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Law School News: From The Community, For The Community 1/21/24

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Law School News

From the Community, for the Community

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In December 2023, RWU Law Associate Dean for Student Life & Operations Lorraine Lalli L'01 was awarded the NAACP Providence Branch's Rosa Parks Courageous Leader Award in recognition of her service to the law school and the larger community. Image Credit: NAACP Providence

Long before she was the Associate Dean of Student Life and Operations at Roger Williams University School of Law, Lorraine Lalli was an aspiring law student. On her admissions essay for RWU Law, she wrote about how she grew up in Providence's Mt. Hope neighborhood and planned to use the skills she learned in law school to give back to the community.

“At the time, I thought that maybe I would go into politics,” she recalls, “but I knew that it would be some way to use those skills to try to help shape the community in a more equitable fashion.”

Today, Lalli wears many hats in her role with the law school, from supporting student well-being to giving back to the larger Providence community, where she grew up and watched her parents lead and serve.

Tools to succeed

After growing up in Providence, Lalli earned her undergraduate degree from Spelman College, a historically Black women's college in Atlanta. She cast a wide net for law schools up and down the East Coast. When she visited RWU Law, though, "I really felt like it was going to be a place where I was going to be valued as an individual and really have the tools that I needed to succeed. And I was, and still am, very invested in the local Rhode Island community and so the opportunity to study law in Rhode Island was attractive to me."

As a student, Lalli recalls being one of a small number of Black students. She was active on the trial team and president of the Multicultural Law Students Association ("MCLSA"), an umbrella group for students from various backgrounds. She graduated at the top of her class and was a speaker at graduation.

After graduation, Lalli worked in the banking and finance department of Brown Rudnick before stepping away to raise a family. When she learned about the opening for the inaugural head of diversity at RWU Law, she and her husband were active in mentoring students at what is now Bridgewater State University, where he worked. The new position at RWU Law fit her strengths.



A catalyst for change

Lalli hit the ground running, starting a networking partnership between the Thurgood Marshall Society of Rhode Island and the MCLSA. She also helped the law school extend its pipeline programs for high school students and begin a pre-orientation for diverse students. In 2007, Lalli was promoted to Dean of Students.

When asked about the evolution of the law school during her tenure, she points to the law school's [mission statement](#), which emphasizes not only student success but also service to the community as a whole. According to Lalli, "One of the things that I'm really proud about is that we changed our school's mission statement to firmly state our pledge to supporting diversity within our school, but also to further articulate our relationship and responsibility to the broader Rhode Island community as we push for racial and social justice."

Lalli's work has paid off. When she came onboard in 2005, students of color made up 9 percent of the RWU Law first-year class. By 2023, the number had jumped to 28 percent.



A legacy of service

Lalli continues to be active in the Providence community, serving on the boards of groups like the community development organization One Neighborhood Builders and Mt. Hope Learning Center. She also appreciates the law school's partnerships with community-based organizations. For example, the Law School's Feinstein Center for Pro Bono and Experiential Education provides students with hands-on legal experience while working with area organizations.

"One of the things that's special about RWU Law" Lalli says, "is there isn't this kind of separation between the work that we do for the Law School and the community-facing work. One is an extension of the other."

In December 2023, Lalli was awarded the NAACP Providence Branch's Rosa Parks Courageous Leader Award in recognition of her service to Roger William University School of Law and the

larger community. The award was especially poignant because her mother – Linda Newton, the first vice president of diversity of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island – had previously received the same recognition. During the awards gala, Newton introduced her daughter, describing her as “an unwavering advocate for political, educational, social, and economic justice.”

When she was applying to law schools, Lalli had been drawn to RWU Law because she believed she would be valued there. That is no less true today. “I’ve stuck around for so long because I think it’s a place where I really have a voice and people listen, where the work that I do matters for students and I hope matters for the broader community,” she says. “You can see the fruits of your labor on a daily, weekly, and long-term basis, and that feels good.”