percent of all published material, and they are read across age and gender lines. They resemble illustrated novels more than silly stories.

Over there, comic book artists are like rock stars,” she says. But here, the industry was being taken for granted, says Mukherjee. Piracy was a big problem in the United States. These companies may have been powerhouses in Japan, but here they were fledgling distributors of comic books.

“We’d put our heart and souls into marketing these products, and there was no one looking out for our interests. I’d go to conferences and see our pirated comic books. The conference organizers wouldn’t listen,” she says.

She worked with small companies that lacked the legal resources to take action. So Mukherjee formed JAILED, Japan Animation Industry Legal Enforcement Division, a consortium of her competitors who joined forces to fight piracy. “We were all vying for the same market share, but we still faced the same problem so we united and hired the right people,” she says.

That case, plus Hill’s personal battle with civil rights limitations, led him to law school. An openly gay man, Hill perceives the legal prejudices aimed at him: laws against sodomy and laws that do not protect same-sex couples in housing, adoption, or marriage.

“Those laws can significantly affect the choices in my life,” he says. “Discrimination is very pervasive now. I’m interested in learning how we can frame the law to protect all people.”

To that end, Hill is president of Outlaw, an alliance of law students concerned about political, social, and legal issues related to sexual orientation and gender diversity. He plans to pursue a career in public interest or advocacy law. Hill said that he may even consider joining the legislative process through politics someday.

A Boston native, Hill knew of Washington University because his father, a radiologist, graduated from the School of Medicine in 1971. His mother is also in the medical field, which meant both parents were initially unsure of his decision to pursue law.

“I think they are very happy now with the decision I’ve made,” he says.

As is Hill, who is impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment of the faculty. “I’m also encouraged and surprised to see the diversity of my class. One thing we seem to have in common is that we all love learning.”

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