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Law School News

'Law Isn't a Foreign Language Anymore'

One of Southern New England's top investigative reporters explains why pursuing a Master of Studies in Law at RWU Law makes sense.

November 24, 2020 | Michael M. Bowden



WPRI12 investigative reporter Tim White. Image Credit: Courtesy of WPRI12

Investigative reporter Tim White has been honing his craft in Providence and Boston for more than two decades. The recipient of four New England Emmy Awards (and a host of other honors) for his investigative work, White is also executive producer and host of WPRI 12's long-running weekly current affairs program "Newsmakers." He has moderated many live candidate debates, and co-authored a book, *The Last Good Heist*, a study of the New England mob. It's fair to say that he has very little left to prove professionally.

So why return to the classroom mid-career to undertake the challenge of earning a Master of Studies in Law at Roger Williams University School of Law?

“Over my two decades in this job, I have interacted a lot with the judicial and criminal justice system,” White explained. “I wanted a broader understanding of the courts, of the legal system, and the MSL program has delivered on that.”

Though he won’t complete his degree until spring 2022, White is already feeling the impact of his studies.

“I’ve covered a lot of trials in my day, but last month I was at a Superior Court trial taking notes and – as I listened to the prosecution and defense make their arguments to the judge – it dawned on me that I was easily following the details of the proceeding, that it wasn’t a foreign language to me anymore. And that extra depth of knowledge helped me write a clearer, more comprehensive story for my viewers and readers.”

White credits the high caliber of RWU Law faculty for the transformation.

“Criminal Law with Professor [Emily] Sack was hands-down the hardest class I’ve ever taken in my life – but also one of the most rewarding and eye-opening,” he said. “And I loved Con Law with Professor [Diana] Hassel – it’s essentially the history of this country seen through the lens of the Supreme Court. The common thread with every instructor I’ve encountered at RWU Law is their deep knowledge of and passion for their topics. You always feel confident that you’re in good hands.”

In addition to the professional benefits, White is also pursuing the MSL to improve his ability to advocate for journalists on a more universal scale. He currently serves on the board of directors for the New England First Amendment Coalition, a Boston-based group that aims to defend, promote and expand public access to government and the work it does.

“Transparency is under attack in American journalism right now,” White said. “The MSL program has helped me to make important legal arguments when advocating on behalf of government transparency in particular – public records requests and so on. It’s stuff I’ve been doing for two decades, but I take a different approach now when I am, for example, seeking an advisory opinion from the Attorney General’s office.”

White has encouraged several of his colleagues in journalism to consider the MSL program.

“We need to have a better mastery of the legal system right now in journalism, and the MSL delivers on that,” White said. “When we have that broader understanding, it not only benefits us personally, but also the community that we serve.”

Born in Newport, Tim White graduated from the University of Massachusetts Amherst with a degree in communications. He and his wife live in Rhode Island with their two children. No stranger to the field of journalism, he is the son of the late Jack White, the Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter.