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## Law School News: A Fond Farewell To Deborah Johnson 6-7-2019

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*Roger Williams University School of Law*

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June 7, 2019

# ***Law School News***

## **A Fond Farewell to Deborah Johnson**

Over eight years, RWU Law's Director of Diversity and Outreach helped the school's student diversity double from 15 to 30 percent.



Deborah Johnson

June 7, 2019

Michael M. Bowden

Students, faculty, staff gathered at the Bravo Bistro in Providence Thursday to bid farewell to a much-admired colleague, Deborah Johnson, who has served since 2011 as RWU Law's Director of Diversity and Outreach – not to mention a professor of insurance law and contract drafting, among the many other hats she wore here.

Johnson will be fulfilling her lifelong goal of teaching full time, as she joins the faculty at Northeastern University School of Law, her alma mater. She will teach Legal Skills in Social Context, an eight-credit, first-year course designed to hone students' legal skills within the interplay among law and diversity, values, and institutional power.

During Johnson's tenure, RWU Law's diversity doubled from 15 percent to 30 percent, with fully 32 percent 2018's entering class identifying as racially or ethnically diverse.

"For just over eight years, Deborah has served RWU Law with distinction," said Dean Michael Yelnosky, who delivered a heartfelt tribute to Johnson at the farewell gathering. "She has become a friend and a trusted colleague to many of us, and she has helped countless numbers of students, some of whom desperately needed her help. And she always brought her unique blend of professionalism and kindness to her work. I know I speak for many of us when I say that she has helped me grow personally and professionally and that she will leave behind a wonderful legacy."

Michael Donnelly-Boylen, RWU Law's Assistant Dean of Admissions, drew laughter as he recalled working under Johnson in a campus coffee shop during their undergraduate years at the University of Notre Dame – adding that it was Johnson who first taught him to make cappuccinos.

"You have challenged us to do better," he told her. "I can't thank you enough. I have seen firsthand your dedication to our students and the effort you have put in to create programs and events that make this a welcoming place. We have big challenges ahead as we work to better serve our growing minoritized student population. But we are better prepared to meet these challenges because of the work you have done here for so long."

Others who spoke at Thursday's event included Ame Lambert-Aikhionbare, Ph.D., vice-president and Chief Diversity Officer at Roger Williams University, who shared memories of Johnson as a cherished friend and colleague; Mikela Almeida '16, Assistant District Attorney at the Middlesex District Attorney's Office in Massachusetts, who recalled Johnson's empathy, friendship and support for her and other students of color during her years at Roger Williams; and the Honorable Edward C. Clifton, Distinguished Jurist in Residence and board member at RWU Law, and retired judge of the Rhode Island Superior Court, who reflected, "I find it daunting to imagine how we will ever find someone to fill your shoes."

Johnson is immediate past three-term president of Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys (MBWA). She has had a distinguished legal and professional career in both the private and public sectors, including corporate law, nonprofit business, government, and higher education.

Before her arrival at RWU Law, Johnson served as Law Clerk to the Honorable Napoleon A. Jones, Jr., of the United States District Court (S.D. Cal.) in San Diego, and worked for six years as a Law Associate with Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky & Popeo, P.C., in Boston. She was Director of Youth Programs at the Boston Center for Community & Justice. She has served on numerous nonprofit boards and committees, including the Elizabeth Stone House, the Center for Collaborative Education, the Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, and the Women's Resource Center in Rhode Island. She is also a member of the Thurgood Marshall Law Society of Rhode Island.

Johnson is a member of three state bars: California, Massachusetts, and New York. She earned her B.A. from the University of Notre Dame and her J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law.