

MATCHING STUDENTS TO THE SCHOOL OF LAW

Through her personal approach to admissions, Mary Ann Clifford draws some of the best and brightest to Washington University.

by Stephen Schenkenberg

Mary Ann Clifford, JD '99, assistant dean for admissions, has reason to be happy: Applications to the law school soared last year by 22 percent, a record that speaks to the years of ambitious goals and follow-through. But for Clifford, this total is no more important than the individuals behind the statistics. "I love meeting prospective students and candidates," she says. "Everyone has an interesting background or story."

This includes Clifford herself. With an undergraduate degree in accounting and an MBA, she spent several years working in the corporate world before taking time off to raise her two daughters. As they grew

older, she asked herself what she really wanted to do; law school was the answer.

"I was fortunate to have a very supportive husband and family," says Clifford. "I would drop my children off at school in the morning and, as I was driving to Washington University, think how lucky I was to be able to attend law school."

After graduation she worked briefly for a trust company before receiving a phone call about joining the School of Law's expanding admissions office. She accepted happily, first serving as director of admissions—working primarily on marketing materials for prospective candidates—and now assistant dean.

"The whole admissions cycle is just that," Clifford says of her annual workload to bring in not only more applicants, but ultimately classes that represent increasingly talented and diverse students.

"In the fall, we mainly do our recruiting," she continues. "We are visiting schools and law school forums, talking with candidates, sending out

marketing materials, and hosting online chats."

From early winter through spring she and the admissions committee review applications. This past year Clifford read each of the almost 3,800 applications submitted. "There were days in January and February," she recalls with a laugh, "when I brought home stacks of applications every night."

As the School makes its decisions and as the applicants are considering their own decisions, Clifford plays a pivotal role: "One of my main goals is to make sure candidates have the chance to think, 'Is this the right path for me? Is this the right school for me?' We want to give them as much information as possible to help them make that decision."

Clifford's personal-touch philosophy can be traced back to her own selection of Washington University's law school. With a few choices of where to study, and financial incentives at each, she chose the University in part for its effort to reach out to her. "I can remember Janet Bolin [now the School of Law's associate dean of admissions and student services] calling me toward the end of the admissions process and asking, 'Is there any information that I can provide that would help you with your decision?' I was surprised and flattered."

David Kliper

As for what the law students do once they begin their legal education, some will have clearly defined paths, while others will not. What the students share, Clifford says, is "the idea that they will be part of a profession they will enjoy and that they'll be able to pursue over a lifetime." ♦

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