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Trending@RWU Law: Dean Yelnosky's Post: Serving the Public Interest and Serving Our Graduates

Michael Yelnosky

Roger Williams University School of Law

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Dean Yelnosky's Post

Serving the Public Interest and Serving Our Graduates

Posted by Michael Yelnosky on 05/11/2015 at 10:02 AM

The innovation continues at RWU Law. We were one of the first law schools in the country to require pro bono service for graduation. We are home to the nationally recognized [Pro Bono Collaborative](#), which connects lawyers, community organizations, and law students to provide free legal services to indigent clients. We were one of the first law schools in the country to [guarantee](#) each student a substantial clinical experience. We are one of a few law schools in the country with a [corporate counsel externship program](#) that places students each semester in the general counsel's offices of major companies. We were one of the first law schools in the country to respond to the spiraling cost of legal education and [reduce our tuition](#). The list of innovations [goes on and on](#)

In March we celebrated the launch of another innovative RWU Law program: [The Rhode Island Center for Justice](#) and the [RWU Law Center for Justice Fellowship Program](#). For years, a group of lawyers in Rhode Island were brainstorming about ways to increase the supply of free civil legal services to assist low-income Rhode Islanders. The existing civil legal service providers work tirelessly to serve the poor, but the need for free legal services, unfortunately, far exceeds the supply. In Rhode Island, as in the rest of this country, there is a justice gap. Two lawyers, Amato ("Bud") DeLuca and Miriam Weizenbaum, persisted. They envisioned a non-profit organization staffed by lawyers who would provide free services to clients in need – clients in need of suitable housing, clients in need of electricity, clients in need of a path to U.S. citizenship, and clients in need of the wages the law requires they receive for the work they have performed. It was those people – the vulnerable and unfortunate – that drove Bud and Miriam.

At the same time, the law school was thinking about a way to provide more support for our graduates who are interested in becoming poverty lawyers. We have a large cohort of alumni who have chosen that career path – many of whom are working for organizations where they were once externs through our clinical program, and many of whom leveraged those experiences to land jobs in public defender and civil legal service offices across the country. We also have a loan repayment and assistance program for graduates who embark on those careers. But we were looking to do more. Eventually, because of our deep roots in the legal community, we learned of Bud and Miriam's project, sat down with them, and realized that if we collaborated the result could be greater than the sum of its parts. That is the collaboration we celebrated on April 9, 2015 at the offices of the Rhode Island Center for Justice, in space provided by Roger Williams University and the Roger Williams University School of Law.

The Center has hired an experienced poverty lawyer, [Rob McCreanor](#) to serve as the executive director and provide training and other guidance to two 2011 RWU Law grads, [Marissa Janton](#) and [Misty Delgado](#). Marissa and Misty are the inaugural RWU Law Center for Justice Fellows, and they will spend two years at the Center learning how to practice poverty law by serving some of the needy that Bud and Miriam were targeting. Marissa and Misty will ultimately be joined by two more RWU Law Center for Justice Fellows. These young lawyers will serve the needy while at the Center and then go out into the community with powerful tools to continue to work for social justice.

As I said at the Center launch, I am proud the law school is part of a community that does not turn a blind eye to the plight of our fellow citizens. In this unique collaboration with the Rhode Island Center for Justice, our graduates win, and the community wins. That's how we like to do things at RWU Law.

Some pictures from the launch event appear below.



Chief Justice Paul Suttell



Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea



Anna Cano-Morales, Director of the Latino Policy Institute at Roger Williams University



Staff Attorney Misty G. Delgado '11 and Keally Cieslik, Director of Community Partnerships at the Center for Justice



The overflow crowd



**L-R standing: President Farish, Dean Yelnosky, Miriam Weizenbaum, Esq., Amato DeLuca, Esq.,
and Chief Justice Suttell**

**L-R seated: Melissa Husband, Executive Director at the Community Action Partnership of
Providence, Anna Cano-Morales, Central Falls Mayor James Diossa and Secretary of State Nellie
M. Gorbea**