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RWU Law News: The Newsletter of Roger Williams University School of Law 06-2020

Roger Williams University School of Law

Michael M. Bowden

Katie Mulvaney

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June 26, 2020

RWU Law News

The Newsletter of
Roger Williams University School of Law



June 2020

Farewell to Dean Yelnosky

A visionary leader and champion of social justice in legal education, Dean Michael J. Yelnosky steered RWU Law from the wake of the Great Recession through the upheavals of the COVID-19 pandemic, while continually positioning the school to remain “aggressively relevant.”



[Read More](#)

A Time of Change



Commencement 2020

Held in the midst of a pandemic, Commencement 2020 unfolded like none before it. But despite forced separation, the community truly came together.

[Relive it](#)

Welcome, Dean Bowman!

A nationally recognized scholar and educational leader, Dean Gregory W. Bowman vows to “build an even brighter future for legal education in Rhode Island.”

[Get details](#)





Our Newest Board Members

RWU Law's BOD welcomes 11 new leaders of the bench, bar and non-profit and business sectors -- many of them alums -- diverse in every sense; and excellent role models and advocates for our students."

[Learn more](#)

'The whole experience was just invaluable ...'



Nicole Yancy '18

RWU Law's first graduate to obtain a judicial clerkship with the Administrative Office of the Juvenile Court in Boston, Yancy is now Pennsylvania's first official Child Advocate.

[Nicole's Story](#)



Will Sheehan '20 selected for prestigious Immigration



25 ICE detainees win release with help of RWU



Tara Allen named Professor of the Year, exploring "that

Summer Legal Corps
Student Fellowship by EJW

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Law professors and
students, PBC, ACLU

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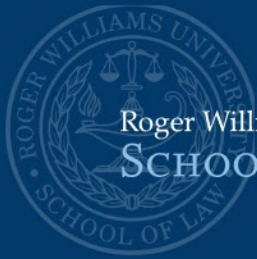
space between mystery and
mastery of the law.”

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SCHOOL OF LAW

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A Fond Farewell to Dean Michael Yelnosky

A visionary leader and champion of social justice in legal education, Yelnosky steered RWU Law from the wake of the Great Recession through the upheavals of the COVID-19 pandemic, continually positioning the school to remain “aggressively relevant.”

June 26, 2020

Michael M. Bowden



Faculty and staff bid a social-distance farewell to outgoing RWU Law Dean Michael Yelnosky, via car parade on the rainy Tuesday afternoon of June 30, 2020, his last day on the job.

Image Credit: Nicole Dyszlewski

On Tuesday, June 30, 2020, Dean Michael J. Yelnosky will step down as the fifth dean of Roger Williams University School of Law, concluding an extraordinary six-year tenure in that role. A visionary leader and champion of social justice in legal education, Yelnosky has dedicated 27 years to the law school, both as a founding faculty member and as dean.

“I am grateful to so many for this opportunity, and for supporting and working with me as dean,” he said. “Whether I was working on new programming, fundraising, diversity and inclusion, board engagement, or attracting and retaining an excellent faculty and staff, I tried to keep the needs of our students and alumni front of mind.”

Yelnosky's deanship marked an important period of growth for the school. At a time when many law schools were retrenching in the wake of the Great Recession, Yelnosky focused on positioning RWU Law to remain “aggressively relevant.”

Under his leadership, the school developed new and [innovative academic programming](#), while opening an experiential learning campus in Providence, [reducing tuition](#), and taking significant steps toward making the school [more diverse and inclusive](#). In the process, Roger Williams became the most affordable private ABA-accredited law school in the Northeast.

“Instead of being back on our heels, we started to declare the ways in which we were not like other law schools,” Yelnosky said. “It gave us, I think, the sense that we could be more than just passive observers of our market.”

His approach did much to solidify and grow confidence in and support for the school among students and alumni, as well as the broader bench and bar.

“A respected scholar, beloved teacher, and skilled ambassador to the Rhode Island bar and judiciary, Michael Yelnosky has set us on the course we will follow for decades to come.”

~ Judge William E. Smith, U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island

“With his deep commitment to public interest law and social justice issues, Michael Yelnosky has provided transformational leadership in guiding RWU Law,” said Judge William E. Smith of the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island, chair of the law school’s Board of Directors. “He is a respected scholar, beloved teacher, and skilled ambassador to the Rhode Island bar and judiciary, who has strengthened the law school’s reputation and relationships throughout the legal field. He has set us on the course we will follow for decades to come.”

A widely recognized expert on employment and labor law, as well as dispute resolution and judicial selection, Yelnosky plans to stay on as a full-time professor at RWU Law after he steps down as dean. Effective July 1, 2020, his successor and [RWU Law’s sixth dean, Gregory W. Bowman](#), will take the reins.

