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Announcement by President Donald Farish

Roger Williams University

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January 15, 2014

Dear RWU Law Faculty & Staff,

I am excited to share with you today two important announcements for RWU Law. Even as we enter the second half of our 20th anniversary year, we are planning for a future full of both challenge and promise – and on both fronts, today’s news will expand upon our already strong foundation and position us for success in the years ahead.

Strong leadership is critical to the success of any organization, and with that in mind I am pleased to announce the selection of Michael J. Yelnosky as the School of Law’s next dean. Professor Yelnosky will succeed Dean David A. Logan when he returns to teaching this summer after guiding the School for more than a decade of transformative change.

Most, if not all, of you know Professor Yelnosky, of course, as a gifted and dedicated faculty member. He also served as associate dean for academic affairs from 2004 to 2008 and has been a key leader in Roger Williams University School of Law’s two-decade legacy as Rhode Island’s only law school. His selection concludes a search process initiated in August, when Dean Logan announced that he would return to teaching at RWU Law following the 2013-14 academic year.

An instrumental force in the law school’s emergence as a major influence on our region’s legal culture, educating practice-ready lawyers and serving the area’s neediest populations, Professor Yelnosky has been a consistent voice of wisdom, innovation and progress as the School continually adjusts to changing professional and economic realities outside the academic world. 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 selection for this vital role going forward.

And we cannot dismiss the challenges that *are* facing legal education – and the students we serve, who are our future lawyers. Over the last several years, RWU Law has increased its commitment to offering a rigorous, marketable legal education that will enable our students to emerge job-ready and prepared to thrive in their early careers, even in today’s increasingly competitive legal employment market. Efforts launched during this academic year alone include the new Community Economic Development Clinic; expansion of the Feinstein Center for Pro Bono and Experiential Education; and the institution of our explicit guarantee that *every* qualified student will be afforded a substantial clinical experience.

But no matter how rigorous and relevant the educational experience, we must still confront two other pressing challenges facing students at America’s law schools – the cost to earn a law

degree and the rising debt incurred in the process.

In response to those challenges, I am pleased to announce the expansion of Roger Williams University's signature Affordable Excellence initiative to our School of Law.

- 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, as architecture is the University's other signature professional program that, like law, requires licensure before graduates can practice.
- In conjunction, for all currently enrolled 1L and 2L students, as well as those who enter in the 2014-15 incoming class, a *tuition guarantee* will be implemented immediately. This means that this lowered tuition rate of \$33,792 will not increase for up to three years for all students who remain continuously enrolled.
- Finally, all currently enrolled 1L and 2L students will have the option of keeping their existing financial aid award with the current price of tuition (also frozen for the remaining years) or waiving their current financial aid award and moving to the new tuition model. As a practical matter, we expect that those with aid above \$7,608 will probably choose to keep their current level of aid; those 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.

Those students in the 3L class who are about to graduate will not feel any direct effect of this new model. However, as is also true of previous graduates, these future lawyers will benefit from being the alumni of a well-regarded and successful law school. Change, of necessity, falls unevenly on any student body, and the fact that we cannot go back in time to ensure "equity" for each class of students cannot be an excuse for failing to take action when action is called for.

Ultimately, what does Affordable Excellence do for RWU Law? Quite simply, it makes us one of the best values on the East Coast, accessible to an even broader population of future attorneys. Those who plan to serve the public good through roles in public interest law may find it particularly meaningful. And most importantly, our personalized environment, our unwavering focus on hands-on learning opportunities and our unprecedented access to Rhode Island's bench and bar means the quality of an RWU Law education only continues to advance. Our students will benefit from a high-quality legal education at a cost that makes us the best-priced ABA-accredited private law school in the Northeast.

As faculty and staff, you are an invaluable resource to the University and the School of Law. As promised, in the coming weeks I will have additional information for you regarding the organizational changes we have been discussing. At this time I hope you will join me in celebrating these two remarkable achievements for RWU Law – as, together, we build a school that is even stronger, more responsive to our students needs, and as prepared as ever to meet the

ever-changing demands of the legal profession.

Sincerely,

Donald J. Farish
President