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# RWU Announces \$500,000 Gift to Establish Hassenfeld Projects

Transformative gift will deploy more students throughout Rhode Island to meet local community needs



Construction Management Professor Michael Emmer works with construction management student Benjamin Dion on an experiential-learning project inside RWU's Hawkworks, a 5,600-square-foot fabrication facility.

September 6, 2016 | Public Affairs Staff

**BRISTOL, R.I.** – Roger Williams University has received a \$500,000 gift from Hassenfeld Family Initiatives LLC to establish the Hassenfeld Projects -- an intensive, three-year initiative to expand and enhance its innovative work in experiential education.

The grant builds on RWU's growing cadre of experiential programs that prepare students to meet the demands of today's employers while building skill sets in areas such as economic development, sustainability and social justice.

The Hassenfeld Projects will encompass and enhance a variety of existing community-focused programs in which students work on real-world projects defined by the University's community partners. These projects are typically overseen by RWU's [Community Partnerships Center \(CPC\)](#). Established more than 5 years ago, the CPC has completed some 193 projects since 2010, involving 1,938 students and 75 faculty devoting 118,920 service hours to projects with 153 unique community partners (nonprofits and government entities located primarily in Rhode Island). The total value of this work to the local economy is \$2,362,020.

"We know that students who engage in these projects are better prepared with the practical hard skills and collaborative experiences that will allow them to contribute to Rhode Island employers from day one," said RWU President Donald Farish. "The Hassenfeld Projects will allow us to simultaneously expand our capacity to serve these needs while developing greater leadership capacity within our faculty and students. We are extremely grateful to Alan Hassenfeld and Hassenfeld Family Initiatives for the opportunity to fortify our unique brand of community-engaged, experiential learning."

The grant will establish the Hassenfeld Fellows, a core group of faculty distinguished by their commitment to experiential learning and community engagement, and their scholarly contributions to the field; as well as the Hassenfeld Student Leaders, undergraduate and graduate students who will be specially trained to lead interdisciplinary projects and mentor their classmates. RWU will specifically designate and design multi-disciplinary, genuinely collaborative projects -- to be designated as Hassenfeld Projects -- to enhance communities' self-reliance while enabling a vital transfer of technology and know-how.

"The goal is to increase significantly our capacity to undertake project-based work," said Assistant Vice President for Outreach and Engagement Arnold Robinson. "Each year the CPC receives more project requests from nonprofits and municipalities than we can realistically fulfill. The Hassenfeld Projects will allow us to do more of this work and amplify RWU's impact in Rhode Island."

The Hassenfeld grant comes just months after Roger Williams announced its Campaign for Civic Scholars, an effort to build broad-based philanthropic support for the University's expansive portfolio of programs that marry academic scholarship with civic engagement. Even as RWU's innovative Affordable Excellence program has held tuition flat for five straight years, it has increased its \$2 million-plus annual investment in experiential education in not only the CPC, but also the Feinstein Center for Service Learning, the Center for Economic and Environmental Development, the Business Partnerships Center and the Spiegel Center for Global and International Programs.

"When students engage deeply in solving the hard problems facing society today, they are actually doing the work of building the future," said Alan Hassenfeld, chair of Hassenfeld Family Initiatives. "This is what Don Farish means when he says that RWU is building the University the world needs now. The school's cutting-edge approach to experiential learning is preparing students to fulfill their potential as citizens primed for both leadership and community service. Our shared future, in many cases, is in the hands of RWU graduates."

Both Alan Hassenfeld and his late brother Stephen Hassenfeld received honorary degrees from Roger Williams University in 1993 and 1987, respectively.

"The Hassenfeld name is synonymous with innovation and good works throughout Rhode Island and across the globe," President Farish noted. "We could not be more honored to partner with the family on this initiative. It is a shining example of social accountability in higher education. Students are doing the real work communities need and gaining experience that prepares them as lifelong learners and engaged citizens."

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