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September 5, 2019

# ***Law School News***

## **Dean Michael Yelnosky to Step Down After 2019-20 Academic Year**

RWU Board of Trustees and RWU Law Board of Directors will spend year celebrating Yelnosky's accomplishments, searching for new dean



RWU Law Dean Michael J. Yelnosky

September 5, 2019  
Jill Rodrigues

BRISTOL, R.I., September 5, 2019 – Roger Williams University School of Law announced today that Michael J. Yelnosky will step down as Dean when his contract expires at the end of the academic year, concluding an extraordinary six-year tenure. He will return to a full-time teaching position at the School of Law.

A visionary leader and champion of social justice in legal education, Yelnosky has dedicated 27 years to RWU Law as a founding faculty member and Dean. His tenure as dean of Rhode Island's only law school has marked an important period of growth for RWU Law, as it

continues to deliver on the promise of graduating lawyers who become leaders in their communities.

At a time when many law schools were retrenching in the wake of recession, the School of Law developed new, innovative academic programming and opened an experiential learning campus at Providence's One Empire St., while reducing and then freezing tuition. In the process, it became the most affordable private ABA-accredited law school in the Northeast.

*'With his deep commitment to public interest law and social justice issues, Michael Yelnosky has provided transformational leadership in guiding RWU Law.'*

*~ Chief Judge William E. Smith, U.S. District Court*

“With his deep commitment to public interest law and social justice issues, Michael Yelnosky has provided transformational leadership in guiding RWU Law,” said Chief U.S. District Court Judge William E. Smith, chair of the law school’s Board of Directors. “Michael is a respected scholar, beloved teacher, and skilled ambassador to the Rhode Island bar and judiciary, who has strengthened the law school’s reputation and relationships throughout the legal field. His vision in leading the charge to create a more diverse and inclusive institution and to increase experiential learning opportunities, pro bono and public interest law has set us on the course we will follow for decades to come.”

“I am grateful to so many for this opportunity, and for supporting and working with me as dean,” said Dean Yelnosky, who celebrates the accomplishments of RWU Law every day on Twitter. “Whether I was working on new programming, fundraising, diversity and inclusion, board engagement, or attracting and retaining an excellent faculty and staff, I tried to keep the needs of our students and alumni front of mind.” In 2014, I told the *Providence Journal* that I wanted this law school to be ‘aggressively relevant,’ and I think we have taken important steps towards that goal in the last five years.”

During Yelnosky’s tenure, the School of Law has adapted successfully to the rapidly evolving legal marketplace, and grown stronger through the expansion of academic programming and experiential education opportunities, including the Master of Studies in Law, with specialized areas such as Cybersecurity Law, and the state’s only J.D./M.B.A. program, beginning next year in collaboration with the RWU Gabelli School of Business. The School of Law also developed a collaborative Veterans Benefits Appeals Field Clinic, as well as the Rhode Island Center for Justice, which provides free civil legal assistance to underrepresented people in the local community. Housed in the law school’s new experiential education campus at One Empire Street, the Center for Justice is also home to a fellowship program available to RWU Law graduates that provides hands-on training in poverty law.

*I am grateful that Michael will remain in our community so that our students will benefit from his knowledge and leadership for years to come.*

*~ Roger Williams University President Ioannis Miaoulis*

Yelnosky has also led advances in student success and job placement. The law school has become a national leader in the number of graduates who receive judicial clerkships, with 22.6 percent of the Class of 2018 securing federal or state court clerkships after graduation – the 8th highest percentage in the nation and first in New England. Although it is still a young law school, RWU Law’s graduates now include law firm partners, business leaders, public defenders, state and federal prosecutors, elected officials and judges and more, and its alumni are working from coast-to-coast and around the world. For the first time in the law school’s history, a 2019 graduate received a prestigious post-graduate Skadden Fellowship to address the school-to-prison pipeline issue.

Over the past five years, Dean Yelnosky’s leadership in supporting student voices and commitment to creating a welcoming and respectful climate have allowed RWU Law to make significant steps in becoming more diverse and inclusive. During his tenure, the overall student diversity has risen to 29 percent, while the percentage of women on the faculty has increased dramatically. The law school has also adopted its first Strategic Plan for Diversity and Inclusion and established a variety of new diversity and inclusion programs.

“Michael Yelnosky has led RWU Law with distinction during his tenure, achieving success in graduating engaged, civic-minded lawyers, and significantly expanding access to legal education to a more diverse population,” said Roger Williams University President Iaonnis Miaoulis. “The law school exemplifies the deep commitment to equity and inclusion efforts that we aspire to achieve across all of Roger Williams University. I am grateful that Michael will remain in our community so that our students will benefit from his knowledge and leadership for years to come.”

A widely-recognized expert on employment and labor law as well as dispute resolution and judicial selection, Yelnosky plans to stay on as a full-time professor at RWU Law after he steps down as Dean.

The process for selecting a new dean will commence soon with the naming of a search committee and listening sessions with the School of Law community and key constituencies in the months ahead.