Every student has a story

Every student has a story, and Stetson University College of Law boasts hundreds of wonderful stories. Stetson has attracted what many consider to be its best-qualified student body in 103 years. Today, 895 students are enrolled in our four degree programs: the full-time and part-time J.D. programs, the J.D./M.B.A. joint-degree program and the LL.M. program in International Law and Business. For the 2003 entering classes, we received more than 2,800 applications for 360 open seats in the J.D. programs. As you might imagine, we had to turn down many outstanding, well-qualified candidates. The median undergraduate grade point average was 3.28, and the median LSAT was 153 — and the credentials of those admitted for the Spring 2004 class are even higher. Fifty-four percent of our students are women, and approximately 20 percent are minority.

But bare statistics cannot tell the full story. Our students come to us from diverse backgrounds and at varied points in their lives and careers. The average ages of the classes range from 22 in the Fall 2003 entering full-time class to 33 in the Fall 2002 entering part-time class. While some students arrive directly from college, many have stopped for a while along the way. In this issue’s feature, you will read about students who have remarkable stories, including an air traffic control technician in Antarctica, a recording artist, a Disney character actor, a Russian student who left family and friends to pursue a U.S. law degree, a stage-four Hodgkin’s Lymphoma cancer survivor, and a motivational book author.

Once enrolled, our students develop into outstanding advocates and counselors. The rigor in our classrooms remains high to help students hone the analytical and writing skills they will need to succeed in practice. Stetson also provides excellent opportunities for students to gain practical experiences before graduation. For example, we have internship programs with the Florida Supreme Court and our local state and federal courts. Our relationship with the local judiciary will only strengthen when the Second District Court of Appeal joins Stetson at our new Tampa Campus in early 2004. In the words of Chief Judge Chris Altenbernd, Tampa will have the first and only teaching courtroom in Florida. We also offer many clinics, ranging from long-standing programs with state attorney and public defender offices to newer offerings for mediation training, in-house counsel practice, and elder consumer protection.

Life outside the classroom is also vibrant. In August, the ABA’s Law Student Division honored Stetson with its Student Bar Association of the Year award. Our Hispanic Bar Association recently sponsored its seventh annual HBA picnic, complete with Latino music, cooking demonstrations and salsa dancing lessons. The Black Law Students Association, in conjunction with the George Edgecomb Bar Association, presented “Survival of the Fittest,” a full-day program on interviewing protocol and tips. We recently hired a new Associate Dean of Students, Dr. Phebe Kerr, who will soon implement a leadership training program and a cultural arts program. Our advocacy teams continue to win awards on the regional, national and international levels, and our Law Review produces three fine volumes of scholarship each year while also serving as headquarters for the National Conference of Law Reviews.

While you will have an opportunity to get to know a few of our students in this issue, these stories provide just a glimpse into the talent, diversity and energy that exists within our student body. I wish each of you had the opportunity that I have on a daily basis to see the excitement on the campus as students move from class to class, prepare for their four-hour trials and moot court arguments, organize and present special programs, volunteer in the community and grow into true professionals.

To that end, I invite all alumni to join us on campus at some point — whether as a guest speaker, a moot court judge, or an interviewer — to meet more of our fabulous students. We believe you’ll be impressed.

Sincerely,

Darby Dickerson
Interim University Vice President and Dean