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August 30, 2019

Law School News

'RWU Law is Essential to the Vision'

As Roger Williams University's 11th president, Dr. Ioannis Miaoulis, completes his second full week in Bristol, here is a conversation he had with RWU Law Dean Michael Yelnosky earlier this year.



RWU Law Dean Michael Yelnosky and Roger Williams University President Ioannis Miaoulis.
Image Credit: RWU Law/Andrea Hansen

August 30, 2019
Michael M. Bowden

In February, the Roger Williams University Board of Trustees announced the appointment of the University's 11th president, Ioannis Miaoulis, who transformed the Museum of Science in Boston into an institution of national and international prominence. He took the reins on August 19.

During his career, Miaoulis has led large-scale efforts to spark passion for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) among young learners around the world. Prior to his tenure at the Museum of Science, he was Dean of the College of Engineering at Tufts University and led the effort to make it a separate School of Engineering.

Born in Athens, Greece, Miaoulis graduated *summa cum laude* from Tufts University in 1980. He earned a master's degree in mechanical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1984 and a master's degree in economics from Tufts in 1986. He received a doctorate in mechanical engineering from Tufts in 1987.

Miaoulis recently visited the School of Law for a chat with RWU Law Dean Michael Yelnosky.

Dean Yelnosky: We just came from your first visit to the law school – attending our Accepted Students Day Diversity Breakfast. So welcome, and thank you for being here. How do you like the place so far?

President Miaoulis: I love it. The energy is great. I had a chance to speak with some students, some faculty members; everyone has been wonderful. Of course, I'm not a lawyer. But there's an excellent sense of something very interesting going on.

MY: And you've done some incognito research on the university as well ...

IM: Yes, I actually took two campus tours incognito. I also went into the dining hall and pretended to be a parent. And I wasn't being totally dishonest about it, actually, because ...

MY: So you *are* a lawyer! *[Laughter]*

IM: I stayed for three different lunches, sitting with different groups of students – men, women, sitting together and having a good time. And I pretended to be the parent of a prospective student and asked them, "So how do you like it here?" All of them seemed very happy with the university; they spoke very highly of it. And these were just ordinary students, not tour guides trained to say good things.

MY: I fell for you when you first told us that story. I thought, "This is the kind of spirit we could use."

IM: Well, how else do you learn about a place? At a university, the consumer is the product. So what better way to get the feel of it than to see firsthand the quality of the students who have been attracted to the university, and ask how they feel about it?

In fact, one of the first students I sat and listened to was a law student. She was sitting with an undergrad student. It was a great conversation. They were very engaged, so I didn't speak to them, I just listened. At one point, he asked her, "What do you guys do for fun over at the law school?" And she said, "Well, I'm a first-year law student, so we don't have time for fun. We just study all the time."

MY: Which is true, for the most part. And the fact that a law student was sitting and having lunch at the Commons with an undergraduate – that makes me think about the connection between the School of Law and the rest of the university. Maybe those interactions happen more often than we think they do.

IM: I think it's terrific. We're all one university. And the Providence campus seems like another great opportunity to expand those sorts of connections.

MY: Well, during their first year, it's nice for law students to have a sort of real, classic academic experience here in Bristol.

But we believe strongly in getting them out into the community, gaining experience. And the Providence campus is really the hub of the programs that get them out there. For example, our clinics are there. But let's talk a little about you. What are you passionate about that we wouldn't know from your very impressive CV?

IM: My two main hobbies are fishing and cooking. Incidentally, the first time I ever saw Roger Williams University, it was from my boat – and I have to say, what an impressive view. Narragansett Bay is, by far, my favorite fishing spot in New England. I have a small boat, and I used to take it to Allen Harbor, a beautiful place not far from Quonset. I used to fish all around there.

MY: When did you first develop a taste for being out on the water?

IM: I have always loved the water. I grew up in Athens, Greece, and my parents had a small summer house right on the water, on the Gulf of Corinth. I used to spend every summer there, and a lot of weekends when the weather was warm – probably 16 hours a day on the water. I would swim, snorkel, sail, fish – everything.

MY: What do you fish for in Rhode Island?

IM: Bluefish, primarily.

MY: I love bluefish. My wife won't eat it. I keep telling her, "You're missing out." But I think bluefish has this reputation of tasting a little too "fishy."

IM: I disagree. As long as it's fresh, you just clean it, put some Cajun spices on it, a little olive oil, put it in the oven – that's one of my favorite ways to eat fish. Or you can make a nice sauce with good olive oil, lemon, a bit of oregano... just delicious.

MY: Nice. And do you drink wine or beer with that?

IM: Beer while I'm fishing, wine when I'm eating.

MY: Rules to live by. *[Laughter]* A lot of the publicity surrounding your appointment as RWU's new president focused on the STEM elements of your background. Could you talk a bit about the more liberal arts subject areas – in particular the law, and how your background prepares you to work with that side of the academic equation?

IM: I feel that a well-educated person is one who appreciates and understands matters beyond merely technical skills. And it's not just a matter of the curriculum; it's the people you interact

with, the friends you meet from other disciplines. When I got my master's in economics, I survived classes like microeconomics only because my classmates were not as good in math as I was, and it's very mathematical – so they helped me with the economics and I helped them with the math.

Roger Williams is strong in both the technical disciplines and in the liberal arts, as well as in its high-quality professional graduate programs. Frankly, for a university to have a law school is a tremendous plus.

MY: How does the law school fit into your larger vision for the university?

IM: One of the many things that attracted me to Roger Williams was its determination to be the university the world needs now. And I believe RWU has all the right ingredients to become precisely that – a model for education. But we have to do it in a more visible way, so that we are noticed; so that our reputation expands. That's the overall vision. As to specifics, I'm going to spend the next six months genuinely listening to faculty, staff and students – to understand their dreams, aspirations and challenges. And that will enable us to articulate a vision that is not just mine, but rather a collective vision that we can translate into a strategic plan with specific goals and metrics. I'm not smarter than the people who are already here, but I'm new. And that's one of my strengths: I'm in a position to identify, to understand where everything is now, and then try to find opportunities where people want an area to grow.

And maintaining RWU Law as a high-caliber professional school is essential to this vision. You have some great signature products – like the Marine Affairs program, for example, which fits right into the growing societal focus on coastal sustainability. And exceptionally strong experiential programs as well.

MY: Yes, we were one of the first schools in the country to guarantee clinical experience for students while they're here. It's an area where we have a tremendous amount of depth and we've been recognized for the work that we do getting students out into the community and getting experience on the one hand, but also providing really valuable services for individuals who would not otherwise be able to afford representation.

IM: That's very consistent with the whole culture of the school, and it positions us uniquely.

MY: Yes. The connections that being the only law school in the state provide to our students really distinguishes us from our competitors as well.

IM: And every year, more and more of your graduates are lawyers and judges, in Rhode Island and beyond. I hope to cultivate strong relationships with all of our alumni, because we need them to be connected; they're part of the family. I want our students to see themselves not only as students, but as future alumni. They should feel that they are part of the future of the institution, and not just customers who are going to get their degree and get out of here. If we neglect our alumni, it's a lost opportunity.