Ask Mark Smith, JD '86, what he loves about his job, and his answer is both immediate and enthusiastic: “The students.”

Smith worked for the St. Louis firm of Bryan Cave LLP before joining the law school as assistant dean for student services in 1991. Now an associate dean, he has served a multitude of student needs—from admissions and financial aid to teaching and career advising.

“Most of my focus these days is on improving career services,” Smith says. “The University’s growing prestige helps get recruiters to look beyond the top tier of grads,” Smith says. “The students are so qualified and exceptional when they get here that dipping deeper into the graduating class yields lawyers of equal or better quality than the top tier of many other schools.”

His biggest challenge now is the slowing economy. With firms hiring fewer young lawyers, Smith must be increasingly persuasive—and creative—as he promotes the law school and its students. He is traveling and setting up networking events for students and alumni, visiting law firms and agencies, and even calling employers to put in a good word for individual students.

One of the most exciting innovations is the use of videoconferencing for long-distance student job interviews.

Third-year student Ezekiel Kaufman says Smith’s open-door policy is a definite plus. “Mark is always very accessible to students,” he says. “Because he’s practiced law, because he’s been there, he can give you realistic advice. I’m interested in the unusual area of hospitality law, and Mark helped me to focus on that and get a summer position with a large firm in Washington, D.C.”

More than a passionate advocate for students, Smith is also a good citizen. “I definitely believe in giving back,” he says. “I grew up in St. Louis. My parents were regular blue-collar types. Lots of people helped me along the way, and I like to try to do that for others.”

Smith serves as president of the St. Louis Police Board, which, among other duties, sets policy and decides on promotions. The board consists of the mayor of St. Louis City and four governmental appointees. Smith says his experience on the board has deepened his respect for police and other public servants.

He and his wife, Lisa Braun, JD ’88, associate general counsel at the University, also give back through a scholarship. “Washington University gave me a great law school education and a great preparation both for practicing law and for helping our students prepare for practicing law,” Smith says. “Working at the law school, I see the good things that are happening here, and it’s a pleasure to contribute.”

Mark Smith

Creativity and persuasion are two qualities Mark Smith puts to work as head of the Career Services Office.

For the Students

As president of the St. Louis Police Board, Mark Smith (right) met with Missouri Governor Bob Holden (center) and St. Louis City Police Chief Joe Mokwa.