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RWU Law introduces Master’s in Law for Non-Lawyers

RWU Law launches new Master of Studies in Law to offer legal education in a one-year program

September 10, 2015 | Public Affairs Staff

BRISTOL, R.I. – For professionals interested in gaining a legal education without training to become a lawyer, Roger Williams University School of Law has launched a new Master’s in Law for non-lawyers. The Master of Studies in Law (M.S.L.) is a one-year program open to learners who seek deep exposure to law and legal methods in order to broaden their professional skill set or add value to their résumé, but who do not want to be practicing attorneys.

Part of RWU Law’s M.S.L. program will replicate the experience of a first-year juris doctor student. M.S.L. students will study such law school staples as torts, contracts, criminal law and civil procedure alongside J.D. students, writing the same papers and taking the same exams.

But M.S.L. candidates will also have access to higher-level elective law courses applicable to their particular career fields. And they will graduate after accumulating two semesters of credit instead of the six needed to earn a J.D. The first class of M.S.L. candidates will matriculate in Fall 2016.
“Law now influences human activity as never before,” according to RWU Law Dean Michael J. Yelnosky. “One consequence is that a growing number of non-lawyers come into contact with lawyers and the law as a regular part of their work. As a result, many people would benefit from some rigorous legal training, but don’t need a J.D. Our M.S.L. program is designed to serve people who are seeking that edge.”

The program is a practical and forward-looking response to a fast-changing legal and business landscape that touches almost every aspect of life. Over the past few years, a dozen or so law schools around the country have established M.S.L. programs; however, RWU Law and Northeastern University are the only law schools in New England with broad M.S.L. programs.

The course of study will provide students with a solid legal foundation paired with a flexible and practical professional slant. Along with gaining a foundational understanding of law, students will be able to design a course of study that focuses on subject areas most important to their career goals. Human resource professionals, for-profit and non-profit business managers, journalists, government employees, realtors, accountants, IT professionals, educators, compliance officers, and those who work in the criminal justice system and in various positions related to environmental law are examples of professional fields that might benefit from this course of study.

Yelnosky noted that the program is not intended to train lawyers or undermine traditional legal practice, but is simply a practical response to changing realities.

“Master’s program graduates will not be lawyers and will not be able to practice law,” he said. “However, they will be better consumers of legal services; better at working with legal materials, such as statutes and regulations; better at communicating with lawyers, better at determining whether they need legal services; and better educated about the legal system, which has an increasing impact on all our lives. Master’s graduates will be a complement to and not a substitute for lawyers.”