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Roger Williams University recognizes inaugural Shawmut Scholars

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Shown (from left) are: RWU Shawmut Scholar, Jenifer Gomez; Marianne Monte, chief people and administration officer at Shawmut Design and Construction; and RWU Shawmut Scholar, Amy Parrilla.

Bristol, RI With four years of real-world learning and mentorship experiences with a leading construction management firm, along with full tuition support, added to their tool belts, the inaugural cohort of Roger Williams University's (RWU) Shawmut Scholars will graduate this spring ready to become the construction leaders shaping the built environment.

In 2021, RWU established the partnership with Shawmut Design and Construction, a national construction management firm dedicated to fostering a talented and diverse workforce. The Shawmut Scholars program provides access to education and career development through four-year scholarships, paid internships, professional development, and mentorship to students majoring in construction management or engineering. These students saw firsthand how industry professionals operate through site visits of construction projects and learning directly from seasoned professionals, integrating their classroom learning with industry application to expand their understanding of project management, site coordination, and leadership skills. As they prepare to enter the workforce, the impact of the program is evident in their confidence, skills, and career readiness.

With the success of this inaugural cohort of students preparing to graduate, RWU and Shawmut have made known that another four scholarships will be available to launch the next Shawmut Scholars in fall 2025.

“Shawmut Design and Construction is proud to celebrate the inaugural class of Shawmut Scholars at Roger Williams University, students who have gained real-world training and are ready for great careers in construction management,” said Les Hiscoe, CEO of Shawmut. “Now, we look forward to seeing all they accomplish in the industry, including two of the scholars who will soon join Shawmut as full-time employee-owners upon graduation, and to welcoming the next group of RWU Shawmut Scholars this fall.”

For students like Amy Parrilla, a senior Construction Management major with a minor in Business from Medford, Mass., the Shawmut Scholars Program is a foundation for confidence, professional growth, and a sense of belonging in the industry.

“The Shawmut Scholars program has given me a sense of community, which I didn’t have before,” said Parrilla. “It made me realize that I can succeed, that I do belong here, and I can handle the challenges that come my way. It pushed me to look beyond what I thought I could do and to aim higher in my academics and my career.”

Through the program’s immersive experiences, Parrilla gained firsthand exposure to major construction projects. She worked on high-profile sites, including a historic Newport mansion, where she honed her project management and scheduling skills. She also contributed to a North Providence schools project, attending owner meetings and making site visits, which gave her practical insight into client relations and site coordination. These opportunities, combined with mentorship from industry professionals, strengthened her ability to adapt to real-world challenges.

“The Shawmut Scholars program has created a powerful support network that goes beyond financial assistance,” said Sierra Zschirnt, director of external relations at RWU’s Center for Career and Professional Development, who coordinated the internship and professional development programming for the Shawmut Scholars program. “It offers our students not only the opportunity to gain valuable internships but also the professional guidance and mentorship necessary to navigate an industry where they may lack connections. By giving them access to Shawmut’s leaders, site

visits, and field trips, we've empowered students to step into the professional world with confidence and skills they might otherwise not have had. This program is more than just an internship; it's about building the future leaders in the construction industry."

For Jenifer Gomez, a senior double majoring in Construction Management and Spanish with a minor in Business from Providence, R.I., the Shawmut Scholars Program was a key factor in her decision to attend RWU. The promise of mentorship, hands-on learning, and a direct connection to industry professionals provided her with a strong foundation for academic and career success.

"The Shawmut Scholars program played a pivotal role in my decision to attend RWU," said Gomez. "It gave me early access to industry professionals, hands-on experiences, and a supportive community that helped shape my career aspirations. Knowing that RWU and Shawmut were invested in my success reinforced my confidence in pursuing construction management."

During her time in the program, Gomez worked on several significant projects, including assisting with a large-scale commercial build in downtown Providence. Shadowing experienced project managers, she learned to navigate construction logistics, budgeting, and contractor coordination. These experiences not only strengthened her technical knowledge but also built her confidence in stepping into leadership roles.

For Bryant Olivo, a senior Civil Engineering major with a minor in Mathematics from Providence, R.I., the Shawmut Scholars program exceeded his expectations, providing hands-on experience that deepened his understanding of construction management and site operations. From working on dormitory renovations at Brown University to assisting with large-scale projects like Churchill House, he developed problem-solving skills, strengthened his communication abilities, and learned the intricacies of project logistics.

"The most valuable lesson I learned through the Shawmut Scholars program is the importance of communication in every phase of a project," Olivo said. "Being on site and working alongside professionals helped me recognize areas where I needed to grow, especially in speaking up and collaborating with different teams. The experience gave me a deeper understanding of project management and reinforced my passion for building infrastructure."

As they prepare to graduate and enter the workforce, both Parrilla and Gomez are stepping forward with not only the technical expertise but also the confidence and connections that will shape their careers. That success is already coming to fruition, as both Gomez and Parrilla have accepted job offers with Shawmut, launching their careers with the very company that helped shape their academic journeys. Olivo was also offered a job with Shawmut but will be moving after graduation to a location where the company does not have an office and could not accept the position.

"The Shawmut Scholars program has become an integral part of the Roger Williams University community, and its impact continues to grow," said Elizabeth Fongemie, Director of Advancement. "By providing students with access to education and opportunities in the construction industry, Shawmut is not only helping to build a pipeline for talent but is also empowering the next generation

of leaders. Through this partnership, students gain professional guidance that goes beyond the classroom, equipping them with the skills, insights, and confidence they need to succeed. We are proud of the difference this program is making, and the mentorship provided by Sierra Zschirnt and the Center for Career and Professional Development team has been invaluable in shaping our students' futures."

With the ongoing collaboration between Roger Williams University and Shawmut Design and Construction, the Shawmut Scholars program will continue to open doors, shaping the future of the construction industry by providing access to education and building a talented pipeline of graduates who are ready to soar as soon as they graduate.

For the fall 2025 semester, the RWU Shawmut Scholars program will provide another four full-tuition scholarships for incoming first-year students majoring in construction management, or business or architecture majors who commit to minoring in construction management. For more on the RWU Shawmut Scholars program, visit: <https://www.rwu.edu/undergraduate/admission-aid/financial-aid/types-aid/new-student-awards-and-endowed-scholarships/shawmut-scholars>.

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