Shannon P. Bartlett Returns as Dean of Students

By Claire Stamler-Goody

Dean of Students Shannon P. Bartlett has long been fascinated by the law. It began when she debated problems with the legal system as a law student, and motivated her to teach legal writing years later; her son is even named Brennan after the Supreme Court justice. Her passion for the law, partnered with her background in psychology and corresponding interest in social work, are what drew her to her new position at the Law School.

“In many ways, this is the perfect position for me because it marries my interest in people and how we navigate our worlds with my love of the law,” Bartlett said.

After serving as the Law School’s Associate Director of Student Affairs from 2010 to 2013, Bartlett spent three years as Director of Diversity Education and Outreach at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law. She returned to the Law School as Dean of Students on August 1, 2016.

“We are so excited to welcome Shannon Bartlett as our Dean of Students,” said Dean Thomas J. Miles. “Our students and community as a whole will tremendously benefit from her deep knowledge of campus climate issues, her understanding of the Law School, and her wealth of experience in student affairs.”

During her position at Northwestern, Bartlett studied diversity and inclusion and learned to apply her expertise to the law school environment. Her extensive knowledge of this field, she added, will be an asset in helping to build a community that is accessible to everyone.

“As lawyers, we can and should debate, challenge, and push one another, and I’d like to think that we can do all of that in a manner that fosters civility and mutual respect. But we also have to remember that uncomfortable does not mean unsafe, and sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish the two,” she said.

Bartlett first became interested in student affairs when she taught legal writing at Loyola University Chicago School of Law. She was also working at a small law firm at the time, and was surprised by how much she enjoyed interacting with students again.

“It reminded me of why I wanted to go to law school in the first place and why I loved law school,” she said. “Teaching was reenergizing, and I loved the optimism and excitement.”

While in law school, Bartlett was more focused on her coursework than student life—and that experience has shaped her approach to the Dean of Students position. Now, she wants to make sure students take advantage of everything the Law School community has to offer.

“Law school is a time in students’ lives like no other,” she said. “It gives them an opportunity to engage with people who see the world so differently from them, and to explore ideas and better understand their own positions. That is rare, and they won’t always get that opportunity once they leave.”

Bartlett is excited to interact with the Law School’s student body again—one that is especially united, she said, in part because of its class size, long-standing traditions, and welcoming faculty members.

“Events like Coffee Mess, Wine Mess, the Entering Students Dinner, the Graduating Students Dinner—these all make a difference,” she said. “They make people more accessible, and it feels very cohesive.”

For Bartlett, coming back to the Law School is also a return to her roots. Her father began working at the University while he was a student here and basically never left, she said. Bartlett was born in a University of Chicago hospital and spent a lot of time on campus growing up. Now that she’s back at the Law School, she and her father carpool together from Oak Park to Hyde Park every morning.

“I’m excited to be back,” she said. “It’s a big job, but I love the school and I’m looking forward to talking with students and figuring out exactly what our community needs.”