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Michael Yelnosky

Roger Williams University School of Law

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May 8, 2017

Dean Yelnosky's Post

THE PATH TO COMMENCEMENT: MARIA VIVEIROS '17

Posted by Michael Yelnosky on 05/08/2017 at 09:43 AM

On May 19th, the members of the Class of 2017 will cross the stage and receive their diplomas from President Farish. That short crossing tells little of the rich stories of how graduates arrived at that path. Part of what is moving about commencement is that observers know each graduate's path was unique and deeply personal. I write to share the path of just one of the members of our remarkable Class of 2017, Maria Viveiros.



Maria was born in Rhode Island. Her mother is a Guatemalan immigrant who came to the United States to try to build a better life for her daughters. Maria graduated with distinction from Shea High School in Pawtucket, and then she attended Brown University, from which she graduated in 2008 with a B.S. in Sociology.

Maria was just getting started. She went to work as a benefits client analyst at CVS/Caremark, where she helped design and manage pharmacy benefit plans for large employers. In 2010 she was recruited to join UnitedHealthcare as a state Medicaid program manager. On the side (believe it or not) she earned an M.B.A in Healthcare Management. When she applied to RWU Law in 2013 her boss at UnitedHealthcare described her as “a rising star.”

Her boss was right. Maria became the Associate Director of Compliance at UnitedHealthcare just over a year after she matriculated as a part-time student here in fall of 2013. Maria told me that RWU Law was the only place where she could pursue her career and educational goals at the same time. It was not just the location, she says, but also the culture at the school. She found the faculty, staff, and students to be flexible and supportive of her at all times.

However, make no mistake. Maria has worked hard for everything she has achieved. She works in the evenings and on weekends to keep up, and she has had to take summer and evening classes whenever possible. Her academic work has been outstanding, and she has been able to complete all her degree requirements in just one extra year of study.

Remarkably, she has also been able to participate fully in the public interest and experiential programs that are a hallmark of the RWU Law experience. Maria participated in the Pro Bono Collaborative U Visa Project, which offers victims of domestic violence legal assistance in seeking nonimmigrant visas. She also participated in an Alternative Spring Break Project that sent students to San Antonio, Texas to work with the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services, an organization dedicated to helping families, adults, and unaccompanied children seek legal relief from deportation. In both of these projects Maria was able to apply her legal knowledge and her fluency in Spanish to assist people in dire need.

Maria was also able to participate in our unique Corporate Counsel Externship Program. Professor Cecily Banks, the director of that program, was able to assist Maria in finding a placement within UnitedHealthcare's general counsel's office so she could begin to work more directly with, among other things, the legal aspects of the growing field of corporate compliance. Maria credits the law school with helping her develop skills in legal research, legal writing, statutory interpretation, and contract drafting, in addition to helping her learn foundational substantive law and special subjects that will be of great value to her in her career.

Her most memorable moment in law school came just months ago when she travelled with a group of honors students to D.C. to watch argument in the United States Supreme Court, meet with one of the lawyers after his argument concluded, and observe part of the confirmation hearing of Justice Neil Gorsuch.

After graduation in May, Maria will prepare and sit for the Connecticut bar examination. She intends to continue to work in the legal department at UnitedHealthcare, and because Connecticut recently adopted the uniform bar exam, passing that exam will allow her to practice law in over twenty-five jurisdictions.

As I tell students at commencement, we will miss them. It was a privilege to have Maria and her classmates study and graduate from RWU Law. They have made the law school a better place, and we look forward to watching where their paths lead them after they cross the stage on May 19th.