You can come to Janet Bolin for answers.

Offering advice to prospective students regarding the options surrounding their academic pursuit is a big part of the job for Janet Bolin, the School of Law’s assistant dean for admissions and financial aid. It’s a role relished by Bolin—known by faculty and students alike for her warmth and genuine regard for others—and one she does very well.

Where, you might ask, did she first develop that ability to talk frankly with people, to get quickly to the heart of an issue, and to deliver sometimes-difficult news with compassion?

To find the answer, flash back to Houston, Texas, in the spring of 1978. Bolin, freshly graduated from Florida State University, had moved there to work at the headquarters of Shell Oil Company in the consumer affairs department.

“Shell had the ‘Come to Shell for Answers’ marketing campaign with the little yellow booklets giving driver safety tips and the like,” recalls Bolin. “People were always writing in, asking questions about problems they were having with their cars.”

Bolin became the ghostwriter for the Shell Answer Man, finding answers and responding to the steady stream of letters arriving at Shell. “I’d have to consult a book on cars or talk with some of the Shell engineers to figure out the problem,” says Bolin. “Then I’d craft some homey response and send it back.”

After mastering the intricacies of diagnosing car troubles through the mail, Bolin moved to Chicago in the fall of 1978 to take a job at DePaul University College of Law. Rising quickly to positions of increasing responsibility, she was named director of career services in 1982. Then, in 1989, she received her JD from the school and was named an assistant dean. Bolin left DePaul in 1994 to become director of admissions at Washington University School of Law.

At Washington University, Bolin has stressed the importance of providing as much individual attention as possible to prospective and admitted students. “When we talk with someone or send out information, we try to make the experience relevant to that person’s needs and perspective,” says Bolin, who regularly includes personal notes and clippings to applicants in letters sent from her office.

As part of that effort, the Admissions Office has staked out a significant presence on the Web. The array of electronic resources includes a secure bulletin board for students who plan to come to the School of Law in the fall.

“When researching options related to law school, people are increasingly turning to the Web for everything from academics to housing to transportation and the community,” says Bolin. “Because of that, we try to offer a wealth of information online, in a way that can be accessed and arranged based on each individual’s perspective and interests.”

That ability to offer a great deal of information about the School, while also delivering it on a very personal basis, is a tremendous asset, says Joel Seligman, dean and the Ethan A.H. Shepley University Professor. “Janet has created an environment in the Admissions Office that offers a lot of individualized attention. She also has a great idea of the broad picture and can communicate things that happen very effectively and quickly to potential students.”

And that is why people still turn to Janet Bolin for answers.