Yelnosky earned his B.S. degree from the University of Vermont and his J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania.

‘A Rock Star’

Voices from across the University community and throughout the state’s bench and bar are united in their praise for Yelnosky’s contributions as dean of RWU Law.

“For six years I have had the privilege of working side by side with Dean Yelnosky on behalf of the law school,” Judge Smith noted. “Michael has been a tireless advocate of the law school within the University, the Rhode Island legal community, and the rapidly expanding circles of the law school’s influence in the business, nonprofit and educational communities.”

Smith added, “He is universally respected and liked and has elevated the law school in countless ways. Above all, and most crucially, Michael has been a dean who always puts students first. Through good times and challenges alike, Michael has been a selfless, dedicated, kind — and occasionally very humorous! — leader, as well as a friend to everyone at RWU Law. We all owe him a deep debt of gratitude, and I know I speak for the entire Board when I say I hope he will be with us for many years to come.”

“Michael's warmth permeates the entire institution, setting just the right tone for a learning environment in which curiosity and hard work are rewarded and student accomplishments are truly celebrated.”

~ Professor Andrew Horwitz, Assistant Dean for Experiential Education

The Honorable Paul A. Suttell, Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, and a member of the Board, spoke admiringly of Yelnosky's leadership in difficult times.

“It is perhaps fitting that Michael, an original member of the faculty, has guided the law school during some very difficult times in legal education, and he has done so with equanimity and grace,” Chief Justice Suttell said. “Although the current pandemic prevents a proper celebration of his six-year tenure as dean, it cannot diminish his many achievements.”

Suttell went on to list several of these achievements.

“Michael has positioned the law school as a leader in experiential law, clinical programming, and public interest law,” he said. “He has strengthened the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the law school and the Rhode Island Judiciary. And his commitment to diversity and inclusion will no doubt reap benefits to the legal culture in Rhode Island for years to come. It has been a pleasure working with Michael and I look forward to his continued friendship.”

Speaking from a faculty standpoint was Yelnosky's longtime friend and colleague, Professor Andrew Horwitz, Assistant Dean for Experiential Education.

“Michael has made extraordinary contributions to RWU Law since its inception — as a faculty member, as an associate dean, and ultimately as a dean,” he said. “His humble and personable approach is exactly what the school needed to guide us through some very turbulent times.”

Horwitz explained, “Michael is thoughtful and open-minded, yet clear, firm, and decisive when that form of leadership is required. His warmth permeates the entire institution, setting just the right tone for a learning environment in which curiosity and hard work are rewarded and student accomplishments are truly celebrated. His shoes will be very hard to fill.”

On a personal note, Horwitz added, “Michael has been a good friend, a supporter, a confidant, and a trusted advisor to me for over 25 years. Working with him has been a great joy and having him as a friend an even greater one.”

Linn Foster Freedman, a partner with Robinson+Cole, former member of the Board, and namesake of the law school's Freedman Classroom, expressed admiration for the ways in which Yelnosky prioritized students.

“As dean, Michael was deeply committed to the law students,” she said. “He was always focused on the students’ experiential learning, well-being, and development. He was a strong, yet gentle, caring and fun leader of the law school.”

These characteristics, Freedman noted, also extended to the community at large.

“Not only was Michael committed to the students, he was also committed to the law school as a whole,” she said. “He was laser-focused on improving LSAT scores, providing employment opportunities for students, developing relationships with the judiciary and members of the bar, and improving the reputation of the law school. He was a rock star and we will miss him so much.”

Mission, Spirit and Culture

Speaking for many students and alumni was Nicole Benjamin '06, now vice-chair of RWU Law's Board and a shareholder at Adler Pollock & Sheehan P.C. in Providence.

“There are many who can take credit for impacting the lives of RWU alumni, but very few who can take credit for impacting the life of *every* RWU alumnus,” Benjamin said. “As a founding faculty member, Dean Yelnosky has made an indelible mark not only on RWU Law but also on the lives of every one of its graduates and, by extension, the legal community in Rhode Island and beyond. RWU Law is stronger, its graduates are brighter, and the public's legal needs are better served because of Dean Yelnosky's unwavering commitment to faculty scholarship, experiential learning and public interest law.”

“Michael has been central to developing this law school's sense of self since the very beginning. In many ways, he has defined the mission, spirit, and culture of the place.”

~ Michael Donnelly-Boylan, Assistant Dean of Admissions

Recent graduate Braxton Medlin '20, former president of RWU Law's Student Bar Association and now an associate at Pannone Lopes Devereaux & O'Gara LLC in Providence, underlined Benjamin's statement.

