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Dean Logan's Blog: Mentorship

Roger Williams University School of Law

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A big part of success in law school, as in life, comes from the support and advice of others. At RWU Law we recognize the importance of mentorship in guiding students and helping them learn about not just success stories, but also strategies for overcoming obstacles, understanding strengths, and making smart decisions. Students find mentors in lots of places. For many, the most influential mentors are not people who were assigned as part of a program. Rather, they are folks who take the time to ask the right questions and serve as a sounding board. That said, official mentoring programs have an important place in professional development and law school in particular. It is often said that studying the law is like learning a new language. For learning this new language, the support of a mentor can make all the difference.

Many of our mentorship programs are housed in our student organizations. For example, the Women’s Law Society has a mentoring program connecting women law students with practitioners and judges in the Rhode Island Women’s Bar Association. With about 15 students participating annually, this program offers one-on-one advice from people who have gone through similar experiences. By serving as mentors, these successful attorneys are not only helping teach our law students, but they help make successful women attorneys.

One of our longest running mentoring programs is the relationship between our Multicultural Law Students Association and the official minority lawyers’ group in Rhode Island, the Thurgood Marshall Law Society. This initiative has informally existed for over a decade, but in the last six years it has evolved into a structured program. With over 35 attorneys and judges volunteering and about 25 students matched annually, the program benefits from attorneys who attend the functions and help foster a support network. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard from practicing lawyers that they find that working with law students in such a program is an energizing experience, well worth the time commitment.

Peer mentorship is an important as well – and can be essential for students who are trying to find their place in a new part of the country and a challenging academic environment. Such opportunities abound in a close-knit community like RWU Law, whether over coffee in the Bistro or in the more structured context of a study group, but formal programs have their place as well. One successful program is for the 1Ls in our Honors Program. Each entering Honors student is assigned a peer mentor who is a 2L or 3L and also in the program. As one participant said at the end of last year: ‘I think my mentor was the most beneficial aspect of the Honors Program. She was helpful in getting acquainted with law school in general, and was a valuable resource for any random questions I had. Even now, she has given me advice on selecting courses for next year.’

Here are some photos from a recent MCLSA/Thurgood Marshall event.
Linda Rekas Sloan, Esq., Jennifer Coliflores ’11, and Zahrah Taylor ‘12