The tie that bonds

BY QUINCEY R. JOHNSON '93

A new team is actively promoting its services to a diverse employer community, generating new opportunities for students.
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graduation may end your days as a student, but it doesn’t end your connection with the institution. Dean Donald G. Gifford is working to ensure that students and alumni strengthen their school ties and find the connection a valuable one as their careers advance.

To that end, Gifford has assembled a new team of professionals in the law school’s career development office.

“Talented young people come to the law school not merely for intellectual curiosity, but to gain access to meaningful and rewarding careers,” says Gifford. “The nation’s best career development office is an important part of what we now offer our students.”

Maryland law students learn how to respond to the Socratic method, wrestle with legal issues, and cope with the difficult questions of a moot court judge, but who will teach those same students to handle employment searches and to make the transition from student to professional?

Who better than three lawyers—who have actually made the student-to-professional transition—to assist students with the rigors of finding employment.

José Bahamonde-González, assistant dean for career development, emphasizes that not only do he and his staff hold JD degrees, but all three of them come to the University of Maryland with extensive experience in professional development from other nationally renowned law schools. “Each of us has concentrated experience in career development plus the passion for helping students become professionals,” he says.

Prior to joining the School of Law, Bahamonde-González served as assistant dean for career planning at the University of Miami School of Law and as assistant director, office of career services, Georgetown University Law Center.

Dana L. Morris is director of career development and also came from the University of Miami, where she was director of the Career Planning Center. M. Teresa Schmiedeler completes the team as assistant director of public interest and judicial clerkship programs. She was formerly assistant director and public interest coordinator for career services at American University.

In this newly overhauled office, Bahamonde-González will focus on student outreach, professional development and front-line marketing of the school; Morris will focus on private sector and government employment, and publications; and Schmiedeler will work on public interest positions, fellowships and judicial clerkships.

“The 1980s job market is probably never coming back. Students are coming in now with that reality already in their heads. They know what they are up against,” says Bahamonde-González.

“Thus, to have some students admit that they never were in the career development office can be a tremendous detriment to their job search.”

Acknowledging that the lateral job market has improved, Bahamonde-González says the entry-level market is increasingly competitive, adding that students need to be well prepared for the job-hunting experience. “Students need to be sharp when they walk into an interview,” he says. “They are facing employers in a buyer’s market. We can get students interviews; they have to get the job.”

Bahamonde-González’s goals are two-fold: “To instill in students the need to take professional development seriously, and to promote the School of Law aggressively among local and national employers.”

The career development staff has put into action a plan that includes strategic outreach to students, alumni, and the legal communities of Maryland, the District of Columbia and beyond.

Working closely with 1997 graduates, the staff recently confirmed the job status of 99 percent of the class and found that 94 percent reported current employment.

In the public interest area, the staff increased the emphasis on judicial internships and clerkships by hosting a panel program introducing students to judicial law clerks and the unique application process. Schmiedeler will address the annual Conference of Circuit Court Judges this spring to suggest ways the office can assist the judges in obtaining interns and law clerks.

In the area of private practice, the staff will soon launch its Firm Night Program for first-year day and second-year evening students. The program consists of a series of receptions at local firms designed to introduce small groups of students to practicing lawyers in a non-interview setting.

“These events enable students to learn about the day-to-day practice of law while polishing important professional skills,” explains Bahamonde-González.

In addition to preparing students, the office has expanded its Fall Recruitment Program to include an off-campus recruiting program in Washington, D.C. The Washington Interviewing Program, a joint effort with Villanova University School of Law, offers students opportunities to interview with additional law firms and public service organizations.

Whether it is speaking to law firms, federal judges, or researching public interest job possibilities, the office is generating more options for students and graduates.

“Improving the representation of Maryland graduates in law firms and in public service will improve the value of the degree,” says Schmiedeler.