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Law School News: 'More Than I Ever Could Have Asked For...'

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Law School News

'More Than I Ever Could Have Asked For ...'

As this year's Miss Rhode Island, 2L Abby Mansolillo is preparing not only for her final exams but also for the Miss America 2023 competition.

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Miss Rhode Island (and RWU Law 2L) Abby Mansolillo.

Image Credit: Daniel Gagnon

As most of the Roger Williams University School of Law community begins easing into the holiday season, 2L Abby Mansolillo is making her final preparations to complete as Miss Rhode Island in this year's Miss America 2023 competition in December.

Mansolillo won the title and role of Miss Rhode Island this past May—but she still sounds very much like a law student as she recounts working with the RWU Law faculty and administration to rearrange her class and final exam schedules to accommodate the exciting event.

“Everyone was so understanding,” Mansolillo said. “They took the position, ‘Okay, this a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.’ And it is!”

Mansolillo’s Miss Rhode Island win marked the culmination of a series of competitions dating back to her early teens. She told her hometown newspaper, the Smithfield, R.I., *Valley Breeze*, that these competitions “taught her discipline, tenacity, and resilience”—all strong traits for law school success as well. Her interests cross over in other ways as well: during the talent portion of the Miss Rhode Island contest, Mansolillo performed a monologue from the 2018 Ruth Bader Ginsberg biopic, “On the Basis of Sex.”

The educational implications spread ever further.



Image Credit: Daniel Gagnon

“A lot of people don’t know that Miss America is a scholarship organization, so when you win your state you do receive a scholarship,” Mansolillo said. “It can go to student loans, or immediately toward tuition.” For winning the Miss Rhode Island title, Mansolillo received a

\$6,000 scholarship that she put toward her law school tuition—a boost that “aligns beautifully” with her aspirations in the legal profession.

“I think I’ve always known in my heart that I would end up in law school,” she said. “I come from a family of attorneys. My grandfather Louis Jackvony once ran for Attorney General; my mom went to law school, too—so it’s kind of in my blood.”

But it was only during her senior year at Providence College, in the depths of the pandemic, that Mansolillo settled on law school as her next educational step.

“I was looking at different job opportunities, law firms that were hiring interns and paralegals, and I decided, ‘You know what? I’m going to law school,’” she said. “It was always a part of me, but I really had grow into that passion. So, I took the LSATs, and by May I knew I was going to RWU Law.”

She said her choice of Roger Williams was ultimately practical.

“I’m a Rhode Islander at heart,” she said. “I knew I didn’t want to be too far from home. My family’s here and I want to practice here. And of course, Rhode Island’s a small state and our legal community is even smaller—which makes for really great job opportunities and networking.”

Her current legal goals are to become a criminal prosecutor—and eventually, she added, to become the second female Attorney General in Rhode Island. (The first was RWU Trustee Emeritus Arlene Violet, who was AG from 1985 to 1987.)

Her experiences at RWU Law have only confirmed Mansolillo’s interest these goals.

“I interned this past summer in the Rhode Island Department of the Attorney General, working in the Narcotics and Violent Crime unit,” she said. “It was the most rewarding experience, because—even though I’m still in law school and couldn’t practice yet—the supervisors that I had, the attorneys that I worked with, were so incredible and so brilliant. I learned so much from them and I just loved working there.”

In the classroom, Professor James Diamond’s Criminal Law class was her favorite, she added. “I loved it. I understood it. He made the whole topic make sense.”

Mansolillo’s pageant experience has also proven helpful in oral advocacy.

“I started competing when I was 14 years old, so I’ve been talking in front of audiences for years,” she said. “Even when I was little, I never really shied away from a camera, or from being front and center. But as Miss Rhode Island, it’s at a different level; it’s been so humbling and rewarding to speak to so many groups, from pre-college students to panels of judges—and to see that people really want to hear what I have to say.”

“I was always taught that a good leader is someone who is approachable and makes everyone feel that their voice is being heard, that their opinion is important,” she added. “I’m lucky to have a really wonderful group of people around me, who keep pushing me every single day to be that kind of leader, ready to talk to people about anything they want to discuss—whether in an interview like this one, or in a courtroom, or at a Miss America competition.”

Mansolillo says that when she mounts the stage for the Miss America event next month, she’ll be competing for her RWU Law family as well as Rhode Island as a whole.

“My professors and my classmates and so many other people at RWU Law are very excited!” she said. “The outpouring of support here has been overwhelming—never in a million years would I have imagined it would be at this level. It’s so heartwarming to feel that sense of community, and at a law school of all places! It just been so gratifying. It’s more than I could ever have asked for.”