When 224 JD students began classes in August 2002, their entrance into the School of Law community marked the successful completion of a long, rigorous journey.

Talented men and women—drawn from 120 universities (including schools as far away as Beirut and as close as St. Louis), 39 states, and three other countries—make up the first-year class. “The applicants to the School of Law have always been good, but the pool is even stronger now,” says Mary Ann Clifford, the School of Law’s director of admissions. “In the last several years, we have not only seen a substantial increase in numbers of applications, but the quality of applicants, in terms of LSAT and GPA, has also increased.”

The School’s entering students—selected from a record number of 3,145 applicants—are composed of 52 percent men and 48 percent women. Minorities make up 19 percent of the class. Ages range from 20 to 52. Twenty-one percent of the class majored in political science, followed closely by humanities at 20 percent, business at 18 percent, English/journalism at 15 percent, and sciences/engineering at 12 percent. Both a median LSAT score of 163 and a selectivity rate of 26 percent admitted mark new highs for the School of Law.

The rising number of applicants and the School of Law’s determination to remain a small, student-centered institution contribute to the success of the admissions recruitment process. Putting together a law-school class is a year-round, complex process. “We have countless contacts with prospective students and applicants each year,” says Clifford. Those contacts can involve everything from sending out numerous brochures to personal phone calls and e-mail, to presentations at law fairs around the country. A valuable newer tool is the School’s Web site, which can give interested students lots of practical information about courses and resources, as well as information on what to expect if they become a student here.

Behind the marketing mechanics, however, it’s the reality of the School of Law experience that most attracts students:
• A commitment to a student-centered program, with a 13.5:1 student-faculty ratio.
• Nationally renowned legal scholars committed to teaching.
• The increasing allocation of resources, not only to physical facilities like Anheuser-Busch Hall, but also to joint-degree programs, clinical programs, interdisciplinary studies, international and comparative law, and intellectual property law.

In the end, the process comes down to the students. Four of the students in the entering class of 2002 reflect the different interests, varied backgrounds, and diverse ideas about what a life in the law holds for them.

Jamica Dowell: The Practicality of Tax Law

“When did I first start thinking about becoming a lawyer?” Jamica Dowell, who is pursuing an LLM degree in taxation, laughed as she thought about the question. “Well, what mainly comes to mind is being five years old and watching Perry Mason—my favorite TV show at that age—all the time. I don’t really remember why I liked it so much, or if I actually expected to become a lawyer back then, but I did like that show.

When I was considering a career path, I asked myself, ‘How can I do better for myself?’ says Dowell, who grew up in a low-income family in East St. Louis, Illinois. “I decided that being an attorney was the best and most interesting way I could improve my life.”

A 1995 graduate of East St. Louis High School, Dowell headed first to the University of Houston, where she majored in finance. After graduation, she was eager to return closer to home. She gained admittance to a number of Midwestern law schools, including the University of Illinois, University of Chicago, and Washington University. A scholarship led her to choosing the University of Missouri–Columbia.

After receiving her law degree in May 2002, she came to Washington University to pursue her graduate degree. “I was tempted to get a job and make some money after all that time in school,” she says, “but I decided to complete my education first.”

When asked how the LLM program stacks up against her JD experience at Mizzou, she says, “I think it’s more intense. Maybe I haven’t found it harder because I’m really interested in the work, and, when I’m interested in something, I find it easier to handle. The more challenging for me, the better.

“Most of my courses are taught by adjunct professors who are working tax lawyers. They bring their real-life experiences into the classroom, and I really like that. I would have to say the tax program appeals to me because it’s a practical program.”

After graduation, Dowell would like to stay in the St. Louis area working in corporate tax law, estate planning, or both. “I think being an attorney will be interesting, and I’m looking forward to the challenge,” she says. “I expect to give it everything I have. That’s just the way I am. I’ve chosen to be as successful as I can be.”

Christopher Goddard: A Commitment to Serving Society

Christopher Goddard came to the School of Law with a liberal arts background, having majored in both English and philosophy. He also performs music
and holds a strong commitment to social service. Since being diagnosed with type 1 diabetes while a senior in college, he has been active in the diabetes community, including raising more than $23,000 for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation through his “Expect a Miracle” concert.

After graduating from the University of Notre Dame, Goddard devoted his time to singing and songwriting. Describing himself as a cross between James Taylor and Stevie Wonder, he recently released Bus Stop, the second CD produced on his independent record label. He has performed around St. Louis and South Bend, Indiana, and was selected as a finalist at the 2002 Kerrville Folk Festival in Texas.

