



## Danielle D. Dempsey-Swopes '92

### Alumni

Danielle Dempsey-Swopes decided to pursue a law degree because she knew it would put her in a position to help others. Today she serves as Executive Director of the Kansas African-American Affairs Committee (KAAAC), where she works to address the concerns of African-Americans. "Our commission is a seven-member body of representatives from all over the state," explained Dempsey-Swopes. "They set the agenda for the work of the commission, and as executive director, I try to come up with efficient and creative ways to implement the agenda."

One of the KAAAC's focus areas this year is improving the educational opportunities for African-Americans, something Dempsey-Swopes is passionate about. "In this country, poor, rural and minority children still do not have the equal opportunity to receive a quality education," said Dempsey-Swopes. "We still pay to incarcerate more young African-American men rather than spending money to educate them. We have the resources to make sure every child is well-educated, and yet we do not make it the highest priority."

Dempsey-Swopes attributes much of her own success to her education, including the education she received at Washburn Law. It was while she was interning in the Law Clinic that she really began to consider using her law degree in an educational setting versus a traditional law practice. "I had cases where an individual challenged a state policy and a parent challenged a school policy. Both cases made me think about the importance of the work of education and government administrators," said Dempsey-Swopes.

After graduating from law school in 1992, she joined Kansas State University as the Assistant Director of Affirmative Action and was later promoted to Director. In 1996, she left KSU to become

Associate Director in the equal opportunity office at the University of Kansas. In August 2003, Gov. Sebelius appointed Dempsey-Swopes to her current position at KAAAC.

"Some people think it is strange to be a lawyer and not actively practice," admits Dempsey-Swopes. "I hope people see that a legal education can help you in many ways, and you don't have to feel your education is wasted if you are not engaged in traditional law practice....I choose to work in education and government service because it is where I feel I can do the most good."

Dempsey-Swopes encourages law students and new lawyers to explore the many opportunities they have to use their legal training. "We need lawyers in our society to also serve as administrative law judges, professors, mediators, arbitrators, policy makers, legislators, writers, investigators, judges and researchers," she said.

Despite all of her professional accomplishments, Dempsey-Swopes still pushes herself to learn more. "I am learning that I should never stop learning, and that being excellent at what I do requires that I constantly challenge myself, listen carefully and work hard to understand difficult issues. Just because you have a law degree, doesn't mean you know it all."

Looking ahead, Dempsey-Swopes plans to pursue other leadership roles in state or federal government or at educational institutions. She is also interested in working for a non-profit organization or foundation. Whatever her future roles, she will be guided by her desire to help others. "The most important thing for me will be that I am in a position to serve and to help improve the quality of life for all."