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The Late RWU President Donald J. Farish to be Honored by Student Personnel Administrators

At regional conference in Providence on Tuesday, national association will present President’s Award to Farish’s widow

November 12, 2018  |  By Edward Fitzpatrick

BRISTOL, R.I. – The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators will honor the late RWU President Donald J. Farish with its President’s Award during the group’s annual Region I Conference at the Rhode Island Convention Center on Tuesday, Nov. 13.

President Farish’s widow, Maia Farish, will accept the award, which is presented to a college or university president or chancellor who has, over a sustained period, advanced the quality of student life on campus by supporting the institution’s student affairs staff and initiatives.

“Don Farish’s concern for students and engagement with them across campus was one of the hallmarks of his presidency,” RWU Interim President Andy Workman said. “His omnipresence at sporting events, music, dance, drama performances and many other student activities not only demonstrated a commitment to the life of the campus but also made him readily approachable to students with ideas and concerns. The University is honored to have this legacy of student support memorialized by this award from NASPA.”

Before he died on July 5, President Farish was nominated for the award by RWU students Phoebe Thaler ’19, Jacob Brostuen ’18, Associate Dean & Title IX Coordinator Jen Stanley and Vice President for Student Life John King.

“It is a distinct honor for Phoebe, Jake, Jen and I to have nominated President Farish for this award in recognition of his unwavering commitment to students, student life programs, and passionate life-long dedication to higher education,” King said.

President Farish started his relationship with students by being centrally involved in important moments for prospective students – making it a high priority to speak at every admissions open house, accepted students day, and each of five orientation sessions each summer for new students. He welcomed all new students at convocation each August, and he and Maia Farish offered move-in assistance at RWU’s largest first-year residence hall.

President Farish made it a priority to include students in the governance system of the University by attending Student Senate meetings each year and meeting regularly with the student president of Senate, the student newspaper, and even jumping into the radio booth for an occasional interview or show. He was the first RWU president to support...
and facilitate the nomination and election of student representatives to standing committees of the Board of Trustees.

Don and Maia Farish hosted multiple dinners for students at the University Residence, including the top 10 graduating students from each of RWU’s six schools, an end-of-year dinner celebrating the work of Student Senate, and stewardship events matching scholarship donors with student scholarship recipients.

President Farish was particularly sensitive to equity and justice and frequently sent supportive messages regarding issues impacting marginalized students including DACA, international and LGBTQQ concerns. Last year – in response to student requests and in collaborations with student mentors and participants in the Intercultural Center’s PEACE program and Chief Diversity Officer Ame Lambert – President Farish hosted monthly fireside chats that facilitated both awareness and dialogue on campus and national issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

President Farish was student-centered, visible and approachable on campus, and students appreciated his engagement and interest in their experiences. In her nomination, Thaler said, “As a trans student, even when my life and experiences may not matter to society or policy makers, I know that I mattered to President Farish.”

NASPA Region I includes all six New England states; the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Quebec; and the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

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