Two of the most elemental questions in the field—“What is the law?” and “What is good law?”—inform the legal scholarship of Gerrit De Geest, professor of law and the new co-director for the Center on Law, Innovation & Economic Growth. He considers these fundamental issues regularly, he says, because they are at the center of his combined interest in the disciplines of comparative law and of law and economics. The answers have increasing value in a world that is becoming ever more interconnected legally and economically, and they bear on entrepreneurship, growth, and innovation.

Educated in Belgium and on the faculty of Utrecht University in the Netherlands before being recruited to the Washington University Law faculty in 2007, De Geest brings an uncommon level of personal experience to his work in comparative law. He is a member of the Economic Impact Group of the Common Principles of European Contract Law and past president of the European Association of Law and Economics.

Putting the relationship between a country’s laws and its economic vitality in the simplest terms, De Geest observes: “Good law leads to development, innovation, and prosperity.” Economists were largely responsible for early work in the field, beginning with Adam Smith’s *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* and with the recognition of better law in countries where development occurred successfully. But in the last 10 to 20 years, De Geest says, an explosion in comparative law has had legal scholars asking “What is the best law?” and looking at the answers devised by the countries of the world.

“This used to be a question answered by intuition, but the application of scientific analysis has made it a much more rigorous field,” he says. In order to effectively advise politicians and the courts about what makes a good decision, investigations proceed down two avenues, De Geest says. Theoretical answers are intellectual exercises that compare what exists to the optimal situation. More complicated, empirical answers take into consideration a comparison of costs to benefits. “Here,” De Geest says, “consensus gets lost.” For example, he points to the contentious questions of protection of intellectual property and whether it has gone too far. “What blocks development, and what stimulates it?” he asks.

The law has been slow to adopt an international focus when compared to other disciplines such as science and medicine, De Geest says, in part because legal systems differ so drastically in their practical application. “But it’s an international world,” he says, commending Washington University Law for its ability to see the importance of thinking globally. Also noteworthy, he says, is that students have international interests that the school must meet, and many entrepreneurial efforts and legal transactions ultimately will have international implications.

De Geest’s work, begun at Utrecht University and continued here—notably with the upcoming publication of the second edition of his *Encyclopedia of Law and Economics*—connected most appropriately with what was formerly known as the law school’s Center for Research on Innovation & Entrepreneurship. Discussions of his participation in the center led eventually to his appointment as co-director with Charles R. McManis, the Thomas and Karole Green Professor of Law and a noted international expert on intellectual property.

Shortly thereafter, the name of the center was changed to the Center on Law, Innovation & Economic Growth (CLIEG). McManis explains: “With four years of accumulated experience to build on, the end of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation seed grant, and the encouragement of the University-wide Skandalaris Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, the original center has transformed into the Center on Law, Innovation & Economic Growth. The new name more accurately reflects the research mission of the center henceforth, and, in particular, highlights Professor De Geest’s interest and expertise in comparative law and economics.”

De Geest also thinks the name change will help to “let the world know about the work being done here and bring applicable disciplines together.” He adds: “It will focus our efforts and help us recruit talent, pointing out Washington University Law’s awareness of global thinking.”