“Attending law school was a lifelong dream for me, and Dean Yelnosky helped to make it a reality,” he said. “Dean Yelnosky's reliable pleasantries, open-heartedness, and welcoming nature largely defined my law school experience. Even if he was in a rush, he never failed to make eye contact and give a warm smile. When opening up his home and family to students for those famous potlucks and pizza parties, he relished in having a drink and treating us like peers.”

Even in recent times, with troubling social issues reaching a boiling point, Medlin was impressed by Yelnosky's comportment and leadership.

“Given the complexities of the last several months of his tenure — ranging from a crippling pandemic to a much-too-delayed societal shift in the way the country addresses the issues that plague minority communities in the United States — Dean Yelnosky has personified the meanings of empathy, awareness, sensitivity, and humility,” Medlin said. “These are the essential traits of a great leader, and, more importantly, of a great man.”

Michael Donnelly-Boylen, RWU Law’s Assistant Dean of Admissions, noted that these very characteristics have, in many ways, come to define the law school itself.

“Michael has been central to developing this law school’s sense of self since the very beginning,” he said. “In many ways, he has defined the mission, spirit, and culture of the place. More than anything else, I will miss his tremendous empathy. He has led us with his heart and soul. That, to me, is the legacy of his deanship.”

Ralph Tavares, who joined RWU Law last fall as its new Director of Diversity and Outreach, agreed.

“In the short time I have been a part of this institution, I’ve learned about the deep commitment the school has had in the woven work of diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and social justice,” Tavares said. “Where Michael's predecessor, Dean [David] Logan, created a strong foundation point for the law school to build upon, Michael has created an intricate structure of support for that work to continue. I have encountered very few leaders in my professional career who have understood the complexity of this work, and fewer still who have shown the commitment to long-term change that Michael has embodied.”

Lorraine Lalli, Assistant Dean of Students emphasized the importance of building upon Yelnosky's work.

“It been great working so closely with Michael for so many years — first when he was associate dean, and later as dean,” she said. “Even today, the challenges facing the law school and our students continue to evolve, and we must continue to innovate to provide the best education and opportunities for our students. Michael always approached our work with a kindness and caring that was unmatched — an approach that always put students at the center. And it is precisely his people-first perspective that I value and admire.”

A Commencement Like No Other

RWU Law graduates, family, friends, alumni, faculty and staff gather online for a "Virtual Commencement" to mark what should have been — and anticipate in-person celebrations to come.

May 15, 2020

Michael M. Bowden



"Virtual Commencement" 2020 at RWU Law

A cool, cloudy morning gave way to a sunny afternoon in Bristol Friday as a “virtual Commencement” observance was held to honor the 147 graduates of [Roger Williams University School of Law’s Class of 2020](#), pending an in-person event to be held when the COVID-19 pandemic has passed.

The ceremony opened with a brief, live preamble on Zoom, which was hosted by Dean Michael J. Yelnosky and gave graduates (some wearing graduation robes for the occasion), faculty, staff and families a chance to see one another at the moment the processional march would have begun.

Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo opened [the 45-minute video ceremony](#) — hosted on YouTube premieres, and assembled by RWU Law's events, communications, and marketing departments — with a frank acknowledgement of what everyone was undoubtedly thinking: “I know this isn’t exactly how you thought your graduation ceremony would be ...”

The governor went on, however, to state, “You are going into a good and noble profession, and I have very high hopes for you. I can’t wait to see all that you’ll accomplish.”

Dean Yelnosky’s then took the virtual podium, noting that, “What is missing today is simple, but profound. We cannot be proximate, and that has robbed you of much of the magic of this day. But not all of it.”

Yelnosky told the graduates that, as lawyers, “you now have special skills and status that will allow you to help strengthen and improve your communities, wherever they may be. One client, one neighbor, one child at a time, you can and will change the world.”

And he promised that a real celebration — complete with handshakes, hugs and kisses on the cheek — would be held on a future day, when “we all can be together.”

“We did it. And nothing, not even a global pandemic, can take that away from us.”

~ *Valedictorian Sarah Boucher*

Next came a message from [Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall](#), retired 35th Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, who was awarded an honorary doctorate of law and was to have given the commencement address at the in-person event originally planned for this day.

Drawing on the experiences of her university days as an anti-Apartheid activist in her native South Africa, and the countless small gestures and victories that ultimately led to victory in that struggle, she urged RWU Law's graduates to fight for the United States' values and institutions.

“These are challenging times for *our* freedom,” she said. “I’m not speaking of threats from abroad. I am speaking of threats to liberty arising here at home, threats to the very structure of government, on which our freedom rests. Your intellect, energy and daring can contribute so much to the solutions for our breaking systems.”

