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Trending@RWULaw: Assistant Dean Donnelley-Boylen's Post: Meet the Class of 2017

Roger Williams University School of Law

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Meet the Class of 2017

On Wednesday, August 13th we welcomed the Class of 2017 to RWU Law. This is the 13th class I have had the privilege to admit to the School of Law and each one brings its own unique character (and characters!); this class is no different. Each year I begin the year by telling the class a little about themselves. Here are excerpts from my welcome remarks to the Class of 2017:

I would like to welcome all of you to Roger Williams University School of Law and to Orientation 2014. I am so glad to see the Class of 2017 has finally arrived; we’ve been waiting for you.

Students in your class attended a wide variety of colleges and universities all around the country including Louisiana State, Columbia, Vassar, University of Texas – San Antonio, Colorado State, Brown, and Brigham Young University.

But some schools sent us more than others. Five schools are tied for fourth place on the list of top feeder schools to your class. They are Assumption College in Massachusetts, the University of Connecticut – Storrs, Penn State – University Park, Rutgers University – New Brunswick, and the University of Vermont; each has three enrolling students. UMass – Amherst is in third place with four students, our own Roger Williams University is in second with seven students and this year the top feeder school to your class is the University of Rhode Island with 17 students enrolling – 12% of your class.

In your class you will find a minister, a real estate broker, a social worker, an EMT, a superintendant of the public schools here in Bristol, a capitol hill staffer, a submarine sonar technician, a resident director at a college, and even a bartender at Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas.

Someone here trained as an opera singer, someone else is a violinist, and another teaches a cappella. Members of your class have created organizations to improve their communities including a foundation to help at risk African American youth, a football equipment safety awareness organization that was recognized by the President of the United States, and a tenants’ rights organization in West Texas.
Your classmates have worked to rehabilitate injured wild animals in Maine, researched reforestation in Iowa, assisted in re-building Haiti after the earthquake, and helped to establish an orphanage in Honduras. Someone here helped to start a small farm in Virginia focused on the farm to table movement, another classmate has been published on Gawker about being both LGBT and an immigrant. A classmate has facilitated discussions about human trafficking and sexual violence. A number of you have been active in combatting domestic violence serving as victim advocates, court monitors, and volunteering at safe houses.

This may be the largest group of AmeriCorps volunteers we have seen in one class with projects all over the country including working with FEMA to rebuild communities after disasters, tutoring and mentoring kids in Texas, and working with sexual abuse victims in New Hampshire.

You have made the most of your college experience. We have a captain of the football team, a student body president, and a couple Presidents of the Pre-Law Society. A number of members of your class have been advocates for LGBT rights and marriage equality. You have had many interesting political internships including with Members of the British Parliament, United States Senators, the House Democratic Caucus, the Republican National Committee, as well as state legislators from New York to California. Members of your class organized for both the Obama and Romney campaigns. You have also interned in law firms in Rhode Island, legal services offices in New Mexico, and court houses in Los Angeles. While one of you interned for the New Jersey Devils hockey team another classmate interned for the New Dehli Daredevils Cricket Team in India.

A number of you hold advanced degrees including the MSW, MPA, and M.Ed. Someone even has a Ph.D in Biological Science.

At the law school that houses the highly regarded Marine Affairs Institute, it should not be shocking that a number of your classmates have done interesting things on and around the water. Your classmates have tracked whale migration along the East Coast, gathered field data on fish stocks, and studied coral reef ecology in Bermuda. One of your classmates was in the Peace Corps serving as a Coastal Management Advisor in the Philippines and someone else has held a Knauss Fellowship at National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association in Washington, DC.

A number of you have served in the United States Armed Forces. These classmates have served in a wide variety of places including Iraq and Afghanistan.

27% of your class is made up of native Rhode Islanders, meaning nearly three quarters of you are relocating to the area. In fact, one of your classmates has told us this is his first time above the Mason-
Dixon Line and another his first time east of Michigan! 30% of your class hails from the other New England states, 25% from the rest of the Northeast, 11% from the South, 6% from the West but only one of your classmates comes from the Midwest.

A large number of your classmates immigrated to the United States. Some of the countries where you were born include: Costa Rica, Cameroon, Australia, Mexico, Ethiopia, Columbia, Ghana, Bolivia and Ukraine. Your class speaks a wide variety of languages including Spanish, French, Cantonese, Arabic, and Russian.

52% of your class is made up of men, 48% by women. The average age of your class is 24, with 7% of you 30 years of age or older. A number of you are married and some have children. And 9% of your class identifies as a member of the LGBT Community.

27% of your class comes from racial and ethnic groups underrepresented in the legal profession making your class - the most diverse in this law school's history. With five record breaking classes in a row and three that are still in our building this means that Roger Williams University School of Law is the most diverse it has ever been.

It has been a pleasure getting to know all of you over the last year. Please don’t be strangers to the Admissions Office. Feel free to stop in and say hello.

And, on behalf of all of us at RWU Law, welcome to law school.

Here are some photos taken during the welcome address this year: