



## **Florita Sheppard**

### **Diplomat-in-residence, The LBJ School**

Twenty-four years after obtaining her public affairs degree, Florita Sheppard (M.P.Aff. 1980) is back at the LBJ School. As the newest State Department diplomat in residence, Sheppard is currently recruiting students who are interested in Foreign Service careers.

Sheppard, who is among a small group of LBJ School alumni who have risen to the senior ranks in the Foreign Service, was attached to the Bureau for East Asian and Pacific Affairs before coming to the LBJ School in August. She was the Bureau's deputy executive director and provided management support to 200 domestic staff and to the U.S. diplomatic missions in China, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Thailand and 19 other countries in East Asia and the Pacific. Her previous assignment was as supervisory general services officer in Tokyo, where she was responsible for management of U.S. diplomatic property throughout Japan valued at \$2.5 billion and government procurement averaging \$25 million annually. In Japan, she and her staff of 60 provided logistical support for five presidential visits to that country between 1998 and 2002.

The East Asia and Pacific Affairs Bureau is one of five regional bureaus in the Department of State that handle bilateral relationships and support U.S. embassies and consulates overseas. "We have functional bureaus that deal with certain crosscutting issues, but the regional bureaus have the more direct ties with our embassies and consulates," Sheppard explained. "The Executive Office basically handles support issues for our posts overseas—for example, staffing, funding and coordination of facilities issues."

During her career with the State Department, Sheppard has spent 14 years in Washington and 9 years abroad—in Panama, Singapore and Japan. "Working overseas in a consulate or embassy is really the most rewarding assignment you can have in the Foreign Service," she said. "It gives you the opportunity to work with people of other cultures, to be on the front line of American relations with other countries. This is very exciting, but it is also important to serve in Washington to understand how headquarters works and see what the priorities are there."

When asked if 9-11 had an impact on how the State Department operates, Sheppard said she has observed a number of changes. Among these is a new

focus on the security of personnel in Washington as well as overseas. Also, she said, the United States has put a higher priority on public diplomacy in countries in Southeast Asia.

"This is of particular importance because of the large number of Muslims who live in that region," she said. "Indonesia is actually the most populous Muslim country in the world, but you also have significant Muslim populations in Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Brunei."

The post 9-11 environment in Washington also spurred the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative, which was launched by Secretary of State Colin Powell in 2002 to increase staffing levels in order to meet new foreign policy challenges.

"With the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative, we've hired above attrition for the last three years, and this coming year we also hope to hire at higher numbers," said Sheppard. "Maybe because of 9-11 Secretary Powell has had more support for this, because there are always competing budgets and priorities."

And, in a surprising twist, 9-11 has inspired people to join the Foreign Service. "Right after 9-11 a lot of retirees called up and said, 'I want to do something. Let me come back to work and help. I'll volunteer; I want to do something.' And so there's been almost a calling—people have felt that they want to try to help promote international understanding," she said.

Throughout the 2004-05 academic year, Sheppard is available to meet with students to discuss careers with the State Department. Next spring, she will teach an LBJ School seminar on the organization and practice of U.S. diplomacy.