Marshall added, “Each of you must decide whether to protect our constitutional values or to repudiate them. And make no mistake: inaction and indifference *are* acts of repudiation.”

Honorary degrees were also presented to [Dennis W. Nixon](#), the director of Rhode Island Sea Grant, a professor of marine affairs at the University of Rhode Island, and a member of the advisory board of the Marine Affairs Institute at RWU Law; and to [Olin W. Thompson, III](#), a former and much-admired assistant federal public defender for the District of Rhode Island, who is currently battling ALS.

It was a year to mark milestones as well. The [commencement program](#) offered an *in memoriam* to Professor Anthony J. Santoro, the founding dean of RWU Law (1992-1993) and President Emeritus of Roger Williams University (1993-2000), who died at 77 on September 9, 2019, following a short illness.

Tribute was also paid to Yelnosky himself, who will step down on June 30, 2020, concluding an extraordinary six-year deanship at RWU Law. A visionary leader and champion of social justice in legal education, Yelnosky has dedicated 27 years to the law school, both as a founding faculty member and as dean. His tenure marked an important period of growth for the school. At a time when many law schools were retrenching in the wake of recession, Dean Yelnosky focused on positioning RWU Law to remain “aggressively relevant.”

RWU President Ioannis Maioulis, Ph.D., certified the graduates, noting that the virtual nature of Friday's celebration did "not diminish the importance of the day or how proud you should be to have reached this amazing accomplishment. There is nothing ‘virtual’ about what you have done over the past three years.”

Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Jared Goldstein read the roll call of graduates. Dean Yelnosky awarded the Dean's Distinguished Service Award to Professor Raquel M. Ortiz, assistant dean for Library & Information Services.

Chosen by the graduating class, [Professor Tara I. Allen](#) was honored as Professor of the Year, and Chief Justice Weisberger Visiting Professor of Law [David Coombs](#) was named Adjunct Professor of the Year. As Staff Member of the Year, the class selected [Ann Marie Thompson](#), assistant director of Student Finance & Records.

Despite the lack of an in-person Commencement ceremony, valedictorian Sarah D. Boucher urged her classmates to celebrate all the same. "Three years of stress, frustration, maybe a few tears, and an unbelievable amount of hard work and dedication, have finally paid off," she said. "We did it. And nothing, not even a global pandemic, can take that away from us."

RWU Law Announces Sixth Dean

A nationally recognized scholar and educational leader, Dean-Designate Gregory W. Bowman vows to "build an even brighter future for legal education in Rhode Island."

April 13, 2020

Michael M. Bowden



RWU Law Dean-Designate Gregory W. Bowman

BRISTOL, R.I., April 13, 2020 – The Roger Williams University School of Law Board of Directors on Monday announced that Gregory W. Bowman, a nationally recognized scholar who has been serving as dean of the highly regarded West Virginia University College of Law, will become RWU Law’s sixth dean, effective July 1, 2020.

“On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am thrilled to have Dean Bowman joining the law school,” said the Honorable William E. Smith, chairman of the board. “Dean Bowman brings broad experience as a successful law school dean at West Virginia University as well as a solid reputation as a national leader in legal education that will serve us well as we enter our next 25 years. I have no doubt that Dean Bowman will be a terrific asset to the law school, the University, and to the entire Rhode Island legal community.”

Bowman expressed enthusiasm about the appointment. “I am really excited and honored to be joining the RWU community,” he said. “RWU Law does a wonderful job of serving the public and training the lawyers and leaders of tomorrow, and it makes such a difference in people’s lives. I’m looking forward to working with everyone at RWU to build an even brighter future for legal education in Rhode Island.”

“Not adapting puts the entire enterprise of legal education at risk – and thus places our democratic society and ideals at risk. And so we must innovate in the face of uncertainty.”

~ RWU Law Dean-Designate Gregory W. Bowman

Roger Williams University President Ioannis Miaoulis said Bowman is an excellent fit to lead Rhode Island’s only law school. “Gregory Bowman exemplifies the innovation and vision necessary to adapt to the changing legal landscape that are the hallmarks of RWU Law,” Miaoulis said. “As the next dean, Greg will continue to advance the law school’s mission of educating practice-ready lawyers and serving the area’s neediest populations, strengthening its reputation regionally and nationally.”

Current RWU Law Dean Michael J. Yelnosky, who will return to teaching at the law school at the end of this academic year, agreed that Bowman’s impressive track record demonstrates tremendous potential to carry the institution forward.

