



Lynette Petty '87

Faculty

Lynette Petty began her career teaching

grade school after receiving her B.S., from Southwestern University (Georgetown, Texas) in 1978. She taught in the barrio of San Antonio for seven years and then, in Lecompton, Kan., after she and her husband moved to Lawrence, Kan. During her time in Lecompton, Petty volunteered to serve on the negotiation team for the teachers association and found the process to be frustrating. Petty said, "I felt demoralized and unappreciated by the administration. I decided to make a change. I loved my work and it was a hard decision to make." Petty then went to law school.

After graduating from Washburn Law in 1987, Petty worked for Kansas Legal Services. Petty and her husband served as foster parents in a group home for six teenage boys in San Antonio, so Kansas Legal Services was a good fit for her. Petty was managing attorney for KLS in Kansas City, Kan., when she received a phone call from Professor Bill Rich asking if she would be interested in applying for a position in the Washburn Law Clinic when they received a grant to provide legal services to persons with disabilities. Petty jumped at the chance for the opportunity and joined the Law Clinic in 1992.

"I have combined my two passions – working with children and practicing law. My clinic work focuses on domestic and child in need of care cases and allows me to use my experience to help families," said Petty of being able to apply her knowledge to the areas she most loves.

One of the things Petty believes is most important about being a professor is, "A law degree is a powerful tool. Sometimes I think students really don't understand the significance of their decision to pursue the law. Clients come to a lawyer looking for relief from a problem. Sometimes they have done something to cause the problem; other times they are just running through life when trouble happens. The lawyer must be skilled as an advisor as well as schooled in the law. The responsibility of shepherding clients through problems is often not fully appreciated by students."

Petty enjoys seeing the transformation of students to practitioners. After students have learned the substantive law in the

classroom, Petty works with them in the Clinic to put that knowledge into action and represent clients. "It amazes me how much students learn and grow in such a short amount of time," said Petty.

In addition to teaching in the clinic, Petty also works with students with disabilities to determine accommodations that enable them to equally participate in law school. Petty meets with the student, investigates the nature of the disability, and determines the reasonable accommodations necessary to assure an equal opportunity. Some of those accommodations may include adaptive equipment, tutors, note-takers, use of a computer, and real-time captioning or interpreters, to name a few. "Each individual's experience with disability is unique. There is no one cookie cutter to fit a disability type," said Petty.

For the past few years, Petty has also worked with third-year students during their last semester to help prepare them to take the bar exam. In the spring of 2005, Washburn Law began a program to help students prepare for and succeed on the bar exam. Students practice taking multiple choice questions to get a feel for the difficulty level of the exam. The school has also contracted with BarBri which provides a program specifically geared to effective writing techniques for answering essay questions. Through Petty's dedication and effort to prepare law students for the bar exam, Washburn Law bar pass rates have seen a significant increase.

Petty notes, "The practice of law is difficult. It will challenge you to stretch to understand where others are coming from. While you have to put yourself in others' shoes, you also have to keep grounded in your own sense of self." She encourages students to look for balance. "Find out and keep your sight on what is important, and make room for family and friends."