

# On the rise

This spring, the School of Law rose to #27 in the *U.S. News & World Report* law school rankings, the fastest year-over-year rise of any law school in the top 30 and our highest ranking since 2002. Coming on the heels of the school's first-ever recognition as the #1 Best Value in legal education by the National Jurist, this latest accolade was a great cause for celebration.

Of course, rankings are fickle. Schools rise one year, only to fall the next, sometimes for reasons largely beyond their control. Moreover, the underlying methodology can be questionable. For example, *U.S. News* weights direct operational expenses more heavily than financial aid. In my view, that weighting is backwards – law students care more about the affordability of their education than amusements outside the classrooms and courtrooms.

Despite the undeniable flaws of rankings, our rapid rise provides another proof point that we are achieving our vision to be the nation's best return on investment in legal education. Since 2015, we have pursued that goal relentlessly because it is the right thing to do – and because it allows our students to become leaders in their chosen fields without burdensome debt.

Authentic support from our alumni, alumnae and friends is essential to this vision. For example, a transformational gift from former Board of Visitors Chair Kathelen Amos (J.D.'82) and the Daniel P. Amos Family Foundation will provide endowed scholarships and cover certain professional development expenses ultimately for 11 first-generation college graduates studying the law. That gift complements the support provided by the newly created First-Generation Student Association, founded by two current students (one of whom is featured on page 16), and the hiring of the "First-Start coordinator" who will serve as their designated adviser. I am deeply grateful to Kathelen and the entire Amos family for their profound commitment to these students and encourage you to read more about their inspiring gift on page 4.

Additionally, the Distinguished Law Fellows program, created by a catalytic gift from The John N. Goddard Foundation, assists the most academically talented applicants in each entering class. The program has increased from three recipients in 2016 to over 10 recipients this fall (learn more on page 6). Veterans, such as the student featured on page 17, comprise another important and growing student cohort. Through the Butler Commitment, alumnus Jim Butler (J.D.'77) has enabled us to guarantee financial aid to every veteran matriculating this fall.

Many of our students choose to serve state and society, including the judiciary. At the federal level, our alums represent more than half of the active Article III judges in the state of Georgia. In the Southern District, every Article III judge attended our law school. On the state level, our graduates occupy a variety of key posts, including Georgia

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Supreme Court Chief Justice Harold Melton (J.D.'91), featured on page 15. And, nearly 20% of our 2018 graduates served as judicial clerks after graduation. With programs such as the Edenfield Jurist in Residence and the new Be Kind Fund – created in memory of the late Chief Justice P. Harris Hines – federal and state jurists are brought into our classrooms respectively. The Be Kind Fund also provides summer fellowships to students clerking at the Supreme Court of Georgia.

First-rate legal training will always be core to our mission. Our classroom learning is enhanced by 17 clinical and experiential learning programs that serve as centers of excellence and equip our students with hands-on experience. The Wilbanks CEASE Clinic, dedicated to representing survivors of childhood sexual abuse, continues to represent survivors in civil cases and recently produced a path-breaking white paper on Georgia's Hidden Predator Act. The Veterans Legal Clinic opened its doors only last summer, and it is already handling a full caseload of claims from around the state.

The combination of authentic support, commitment to service and first-rate legal training yields important results. For the second straight year, our “employed-at-10-month” rate was one of the best in the nation and best in the state, exceeding 90% for full-time, long-term, “gold standard” jobs. For the second straight year, our “ultimate bar passage” rate was roughly 95%, meaning that virtually all of our graduates who sit for a bar pass within 12 months of graduation. For the fifth straight year, we have lowered student indebtedness with aggregate annual borrowing dropping approximately \$5.3 million since 2013, and roughly 38% graduated with no debt from their legal education during that same period. These are results of which we can all be proud. They make a difference both for our students' lives and for the legal profession.

In closing, let me encourage you to answer the call of your fellow alumni/alumnae leaders on the page opposite this letter. Mentor a student, hire a graduate, make a gift and invest in the momentum of your law school – a school on the rise.

Peter B. “Bo” Rutledge  
Dean and Herman E. Talmadge Chair of Law