By Kent Syverud, Dean of the Law School and the Ethan A.H. Shepley Distinguished University Professor

The national narrative about law schools lately has been very negative. The dominant image is of schools with their heads in the sand. The perception is that law schools are in denial that law practice has changed. To many, law schools seem unaware that lawyers and law students face serious challenges with employment, debt, and career satisfaction.

This issue of Washington University Law Magazine tries to capture the many ways our school has been a leader in responding to the new legal environment. Far from being in denial, this school has been responsive and innovative.

Among our initiatives are an intensive focus on individually partnering with our students and mentoring students throughout their job search; the launching of an online LLM in U.S. Law for foreign-trained attorneys, which is the first of its kind among top-tier law schools; the introduction of new and expanded programs focusing on professional development and skills training in New York, Washington, D.C., and internationally; and concerted efforts to shrink the size of the incoming class while increasing scholarship funding and addressing budgetary issues.

Many of these efforts have been done in conjunction with expertise and generous financial support from our alumni for which I am deeply grateful. I hope you will enjoy reading about some of these partnerships with our alumni, as well as a variety of features on alumni who are themselves involved in innovative careers.

As part of our efforts to further the national conversation about the pressing need for law schools to address current and future challenges in legal education, we will be hosting a national symposium on The Law School in the New Legal Environment. The symposium will address whether enough American law schools like this one will embrace needed change rather than avoid it. The symposium builds on the important work of Washington University’s Brian Tamanaha, who is featured in this issue and is among the keynote speakers.

Examining the reality of the world faced by new law graduates, Professor Tamanaha’s transformative book, Failing Law Schools, is provoking much-needed soul-searching among legal educators. Details about the symposium’s impressive list of presenters and panels are recounted in this issue as well. The symposium is part of a celebratory weekend honoring Professor David Becker reaching the milestone of 50 years of teaching. We look forward to welcoming one of our largest groups of alumni back on campus for these and other Law Alumni Weekend events, October 26–27.

Other areas of interest at our school, which are highlighted in this issue, include features that encapsulate faculty scholarship, including Professor Rebecca Dresser’s book, Malignant: Medical Ethicists Confront Cancer, and Professor John Inazu’s book, Liberty’s Refuge: The Forgotten Freedom of Assembly; faculty law review excerpts by Professors Mae Quinn and Greg Magarian; our Why I Teach submission by Professor Peter Wiedenbeck; and an End Paper opinion piece by Professor Charles McManis.

As you read this issue, I hope you will join us in the realization that while we have much to celebrate at our school, American law schools are not done changing. In my view, the change we have seen so far pales in comparison to what will be necessary in the coming years to adequately help our students, the profession, and the clients they serve. Some of the change, particularly efforts to contain the cost of law school, will be painful. Washington University School of Law will lead in all efforts toward meaningful change, and by doing so it will continue to thrive. I am proud of the students, faculty, and staff here who are embracing change and thereby continuing to have an outsized impact. There are no ostriches here.