“I am delighted that Dean Bowman has chosen to bring his considerable talents to help us write the next chapter of the RWU Law story,” Yelnosky said. “He is a proven leader, teacher, and scholar, and he is well-acquainted with the challenges and opportunities of the current legal education landscape, and with the rapid changes taking place in law practice.”

Yelnosky added that Bowman’s past experience will serve him well in the Ocean State. “He knows what it is like to be the leader of a state’s only law school,” Yelnosky said. “During his time at WVU, he helped launch new programs and expanded the law school’s reach into Switzerland, Russia, Uganda, and Mexico. Frankly, it is hard to imagine a more qualified candidate to become our next dean. I welcome him and look forward to assisting him in any way I can.”

A native of West Virginia, Bowman became the William J. Maier, Jr. Dean of the WVU College of Law in 2015 after serving for a year as Interim Dean at the school. Prior to that he served as the college's Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. A widely published, nationally recognized scholar on international trade law and legal education, he first joined the faculty in 2009. Earlier, he taught at Mississippi College School of Law and the University of Mississippi School of Law.

In a 2019 article in the *Toledo Law Review*, titled, "The Rise of the Creative Law School," Bowman set out an ambitious vision to help ensure that legal education – and the legal profession – remains relevant and responsive in the 21st century.

Bowman wrote: "If the practice of law is changing rapidly (it is), and the perspective of prospective students on the value of law school is changing (it is), and career prospects are no longer automatically seen as a safe return on investment for the cost of law school (they are not), and the market place of the future needs lawyers who have greater career flexibility and stronger soft skills (it will, and in fact already does), then law schools need to adapt to these changes, and they need to adapt *now*."

Bowman concluded: "Not adapting puts the entire enterprise of legal education at risk – and thus places our democratic society and ideals at risk. And so we must innovate in the face of uncertainty." Yet, "if we can dare to be aspirational, even in an age of financial challenges – then the future of American legal education will be bright."

Bowman is a graduate of WVU, where he earned his B.A. in International Studies and Economics, *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa. He also studied in Denmark as a Rotary Exchange Student and received his master's degree in Economics with distinction from the University of Exeter, England, before receiving his J.D. *cum laude* from the Northwestern University School of Law.

Bowman received the Award for Outstanding Teaching from the WVU Foundation in 2014, and he was named "Professor of the Year" in 2011 by WVU Law students. He is the founding director of the College of Law's Geneva Study Abroad Program. Prior to his teaching career, Bowman practiced law in Chicago and Washington, D.C. with the international law firm of Baker McKenzie.

Dean Bowman was selected after a national search led by Storbeck Search & Associates, a national search firm focused on higher education and nonprofit organizations.

Meet Our New Board Members

RWU Law's BOD welcomes 11 new “leaders of the bench, bar and non-profit and business sectors; diverse in every sense; and, like those who preceded them, excellent role models and advocates for our students.”

June 11, 2020

Michael M. Bowden



Roger Williams University School of Law is proud to announce an impressive roster of 11 new members to its Board of Directors, representing a broad cross section of the bench and bar. Their tenures will begin on July 1, when [nine longtime directors will cycle off the board](#).

“Even as we say goodbye to that stalwart group, we are fortunate and proud to welcome an assemblage of equally outstanding new members,” said board chair Judge William E. Smith, of the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island. “They are once again leaders of the bench, bar and non-profit and business sectors; diverse in every sense; and, like those who preceded them, excellent role models and advocates for our students.”

Demonstrating the growing maturity of Rhode Island’s only law school, the full board of 30 members – which includes [incoming Dean Gregory W. Bowman](#) in an *ex officio* capacity – will boast no fewer than 12 RWU Law alumni, six of them from among the new group of members.

[Outgoing Dean Michael J. Yelnosky](#), whose term ends on June 30, said he is confident that the School of Law is in good hands.

“I am thrilled for the law school and for Dean Bowman that so many talented and committed individuals have agreed to join our Board of Directors,” Yelnosky said. “They are a remarkable group, and I am especially pleased at the increase in the number of RWU Law alumni who are now members of the board. It is a sign of our maturity as an institution, and those alumni are proof positive of the impact our graduates are having in their chosen fields.”

Dean Bowman said he looks forward to working with the full board membership.

“The new members of the board are a truly impressive group of leaders from the bench and bar,” Bowman said. “It will be a pleasure collaborating with the common goal of serving the law school and the state of Rhode Island.”

