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Law School News

Dean's Distinguished Service Award: Raquel Ortiz

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2020 Dean's Distinguished Service Award winner Raquel Ortiz

Roger Williams University School of Law is proud to announce that Raquel M. Ortiz – dean for Library & Information Services and associate professor of law – is this year's recipient of the Dean's Distinguished Service Award.

In announcing the award, Dean Michael J. Yelnosky focused on Ortiz's extraordinary contributions in helping the School of Law prepare for March's sudden shift from in-person to online classes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Raquel was instrumental in helping any and all of us learn how to teach and communicate with our students and each other remotely, a paradigm shift we had all of about 14 days to wrap our heads around and operationalize,” Yelnosky said. “She went above and beyond in many ways large and small, and she put in countless hours both from the library and from her home.”

Ortiz recalled her working process.

“When it became clear that we would need to move all of our classes online for the remainder of the spring semester, I first approached the issue like any research question,” she said. “Know your timeline, determine what is being asked and its deliverable, come up with a research plan, execute the research plan, ask for help as needed, and finally create and present the deliverable.”

Ortiz was greatly helped by her knowledge of – and ability to use – many of the tools available at RWU for remote instruction.

“The situation set the timeline, but I sought clarification on a few points from Dean Goldstein as I started my research,” Ortiz said. “I created instructional materials as I learned more about the tools and asked the librarians to read the materials to ensure that I didn't leave out any important steps. I began to create resources for faculty and students simultaneously as I prepared for the training sessions. Like any complex research project, sometimes you go back and do more research.”

She added, “In this case, as I started providing the sessions, new questions came from the faculty, which required repeating the research process. The end result included a resource guide and eventually a Bridges site that collected all of the resources and where I provided recordings of the training sessions.”

'Truly Exceptional'

Dean Yelnosky marveled at the sheer amount of ground Ortiz and her team were able to cover in such a short amount of time.

“I don't remember asking her to do anything,” he said. “She just stepped in where she saw the need. Everyone rose to this challenge, and that work continues – but Raquel's contributions were truly exceptional.”

And the effort is ongoing.

“I continue to update the resources that we created, and we keep adding to the Bridges site,” Ortiz said. “‘We’ is the key element here. Every resource that faculty and students had at their disposal in the spring – the training sessions; working with individual faculty and students – was possible because of our amazing library team. They took on more of our ‘regular’ work to free time for me to execute the research plan, and they gave their time freely when it was needed, which eventually meant that they, too, were able to provide support to faculty and students. They continue to inspire me and make our library the service enterprise that it has become.”

That is also part of the reason that Ortiz won this honor, Yelnosky said.

“In an era when libraries and librarians are being challenged by the loss of their virtual monopoly on books, Raquel has kept the RWU Law library and librarians relevant by focusing like a laser on supporting the work of students, faculty, and staff,” he said.

Assistant Dean Raquel Ortiz has worked in academic law libraries for over 25 years, in the areas of patron services, reference, and library administration. In her current position, she oversees the law library.

She teaches Advanced Legal Research and Introduction to Legal Research and Citation. She previously taught Legal Information Sources at the Simmons College School of Library and Information Science. Ortiz previously worked at Boston University's Law Library, Harvard Law School Library, and various other libraries in the Harvard University system. She is a member of the Massachusetts Bar.

An active member of the American Association of Law Libraries, the New England Law Library Consortium (NELLCO), and Law Librarians of New England, Ortiz has served on numerous committees and leadership positions within these organizations. She currently serves on the NELLCO Executive Committee and LLNE Executive Board.

Born in Puerto Rico, Dean Ortiz is fluent in Spanish. As an avid technology user, Ortiz is interested in technology applications for law, library management, and legal research. She earned her B.A. at Harvard College, her M.S. at Simmons College, and her J.D. at Suffolk University. Her hobbies include reading, paper crafting, and jewelry making.

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RWU Law Dean David A. Logan created the Dean's Distinguished Service Award in 2012 to recognize individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the law school community. It is awarded during Commencement in most, but not all years. Past recipients include Tony Bastone, Chief Justice Joseph R. Weisberger (posthumously), Kathy Massa, Cecily Banks, and Chelsie Horne.