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## **Law School News: Law Student Of The Year! 04-03-2020**

Michael M. Bowden

Roger Williams University School of Law

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April 3, 2020

# ***Law School News***

## Law Student of the Year!

Congratulations, Brenda Reyes '20, one of National Jurist Magazine's "Law Students of the Year"!

April 3, 2020

Michael M. Bowden



*National Jurist* [writes](#):

We've said it before and we'll say it again: There's no more difficult story to write than our annual Law School Student of the Year feature.

Why?

Because choosing the Law School Student of the Year, the runners-up and the finalists is almost an impossible task.

So many are deserving.

In the end, it comes down to splitting hairs, to be honest. So many of the nominees are such extraordinary people who've achieved much in their young lives.

We are thrilled to honor them. ...

#### [About Brenda:](#)

Born and raised in the Dominican Republic before coming to the United States as a teenager, Brenda Reyes, a 3L at Roger Williams University School of Law in Bristol, R.I., has her professional sights set on immigration law – and, not surprisingly, it's personal.

“As an immigrant myself, I understand what it means to come here from another country, whether to work, as my parents did, or to get a better education, as I did,” she said. “Considering the conversation around immigration that has arisen in our country in recent years, I wanted to become part of that fight.”

## Law School Student of the Year finalists



**Sam Faisal**, Suffolk  
University Law School,  
Boston



**Jose Angel Gutierrez**,  
Texas Tech University  
School of Law, Lubbock,  
Texas



**Al Metoxen** (in  
memoriam) Mitchell  
Hamline School of  
Law, St. Paul, Minn.  
(The third-year student  
died unexpectedly last  
October at the age of 46.)



**Brenda Reyes**, Roger  
Williams University  
School of Law, Bristol,  
R.I.



**Bryant Roby**, Chicago-  
Kent College of Law,  
Chicago

An excellent student academically, Reyes has also focused on gaining hands-on experience. She hit the ground running as a 1L, participating in Alternative Spring Break, screening and advising detainees at the Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, Ga.

Back at RWU Law, she rose to become president of the Latinx Law Student Association (winning Student Bar Association recognition as “Best Group President” along the way), an active member of the Rhode Island Hispanic Bar Association (RIHBA), and a volunteer at two Hispanic National Bar Association Annual Conferences. She’s also been an enthusiastic participant in RWU Law’s Immigration Law Clinic.

“Brenda is very dedicated to the immigrant community and the law school,” notes RWU Law Professor Deborah Gonzales, who directs the clinic. “Wherever there’s a need, she’s never shy to volunteer her services.”

For two years, Reyes volunteered with RIHBA during their Citizenship Drives, helping immigrants complete their naturalization applications. She also pitched in with the law school’s Pro Bono Collaborative, working on SIJ (Special Immigrant Juveniles) cases.

Last summer, Reyes advocated for detained immigrant children and survivors of abuse and trauma on a wide range of immigration matters as an intern with the South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project in Harlingen. The previous summer, she prepared DACA renewal applications with Catholic Social Services Fall River, Mass.

What motivates her?

“I can’t help but put myself in my clients’ shoes,” Reyes said. “My parents were documented when they came to the U.S., but if they hadn’t been, I always think – that could have been me! You can never just generalize about what drives people to immigrate. You can’t just lump them all together. Because everybody has their own story and circumstances.”

In that sense, she said, training as a lawyers has helped her to become their storyteller.

“I’m gaining the tools I need to impact someone’s life on an individual basis,” Reyes said. “I have lots of friends who are protesting and creating change in different ways. But being a law student has enabled me to do more than just protest.”

Instead, she’s learning to change the system from within.

“We’ve never had any attorneys in my family – this is something new,” she said. “Community-wise, too, it means a lot for people to be able to see someone who *looks* like them, who can also *advocate* for them. That just makes a world of a difference.”