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Law School News: Dean's Distinguished Service Award 2021: Ralph Tavares 05/28/2021

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May 28, 2021

Law School News

Dean's Distinguished Service Award 2021: Ralph Tavares

RWU Law's Director of Diversity and Outreach lauded for 'his support for our students, and in particular our students of color, in this moment of national reckoning about race and racism.'

May 28, 2021

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Michael M. Bowden



Ralph E. Tavares photo Ralph E. Tavares, RWU Law Director of Diversity and Outreach.

Roger Williams University School of Law is proud to announce that Ralph E. Tavares, Jr., Director of Diversity and Outreach, was awarded the Dean's Distinguished Service Award for his outstanding contributions to the law school.

"Ralph's work as our Director of Diversity and Outreach has been essential to our success this year," Dean Bowman noted in a letter announcing the award to law school faculty and staff. "I have relied on his insights, his wisdom, his compassion, and his lived commitment to our mission and values. I deeply appreciate his support for our students, and in particular our

students of color, in this moment of national reckoning about race and racism. Watching him in action over the past year, I know that he views his work as a calling to make the world a better and more inclusive place for all.”

“Ralph’s service this year has been nothing short of exemplary,” Bowman added in a separate interview. “Time and time again he has gone above and beyond the call of duty for our students, faculty, and staff, ensuring that we are doing the hard but important work needed to become the law school that we wish to be – a welcoming place of inclusiveness and belonging for all.”

Tavares said the recognition caused him to reflect on what truly was an extraordinary year.

“I’ve done my best in this ‘year like no other’ to act quickly, listen with resilience, and help our community move closer towards the goals set in our Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan,” he said. “At the same time, I acknowledge that this work isn’t always neat and pretty. And it doesn’t move as quickly as the change that we want to see, and the change that is desperately needed – especially for our Black students. It requires deep commitment from our leadership, our faculty, our community, and the Town of Bristol.

“I’ve been in diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging work for almost 20 years. And I can say with certainty that this work was amplified over the past year more than any other in my career.”

“During this past year, we lived through an incredibly charged, divisive political campaign,” Tavares added. “We witnessed an insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, and a spike in deep-seated anti-Asian hate, with the tragic shooting in Atlanta, Georgia. We were forced to watch George Floyd lose his life for the duration of nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds. Then came the statewide, national, and international protests as we watched the stories of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. More than 180 Black people lost their lives in the past year to police violence. RWU Law was not immune to the turbulence. Our Black Law Student Association issued a set of demands to leadership to address systemic racism in Bristol, in our hallways, and in our curriculum. Our class Facebook groups erupted in political divisiveness along with our classroom discussions.

“I’ve been in diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging work for almost 20 years,” he said. “And I can say with certainty that this work was amplified over the past year more than any other in my career.”

“And yet, while all this was happening we made substantive progress,” Tavares added. “Our first Black female vice-president was elected to office. Our SBA created a set of guidelines to help keep our Facebook groups respectful. Our faculty approved the creation of a course, ‘Race and the Foundations of American Law,’ as a permanent fixture in our curriculum. And we were able to help many students who were affected by the pandemic with emergency funds donated by AccessLex, our faculty, staff, administration, students, and SBA. We also offered a suite of training opportunities enabling our faculty, staff, and administration to dive deeper into our understanding of systemic racism, LGBTQ+ identity and advocacy, and social justice.

“The advancement of our DEI goals does not fall upon one director,” Tavares concluded. “It is a community of people who have worked collectively. I am proud to work with this community. There’s a lot of work ahead. I’m stunned to receive this award when so many members of our community have done so much for our students over this past year.”

Ralph Tavares is a seasoned leader in diversity, inclusion, equity and access in higher education. Before [joining RWU Law in 2019](#), he served as director of multicultural student success and assistant dean of undergraduate studies at Providence College for five years, and as associate director of admissions and multicultural education at Salve Regina University for more than a decade.

Currently, Tavares is the president of Diversity and Inclusion Professionals of Rhode Island (DAIP), a member of the planning committee for the National Partnership for Educational Access (NPEA), a lead consultant with Huckel Inclusive, and a Senior Inclusion and Education specialist with Advancing Workplace Excellence (AWE). He is a recipient of the Founder’s Award of New England Counselors of Color Bridging Access to College and William S. Neal Award for College Admission Counseling. He has been a liaison to the New England Association for College Admission Counseling Governing Board, and is a member of the National Academic Advising Association.