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RWU Law Commencement: Passing the Baton to the Next Generation

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Recommended Citation

Public Affairs, Roger Williams University, "RWU Law Commencement: Passing the Baton to the Next Generation" (2012). *Featured News Story*. 27.

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RWU Law Commencement: Passing the Baton to the Next Generation

RWU Law's 17th Commencement took place Friday under clear blue skies, as 183 new law school graduates were awarded J.D. degrees before a crowd of nearly 2,000.



The Honorable Jack Weinstein gets excited about his honorary doctor of laws from Roger Williams University School of Law.

May 18, 2012

Bristol, R.I. – Roger Williams University School of Law's 17th Commencement took place Friday under clear blue skies, as 183 new law school graduates were awarded juris doctor degrees before a crowd of nearly 2,000.

Some highlights of the day:

- Renowned jurist and judicial reformer, the Honorable Jack B. Weinstein, delivered the keynote and was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree.
- The Honorable Maureen McKenna Goldberg, Senior Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, was also awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

- Katherine Newby Kishfy delivered the Valedictory Address.
- Professor John Chung and Professor Keeva Terry were awarded tenure.
- Assistant Dean of Career Services Anthony L. Bastone II received the Dean's Distinguished Service Award. Dean Bastone is retiring this year after eight years at RWU Law, and a career spanning three decades.
- Professor John Chung was named Professor of the Year
- John Grasso, Esq. '06 was named Adjunct Professor of the Year
- Custodian Manny Tavares was named the recipient of the first Student Bar Association award for an RWU Law staff member who makes special efforts on a daily basis to make the law student experience positive.

RWU Law Dean David A. Logan opened the ceremony by recalling his own dean's commencement remark that law school is an exercise in "making mental effort under criticism" – an often difficult, but ultimately rewarding experience.

President Donald J. Farish, Ph.D., J.D. noted that the law school, in its now nearly 20-year history, has had a "profound impact" on the workings of the State of Rhode Island.

"There is also no question that the law school has played a significant role in reducing corruption and unethical behavior on the part of public officials," President Farish said.

"You have entered an honorable profession," he added. "As a nation that follows the rule of law, we depend on some of each generation's sharpest minds becoming lawyers and ensuring that the rights of society are balanced with the rights of the individual."

The Honorable Jack B. Weinstein opened his address by honoring the school's namesake, noting that Roger Williams "was a preeminent fighter for religious freedom, liberty and justice for all."

Acknowledging the difficult economy into which this year's class is graduating, he offered encouragement and perspective.

"When I graduated from law school, my classmates and I – like you today – nervously faced an unfathomable world of somewhat bleak futures. Sixty years ago, I had a law degree but no job and no immediate prospect of one. The law found for me an exciting and productive life, as it will for each of you."

Judge Weinstein also touched on his personal crusade against mandatory sentencing guidelines. "Today our federal criminal law remains unnecessarily brutal," he said. "As Nietzsche advised, we should 'distrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful.'"

He added that “the themes of equality, opportunity and freedom have been central to what we are as a nation. They’ve ruled our spirit from the Declaration of Independence to Brown v. Board of Education and beyond.”

He closed by noting, “Your generation like mine will not solve all the issues that vex the world, but you have the skills and the ethical and moral obligation to try. The baton in the race for equality, justice and democracy in the law passes now to you.”

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