



The importance of setting goals has never been a concept missing in the life of LaRae Dixon. As a high school senior, she transferred to a magnet school where a new curriculum in law and public service was offered. She knew then that a career in law was in her future, and believed that careful planning would assist her in achieving this goal.

"I've always been interested in the criminal justice system, in law enforcement, probation and parole," she said. "I've also been interested in helping other people, and I believe that a career in law will allow me to do that."

At the University of Missouri in Kansas City, Dixon majored in administration of justice, a curriculum of coursework she believed would be helpful when she enrolled in law school.

As a third-year student in the Walter F. George School of Law, her main emphasis now is on criminal law or civil litigation, two areas in which she is most interested. She has already gotten her feet wet by working for the past year and a half with a local law firm that specializes in criminal defense, along with some personal injury and malpractice cases. That position ends this spring when she begins a practicum with the public defender's office in Houston County.

While some people may find it difficult to work while they are enrolled in law school, Dixon says the experience has been helpful. "I've found that the actual practice of law is a lot different than what you find in the classroom, and sometimes it can be hard to make the transition from textbook learning to practical application. That's where I think internships and employment can help. A lot of things we learn in the classroom are things I might already know from having worked in a law firm."

Many of Mercer's professors, however, make an effort to show you how things would work in private practice, Dixon said. "At some point in their lecture, they will emphasize what your tactics might be in a particular situation."

All of her hard work and determination is paying

off. Last spring she received the American Jurisprudence Award in evidence, with the highest score in the evidence class. She is also president of Mercer's Black Law Students Association, was a second-year representative of the Student Bar Association, and has been a member of the Public Interest Law Society, the American Bar Association Law Student Division and the Legal Eagle student newspaper.

"She was a good student and was always prepared," said Professor Anthony Baldwin. "She was not only prepared to talk about the assignment, hundreds of pages, week by week, but was also prepared to think about the cases and to answer hypothetical questions, applying principles and theory."

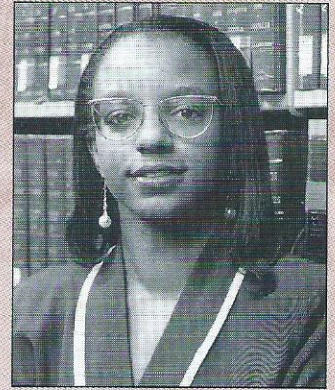
While Dixon never had any doubts about graduating from law school, she attributes her success to Mercer's small size.

"The School's size has really been an advantage to me," she said. "Here, the professors really take an interest in you. I've had many professors help me locate internships, and I've always found them very accessible if you need help with your coursework. Its size also allows you to develop good rapport with your classmates. If you have an opportunity now to develop those relationships with your classmates, it will transfer to the practice of law."

Dixon is the oldest of three children in a family that is very proud of her success. She will be the first lawyer in the family. "Every time I talk to someone in my family, they say they are making plans to come down to Macon in May for commencement," Dixon said.

As graduation approaches, Dixon says she has accomplished one of her most important goals thus far. "I've known exactly what steps I needed to get here, and I've made it," she said.

But after each goal, there's a new one. And for Dixon, it means looking into the future to see where she might be in later years. "I've always seen myself in the courtroom. But I would like to wind down my law career either in politics or with a career on the bench," she said.



Law School  
Allowing  
Dixon to  
Realize Dream  
of Helping  
Other People