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RWU Law: New Dean, Reduced Tuition, Expanded Focus on Experiential Learning

Affordable Excellence makes RWU Law a best-value law school; founding faculty member Michael J. Yelnosky to succeed David A. Logan as dean



January 15, 2014 | Public Affairs Staff

BRISTOL, R.I. – As part of a comprehensive strategy for confronting the most pressing challenges facing America’s law schools – the cost to earn a law degree; rising student debt; and the job readiness of graduates – Roger Williams University President Donald J. Farish announced today that the University has expanded its signature Affordable Excellence initiative to its School of Law.

Simultaneously, Farish named Michael J. Yelnosky, – a founding faculty member, former associate dean for academic affairs, and key leader in Roger Williams University School of Law’s two-decade legacy as Rhode Island’s only law school and as a leading institution in Southern New England – the School’s next dean. Yelnosky will succeed David A. Logan, one of the nation’s longest-serving law deans, when Logan steps down this summer to return to teaching at RWU Law.

The dual announcement comes as RWU Law expands its commitment to offering students a rigorous, marketable legal education that enables graduates to emerge job-ready and prepared to thrive in their early careers, even in today's challenging legal employment market. Among other efforts during this academic year alone, the School launched a new Community Economic Development Clinic in which students provide business-related legal services to nonprofits and community-based businesses; introduced its expanded Feinstein Center for Pro Bono and Experiential Education; and instituted an explicit guarantee that every qualified student will be afforded a substantial clinical experience.

The expansion of Affordable Excellence to the School of Law builds on what has become a signature initiative for Roger Williams University. For undergraduates, Affordable Excellence has meant both cost savings (tuition has been frozen at the 2012 level, and a four-year tuition guarantee means costs do not rise while students remain enrolled) and an enhanced, career-focused academic experience (real-world, project-based learning has become embedded in the undergraduate experience at Roger Williams).

After an initial year of success following the October 2012 launch of Affordable Excellence (including a larger-than-expected incoming class in 2013 and a major jump in freshman-to-sophomore retention), the University redoubled its commitment to the initiative this fall. Today, in describing how Affordable Excellence will address cost and debt for law students, Farish outlined three key actions:

1. For the 2014-15 academic year, the School of Law will reduce tuition from \$41,400 to \$33,792, an approximately 18 percent reduction (\$7,608) that brings the law school's tuition to the same rate paid by the University's architecture students; architecture is the University's other signature professional program that, like the law, requires formal licensure before graduates can practice.
2. For all law students currently enrolled and for those who enter in the 2014-15 incoming class, a tuition guarantee will be implemented immediately. The tuition rate of \$33,792 will not increase for up to three years for all students who remain continuously enrolled full time.
3. Currently enrolled law students will have the option of keeping their existing financial aid award with the current price of tuition, or waiving their current financial aid award and moving to the new tuition model. As a practical matter, students with aid above \$7,608 will probably choose to keep their current level of aid, and students with aid below \$7,608, or with no aid, will presumably opt for the new tuition model. Giving current students that option ensures that *no student* at the law school taking the typical 30-credit load will pay more than \$33,792.

The tuition reduction and guarantee will reduce the sticker price of a law degree at RWU Law by about \$30,000 and result in lower debt loads for law students, important steps forward in an environment when the availability of legal jobs nationwide has diminished and starting salaries have dropped. For future attorneys who plan to go into public interest law – a key area of emphasis at Roger Williams University School of Law – the savings will be particularly meaningful.

“This reduced tuition rate makes Roger Williams University School of Law one of the best values on the East Coast and creates access for an even broader population of future attorneys,” Farish says. “As the only law school in Rhode Island, we see this as particularly important to residents of our state. Yet the supportive, personalized environment that our students treasure and our unwavering focus on hands-on learning opportunities means the quality of our education only continues to advance.”



Yelnosky’s appointment as dean comes as the law school celebrates a 20-year legacy of preparing students for law practice, producing outstanding scholarship, enhancing the legal culture across Southern New England, and providing legal service to individuals and communities in need. His selection concludes a search process initiated in August, when Logan announced that he would return to teaching following this academic year.

As a founding faculty member who served a four-year term as associate dean for academic affairs from 2004 to 2008, Yelnosky (who, in 2011, was named distinguished service professor of law) has played an integral role in the School of Law’s early history and has participated in developing many of its signature programs. At a time when major challenges face the legal profession and legal education nationwide, he emerged as an ideal candidate for moving the school forward while providing continuity and stability.

“Not only has Michael Yelnosky been an instrumental force in RWU Law’s emergence as a major influence on our region’s legal culture, educating practice-ready lawyers and serving the area’s neediest populations, he has been a consistent voice of wisdom, innovation and progress as the School adjusts to changing professional and economic realities outside the academic world,” Farish says. “His deep understanding of the law school’s strengths, combined with his insight and vision on meeting the challenges now facing legal education, make him the ideal choice for this vital role going forward.”

Yelnosky says that having spent virtually his entire career in legal education at the School of Law, Roger Williams is a special place for him: “I have seen the school grow into a remarkable institution through the hard work and talents of the faculty, staff, students, alumni, trustees, and our many other friends and supporters – members of the bench and bar and other community and government leaders. I look forward to helping us continue to design and implement innovative approaches to preparing our students for modern law practice while remaining true to our core values of teaching, scholarship and community service.”

A research fellow with NYU School of Law's Center for Labor and Employment Law, Yelnosky is an expert in employment and labor law. He has served as president of the Rhode Island chapter of the Labor and Employment Relations Association, and he arbitrated a major dispute between the Rhode Island Brotherhood of Correctional Officers and the State Department of Corrections.

Another focus of his scholarship involves the judicial selection process. He has written several articles and hosted a major symposium on Rhode Island's judicial merit selection system, and the results of his research into the role of the ABA in the federal judicial selection process will soon appear in the Roger Williams Law Review. In 2013, he published an op-ed in the Washington Post that summarized the major findings of that research. He is regularly quoted in the media on these and other topics.

In the classroom, Yelnosky is a favorite with 1L students in Civil Procedure and with second- and third-year students in Employment Law, Labor Law, Employment Discrimination, and Judicial Behavior and Social Change Litigation, which he taught with the Honorable William E. Smith, chief judge of the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island.

In his previous administrative role as associate dean, Yelnosky was instrumental in leading the law school's successful effort to gain membership in the prestigious Association of American Law Schools. He also designed and conducted annual studies of the scholarly output of the faculties of most American law schools, which documented the achievements of the faculty at Roger Williams (fifth in New England, trailing only Yale, Harvard, Boston University and Boston College) and garnered national attention.

Yelnosky graduated cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania School of Law and magna cum laude from the University of Vermont. Before entering academia, he served as a law clerk for the Honorable Edmund V. Ludwig in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and worked for two law firms: Mellon, Webster & Mellon; and Morgan, Lewis, & Bockius.

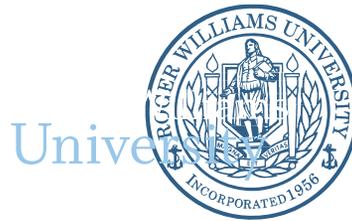
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