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RWU Students Help Plan Scholars at Risk Advocacy Days in D.C.

Student Advocacy Days on March 7-8 will bring together students and faculty from U.S. and Canada to advocate for wrongfully imprisoned scholars

March 5, 2019  |  By Edward Fitzpatrick

BRISTOL, R.I. – Three Roger Williams University students and a professor are playing an instrumental role in planning and executing the third annual Scholars at Risk Student Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C., on March 7 and 8, 2019.

RWU Professor Adam Braver, chair of the SAR-United States Steering Committee, and RWU students Adrienne Wooster, Kyla Yates and Juliet Hulme helped to organize the event, which will bring students and faculty together from across the United States and Canada.

The two-day event features hands-on workshops on human rights best practices, followed by a day of advocacy on Capitol Hill on behalf of wrongfully imprisoned scholars. Students and faculty will participate in SAR’s Student Advocacy Seminars, faculty-led courses on human rights and academic freedom.

“This year, as we house the Scholars at Risk Student Advocacy Seminars Coordinating Office at RWU, our three student coordinators have played an active role in the planning of the conference – from programming to public relations,” Braver said. “It’s been an incredible learning experience for them, and one that only will have increased three-fold by the end of the conference.”

Wooster, Yates and Hulme have written press releases, created a social media guide and made pins for students to wear. In addition, they are responsible for scheduling meetings with government officials.

“For the D.C. Student Advocacy Days,” said Wooster, a RWU senior, “I have worked closely with my fellow student coordinators, Kyla Yates and Juliet Hulme, to facilitate the attendance of student seminars across the United States at an all-day workshop consisting of speaker panels, breakout sessions and advocacy brainstorming – all in effort to promote academic freedom and support scholars imprisoned due to their ideas and intellectual expressionism.”
“I think from a global perspective, living in America gives us a privilege that I believe should be a fundamental right for all – that right being freedom of speech and expression,” said Hulme, an RWU senior. “It’s just hard to imagine people not being able to express their opinions about the actions of a government. I just feel strongly that people should have the right to express their opinions, especially if they are doing so in an educational manner and without harm or violence.”

In addition to the workshops on March 7, students and faculty will hear from an impressive array of speakers and panelists, including government officials, NGO leaders from World Uyghur Congress, PEN America, the Defending Freedoms Project, the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, and Jewher Ilham, daughter of Ilham Tohti, a prominent scholar imprisoned in China.

“Student Advocacy Days is a meaningful event for Scholars at Risk Student Advocacy Seminars from the U.S. and Canada,” Braver said. “It’s an opportunity for the student teams that have been researching and developing advocacy strategies on cases involving internationally persecuted scholars to meet, and to share their research and work.”

On March 8, students will use their newly acquired knowledge and skills when they meet with elected government officials to present their cases and discuss potential advocacy actions.

A full schedule for Student Advocacy Days can be found here. For more information on the event, including requests for interviews with SAR staff, event speakers or students, please contact Alex Bell at alex.bell@nyu.edu.