The new members of the RWU Law Board of Directors are:



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- Collin Bailey '08
 - Vice President, Technology Business Office, Hudson's Bay Company



-

- Alyssa Boss '97
 - Partner, Cameron & Mittleman



- Marek P. Bute '05
 - Strategic Engagements Business Development Manager, Amazon Web Services



- J. Scott Kilpatrick
 - Partner, Chisholm, Chisholm & Kilpatrick



-
- Zachary Mandell '11
 - Partner, Mandell, Boisclair & Mandell



-
- Michael Robinson '00
 - Partner, Shechtman, Halperin, Savage



-
- Ondine Galvez Sniffin
 - Law Offices of Ondine Galvez Sniffin



-
- The Honorable Brian Stern
 - Rhode Island Superior Court



-
- Katherine Sulentic '09
 - Associate Director of Enforcement, NCAA Academic Integrity Unit



-
- The Honorable O. Rogeriee Thompson
 - United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit



-
- Stephen Zubiago
 - Partner, Nixon Peabody

Judge Smith will continue as chair of the Board. Nicole J. Benjamin, Esq. '06 of Adler Pollock & Sheehan P.C. will serve as vice-chair, the Honorable Patricia Sullivan as treasurer, and Howard Merten, Esq. of Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP as secretary. A [full list of the RWU Law Board of Directors](#) for the 2020-21 academic year can be found [here](#).

A Woman of Firsts



Nicole N. Yancy, RWU Class of 2018

[Juris Doctor](#)

Nicole Yancy '18 is a woman of firsts.

Immediately upon completing her J.D., she became RWU Law's first graduate to obtain a judicial clerkship with the Administrative Office of the Juvenile Court in Boston. Earlier this year, she “graciously declined” a second term there in order to return to her native Pennsylvania and become that state’s first official Child Advocate.

“While 22 other states have an Office of Child Advocates, I am the first one appointed for the state of Pennsylvania,” Yancy noted.

It’s a role for which she is uniquely suited. In addition to a strong legal education “with a particular interest in child welfare policy and juvenile law” at Roger Williams, Yancy holds a master’s degree in social work from Rutgers. She previously worked for the Department of Human Services in the Children and Youth division in Philadelphia as a training and development supervisor in the area of child abuse and neglect, risk and safety assessment and

case planning for families, as well as supervising the department's multi-disciplinary team and ongoing sex abuse unit.

“One of the most exciting and gratifying things about my role now is that it's a new position in a newly established office,” Yancy said. “That puts me in a position to identify measures that will create positive outcomes for children and youth, to enhance their safety and protection from abuse and neglect, and to ensure that the quality of services they receive are delivered in a manner that upholds their dignity and rights. It allows me to lay the groundwork in areas where a child advocate could be most impactful for vulnerable populations and to make systemic changes that will improve the lives of so many children, youth and families statewide.”

A 'Unique Mix' of Skills

Clearly, Yancy brings a powerful passion and deep reservoir of skills to the position.

“I have no doubt that my past child welfare experience and the recent experience and knowledge I gained as a law clerk were primary factors in my selection,” she said. Yancy also brings skills gained while “working with the immigrant community on legal matters surrounding deportation and housing, representing families in cases of abuse, neglect and dependency petitions.”

Indeed, these are exactly the qualifications cited by Yancy's new boss, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf – who recently created the state's Office of Advocacy and Reform by executive order, based on the recommendations of his Council on Reform

“Pennsylvania can now focus more effort on the specific needs and support of some of its most vulnerable – its children – through the work of Nicole and her office,” Gov. Wolf said. “Nicole's experience and dedication to children throughout her career will be a big asset to the work already underway at the Office of Advocacy and Reform.”

Wolf added that Yancy's specific skill set was exactly what the position demanded.

“The unique mix of Nicole's child welfare experience with her law degree, combined with her passion for protecting children, make her the perfect fit for this new position and a strong addition to the Office of Advocacy and Reform,” he said.

'Significant Opportunities'

Yancy credits RWU Law with laying “the foundation for my experience in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems,” by affording her “several significant opportunities that helped to enhance my knowledge and skills and which ultimately led to my current role.”

While studying law at Roger Williams, Yancy said, she obtained a transformative internship with the Rhode Island Office of Children, Youth and Families' Office of Legal Counsel. She also participated in the Alternative Spring Break Program, where she was assigned to the Manhattan branch of New York's Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Right's Practice Division. Later, she was selected to participate in the RWU Law Immigration Clinic.

In that role, "I represented indigent clients in matters involving deportation, adjustment of status, and employment authorization," she noted. "I also had the opportunity to observe Family Court proceedings involving unaccompanied minors."

One of her most rewarding experiences at Roger Williams, Yancy said, was externing as a student attorney with Rhode Island Legal Services.

It was "a unique experience that allowed me to gain classroom knowledge and learn lawyering skills from my field instructor, [Suzanne Harrington-Steppen](#), while also gaining hands-on experience representing parents in Rhode Island Family Court under the supervision of the dedicated attorneys in RILS Family Preservation Program," Yancy said. "The whole experience was just invaluable to me, because it taught me practical lawyering skills such as timekeeping, while enhancing other skills such as advocacy, problem-solving, and client counseling."