He also worked as a support staff member at the St. Louis law firm of Thompson Coburn LLP—a great experience, he says, that made him “aware of the power to change things through means of the law. I knew I wanted to contribute to society, and I decided I could best do that by becoming a lawyer.”

Now grappling with the intellectual challenges that mark a first-year student’s introduction to the law, Goddard says, “Law school is an incredibly demanding experience. You get a lot thrown at you, you’re surrounded by intelligent people, and you’re expected to keep up. But I’ve found no sense of the cutthroat here. There’s a support network of faculty and peers who want you to succeed.”

Goddard is one of six Webster Society Scholars in his class. Through this society, the School of Law honors William H. Webster, JD ’49 (see page 28 for more) and provides stipends and three-year scholarships to law students with outstanding credentials, demonstrated leadership, and a commitment to public service.

Undecided about what area of law he wants to go into, Goddard says, “There’s a lot to learn, a lot to experience. I want to take advantage of everything the law school offers. The School’s clinics, courses, and diversity will all help me decide what area of law interests me most.”

He does know, however, that he wants to remain well-rounded: “I don’t want to be known just as ‘the music guy with diabetes.’ As a person with diabetes, I want to make sure those health interests are represented. But I have tons of other interests. Whatever I do, I look forward to improving myself and improving my community.”

Shantikumar Kulkarni: Politics and Law
The son of a father who immigrated from Mumbai, India, and a mother with deep roots in New Jersey, first-year law student Shantikumar Kulkarni graduated from Colgate University with an English major.

“I faced the classic dilemma English majors must all confront after college: ‘How am I gonna eat?’ ” says Kulkarni. Having received his first computer at age 12, he was happy to find a career in information technology, working as a network engineer.

After five years, however, he was ready for a change: “I found the work technically challenging, but not particularly intellectually challenging.” So Kulkarni began to think about a career switch.

“I like to argue a point,” he says, recalling the inner deliberations that led him to law school. “And I’ve always been a political person. Since it seemed to me that the law is fairly political, I thought law school would be the right place for me. I’ve got to admit, though, that my friends didn’t believe me when I first started talking about this. And when I said I was actually going, they really didn’t believe me.”

Kulkarni first discovered Washington University through the U.S. News & World Report rankings. He was then encouraged to apply by his boss, who had attended the University’s business school. Kulkarni visited the
campus to see the law school himself. “It takes reassurance for an East Coast guy like me to come to an unknown place like St. Louis,” Kulkarni says laughingly. He applied to more than 10 law schools, but decided to attend Washington University.

“I expected there would be a lot of intelligent people here, but it’s even better than I expected,” says Kulkarni. “The students who come here are those who excelled at whatever institutions they came from. And there’s a good cross-spectrum of all political and social views—from Libertarians and Federalist Society types to liberals and Green Party types. If you want a political argument, you can always get one.”

Kulkarni says he is working at full speed as a first-year law student. “I expected the load to be heavy, but expecting it and actually experiencing it are two different things,” he says.

Regarding a field of specialization, Kulkarni plans to take his time: “I’m refraining from making up my mind as long as possible. I want to get as much information as I can. Right now I’m busy trying to get my arms around the idea of this thing called the law.”

Tammy VanHeyningen: Intellectual Property and Science
Tammy VanHeyningen has an interesting take on the main difference between her previous life as a research microbiologist and her new life as a first-year law student. Yes, she says, the amount of required reading is daunting. And yes, the intellectual level of the other students is very high. But what she has had to adapt to most is the amount of sitting in law school—sitting in class, sitting in the library, sitting during her four to five hours of reading each day.

“As a researcher, you’re always on your feet, moving around. But here, I sit,” VanHeyningen notes.

But she’s not complaining. Because VanHeyningen knows that law school is key to realizing her aspiration of becoming a patent attorney in the booming field of biotechnology—a career that will enable her to make use of her lifetime interest in science, her natural curiosity, and her competitiveness.

VanHeyningen’s main academic love is biology. She studied it through six years of graduate school at Washington University, then several more years as a research postdoctoral fellow in microbial pathogens. But researchers, she realized even before she finished her doctorate, tend to end up specializing in ever-smaller pieces of the scientific pie. She wanted bigger slices, lots of them.

“I’m an intellectually curious person who likes to learn about new things all the time,” she says. “But in research, I couldn’t think of any good reason to put off going to law school. So even though I had a baby, I just decided to dive in.”

Why Washington University in particular? “I was already in St. Louis and didn’t want to disrupt my family any more than necessary. But mainly, I chose the School of Law because of its commitment to the intellectual property area and its consistent effort to attract ever-better students. Every year it gets better here,” VanHeyningen says. “That means the train is going in the right direction. And I wanted to be on it.”