

ADMISSIONS

Number of Applicants Hits Record

by Ian Skoggard '08 M.Div.

THE 485 APPLICATIONS RECEIVED for the fall of 2007 mark an all-time high for Yale Divinity School, capping a steady increase in applications and bucking national trends. The peak, coming a decade after the

school struggled to attract 200 applicants, is due to increased recruitment efforts, a revamped application process, and programmatic changes at YDS, says Associate Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Anna Ramirez, '93 M.Div.

One major factor for the increased competition to secure one of the school's 160 spots each fall is the dogged wooing of prospective students by Melissa Pucci, '04 M.A.R., assistant director of admissions and recruiting. "Face-to-face recruiting is still the best," she says. "I believe that successful recruiting has a lot to do with building relationships and providing stellar customer service."

Email correspondence keeps YDS fresh in the applicants' minds. Pucci informs students on what is going on at the school, answers their questions within 24 hours, and even sends them holiday e-cards from Hallmark. "I get wonderful response from the students and they are a fun, interactive, and friendly way to reach out to the students," says Pucci, who also travels extensively, visiting 38 schools over a 10-week span last year.

The school itself, according to admissions staff, is an increasingly easy sell under current Dean Harold Attridge, whom Ramirez credits with moving things forward. The dean, she says, has made positive changes in three vital spheres. "The first is that he has increased the financial aid, making it more competitive, making it easier for them to decide to come here. He has also helped establish exchange programs. We also have two new M.A.R. concentrate programs, in Black Religion and in Asian Religions," says Ramirez. "The most

powerful, of course, is the financial aid piece. It is just so expensive to finance a theological education, and many of these students are offered free rides from seminaries. That has been really key in getting people to come here."



Assistant Director of Admissions and Recruiting Melissa Pucci '04 M.A.R., Associate Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Anna Ramirez '93 M.Div., and Admissions Administrative Assistant Jan Fournier '06 M.A.R.

Ecumenism, diversity, and the opportunity to take courses elsewhere at Yale all rank high on incoming students' lists of reasons for choosing YDS over competitor schools. A "diverse multi-denominational experience" is what attracted Fred Sievert, a first-year M.A.R. candidate and retired president of the New York Life insurance company.

Academic diversity at YDS is reflected in a number of

ways. Three new concentrations have been added to the M.A.R. program in recent years. They are Black Religion in Diaspora, Second Temple Judaism, and Asian Religions. YDS is also offering joint degrees with Yale's schools of forestry, nursing, law, management and public health. Additionally, the new Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Studies in Religion and Theology, Emilie M. Townes, is a draw for African-American students.

Much of what YDS offers stems from an intangible sense of community that may be difficult to transmit to applicants via the internet or recruiting materials. That is why encouraging prospective students to visit the YDS campus is crucial, says Ramirez, adding, "The on-campus recruiting program sells itself."

A typical tour of the campus includes a worship service in Marquand Chapel, eating in the refectory and speaking with professors and current students. "Students always tell us that they feel very welcome here, more so than in other schools," says Admissions Administrative Assistant Jan Fournier, '06 M.A.R., who is often a tour guide.