She expects to draw upon all of these skills in her new position.

"Being selected to participate in the RWU Law externship program helped to round out my knowledge of the child welfare and family court system," Yancy said. "The skills I obtained will no doubt aid my work as the Child Advocate of Pennsylvania."

In addition to [Harrington-Steppen](#), Yancy specifically credits [Laurie Barron](#), [Jodi Haley](#), [Justin Kishbaugh](#), [Veronica Paricio](#), and [Kathy Thompson](#) as being essential and "genuine" contributors to her law school success. "With their encouragement, guidance and support, I gained multiple invaluable field experiences while enrolled, and ultimately graduated with honors," she said.

Will Sheehan '20 Selected for Prestigious Immigration Fellowship

Sheehan will work with the Health Justice Program of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest on asylum and U-visa cases for individuals with serious health conditions.

June 17, 2020

Michael M. Bowden



Will Sheehan '20

Will Sheehan '20 has been selected for a prestigious 2020 Immigration Summer Legal Corps Student Fellowship by Equal Justice Works. He will work with the Health Justice Program of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest.

“I was so excited to hear I received a spot with the fellowship and even more excited to match up with my first choice of placement,” Sheehan said. “It is such an incredible honor to be joining the company of the most passionate law graduates, who have a proven record of showing up for immigrants and want to use their law degrees to continue and develop their advocacy. I hope to

learn as much as I can about client-centered, trauma-informed lawyering, and I hope to empower my clients to feel confident and well-guided in their legal cases.”

Though he graduated from Roger Williams University School of Law in May, Sheehan qualified because he applied for the fellowship while still a student. “And because I was able to take the February 2020 bar exam, I could pursue this internship after graduation, since I didn't have to worry about studying this summer,” he said.

As one of just 20 fellows selected from 375 applications nationwide, Sheehan will be hosted at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI), where he will provide support on the organization’s Health Justice Program, including completion of comprehensive immigration and health screenings. Sheehan will also work closely with NYLPI’s immigration attorney on several representation matters, including asylum and U-visas cases for individuals with serious health conditions.

“Low-income immigrant communities in New York have been hit particularly hard by coronavirus pandemic,” said Aoife Delargy Lowe, director of law school engagement and advocacy at Equal Justice Works. “We are grateful to Will for choosing to spend his summer helping immigrant New Yorkers, including undocumented and uninsured immigrants, to effectively access health care services.”

Sheehan’s alma mater is pleased as well.

“Will is a fabulous choice for the 2020 Immigration Summer Legal Corps Fellowship,” said Eliza Vorenberg, RWU Law's Director of Pro Bono & Community Partnerships and Pro Bono Collaborative Director. “He has been a consistent voice for social justice throughout his time at RWU Law, and he is truly passionate about the work he is taking on. That he was awarded this fellowship and that he is choosing to spend his post-graduate and post-bar-passage summer working on behalf of immigrants is a testament to his commitment and to his mettle.”

Vorenberg added that Sheehan has both a background and a future in the field.

“He spent last spring as a New York Pro Bono Scholar learning about immigration law at the Peter Cicchino Youth Project of the Urban Justice Center, and next fall he will begin a two-year Immigrant Justice Corps fellowship at the Safe Passage Project,” she said. “I could not be prouder to call Will one of our public interest graduates.”

The Equal Justice Works Immigration Summer Legal Corps (ISLC), is a new eight-to ten-week summer law student program that places law students at legal services organizations to respond to the critical needs of underserved and low-income immigrant communities. Participants (called "student fellows") have the unique opportunity to explore their passion for public interest while gaining valuable legal skills and experience in immigration law. ISLC provides a \$5,000 stipend for completing 300 hours of service in the program. As part of the Immigration Summer Legal Corps, student fellows are hosted at legal services organizations, and spend the summer helping to expand high-quality comprehensive legal services and resources for low-income immigrants.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, Student Fellows are working remotely this summer to support the efforts of their host organization.

Additional information about the program can be found [here](#).

ACLU wins release of 25 ICE detainees at Wyatt

By [Katie Mulvaney](#)

Journal Staff Writer

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PROVIDENCE -- The American Civil Liberties Union over the past three weeks has won the conditional release of 25 Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainees being held at the Donald W. Wyatt Detention Facility due to concerns posed by the potential spread of the coronavirus at the privately owned prison.

The ACLU filed a class-action suit last month, seeking “urgent” conditional release of about 70 immigration detainees after multiple inmates tested positive for COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the coronavirus.

[U.S. District Court Judge Mary S. McElroy ordered](#) immediate bail hearings for any detainees whose release ACLU lawyers and federal prosecutors could not agree on.

McElroy issued a 15-page written order detailing the difficulties Wyatt has had in containing the spread of COVID-19 due to the detainees’ close quarters and shared cells. The judge observed that the conditions “present a case for a substantial claim of constitutional error and present facts which may lead the court to conclude that their

continued detention under these circumstances presents a substantial risk of serious harm of death.”

As of Monday, 57 Wyatt detainees had tested positive for the virus, with 20 active cases remaining, none of which are ICE detainees, according to a report filed in federal court by Wyatt.

Seventeen staff have also tested positive, with five active cases remaining.

McElroy, lawyers for the ACLU and federal prosecutors embarked on remote bail hearings for some three dozen detainees, some facing imminent deportation. McElroy agreed to release 16 with conditions, such as being monitored and staying under quarantine for 14 days. ICE agreed to release nine others, according to the ACLU. Twenty-four ICE detainees remain confined at the Central Falls facility.

“It is no exaggeration to say that the stakes in this case involved life and death. The Constitution does not allow the government to imprison people under conditions that unreasonably threaten their lives,” Jared Goldstein, a Roger Williams University School of Law professor who represented some of the detainees for the ACLU, said in a statement.

“I’m proud to see that our Constitution worked to protect the health and lives of those who have been released. I regret that any immigrants remain behind the locked doors and barbed wire at Wyatt, but I’m hopeful that the reduced population may make social distancing more possible,” Goldstein continued.

ICE officials declined to comment on the allegations raised in the lawsuit because the litigation remains pending.

“With that said, I would just point out that, from the start of the pandemic, the health, welfare and safety of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainees has remained one of the agency’s highest priorities,” Todd M. Lyons, field office director, for

ICE's enforcement and removal operation in Boston, said in an email statement.

The ACLU secured the release of three other medically vulnerable ICE detainees from Wyatt in a separate earlier lawsuit.

kmulvane@providencejournal.com

(401) 277-7417

On Twitter: [@kmulvane](https://twitter.com/kmulvane)

Professor of the Year: Tara Allen

“This class embraced my rather nontraditional teaching methods, and trusted themselves enough to step boldly into that space between mystery and mastery of the law.”

May 14, 2020

Michael M. Bowden



RWU Law Professor of the Year Tara Allen.

Tara I. Allen, RWU Law Associate Professor of Law, has been voted by the Class of 2020 as Professor of the Year!

When she joined the full-time faculty in 2018, Professor Allen was already a familiar face to many in the Roger Williams family: she had been earning rave reviews as an adjunct for several years, and also served as an externship supervisor for RWU Law students placed in the federal defenders office.

“When Professor Allen formally joined our faculty, we knew she would be a popular teacher,” said Dean Michael J. Yelnosky. But she exceeded already high expectations with her extraordinary responsiveness to student feedback and ideas, constantly refining her approach to provide optimal learning experiences.

“Recently, she has experimented with integrating numerous simulation exercises into even her large enrollment courses,” Yelnosky noted. “Her willingness to adjust her approach to better educate her students is indicative of the commitment that the graduates honored when they selected her as Professor of the Year.”

Professor Allen herself, however, was taken totally by surprise.

“As a member of the law school’s junior faculty, I am honored — and floored — that the Class of 2020 chose me as its Professor of the Year,” she said.

But she acknowledged that her approach to legal education is very much a two-way street.

“What I love most about teaching is showing students how to find their own voices rather than insisting that they parrot back mine,” Allen explained. The Class of 2020, she added, was especially open to this sort of dialogue.

“This class embraced my rather nontraditional teaching methods, and trusted themselves enough to step boldly into that space between mystery and mastery of the law,” Professor Allen said. “While many of us anticipate that this year’s graduates will be tasked in unique ways post-COVID-19, I fervently believe that our law school community has equipped them to overcome any challenges that lay ahead. I can hardly wait to see their future successes!”

Before joining RWU Law, Professor Allen was an Assistant Federal Defender for the Federal District of Rhode Island from 2012, representing indigent defendants in federal criminal proceedings of all kinds. Prior to that, she was a trial attorney for federal defenders’ offices in the Western District of Pennsylvania and the Eastern District of California. She has also served as staff counsel in the U.S. Courts of Appeals for the Ninth and Second Circuits. In addition, Allen has more than a dozen years of teaching experience, including stints at U.C. Hastings and McGeorge School of Law.

At RWU Law, Allen teaches Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure, and Evidence. She earned her B.A. from Wesleyan University and her J.D. from Northeastern.