Rojas Reflects on Law School During a Pandemic

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Rojas reflects on law school during a pandemic

During her sophomore year of college, Alexa Rojas was an intake intern with a children's advocacy center outside of Joliet, Illinois. It sparked the realization that she knew she wanted to make a difference in the lives of kids who have endured abuse and trauma. In her position, Rojas served as the first point of contact for families scheduling forensic interviews with law enforcement and prosecutors. In order to lessen the impact on the victim, substantial logistical work went on behind the scenes to ensure that the child only had to tell their story once—to someone they trusted.
room were for much younger kids. So, we were talking about her track team, her math class. And that’s when this girl said the most heartbreaking thing I’ve ever heard about her abuser.”

The comment, which Rojas protects to this day out of confidence and respect for her client, had such a deep and resounding impact on Rojas that she knew she wanted to earn a law degree.

On Saturday (May 6), Rojas and 176 of her peers will earn JDs from the Indiana University Maurer School of Law, ready to begin the next chapter of their lives. For the Class of 2023, this weekend’s graduation ceremony will end a law school experience unlike any other—they are the class that began their legal education during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For Rojas, that meant not even having the opportunity to visit Bloomington before first-year orientation started.

“I signed up for Admitted Students Day in March (2020), but everything shut down before it took place,” she said. “I didn’t know what Bloomington was like or what law school life would be like. I had some second doubts, to be honest, but the administration made so much outreach that we all felt like we were a part of something.”

She credited the Law School’s administration with holding optional weekly informal sessions throughout the summer for 1Ls to get a head-start on what law school life would be like.

“My peers were very active, both in that class and in our GroupMe texts,” Rojas said. “That was really comforting,
In August 2020, the class of 2023 began their law school careers in a highly unusual way. Two-thirds of each class attended in person, while the remaining third participated online.

“We all knew it was such a strange situation, but it ended up being a bonding experience,” Rojas said. “We were all focused on getting through it together.”

The school deployed a block schedule, putting students in condensed four-week classes on a particular subject. Instead of taking Contracts or Torts over the course of a semester, 1Ls had to master the subjects—and other first-year curricular offerings—in month-long segments.

“I was worried about having to take my first final exam four weeks into law school,” Rojas said. “But there were some advantages. Being able to focus on one subject at a time had its benefits.”

Forging social connections was a challenge as well.

Rojas was elected the 1L representative for the Student Bar Association, giving her insight into how her peers were acclimating to the challenges of hybrid classes.

“The student organizations weren’t firing at 100 percent,” she said, “but groups found ways to hold safe events, both virtual or safely distanced outdoors, that embedded us into the community. The SBA gave me an opportunity to really connect with my classmates and hear their concerns.”

The SBA and other groups matched upper-division students through biweekly “Cocktail Chats” over Zoom to
As restrictions eased, a sense of normalcy started returning midway through the Class of 2023’s 2L year.

“I remember halfway through our second year, I looked up and realized we didn’t have restrictions anymore,” Rojas said. “After the mask mandate was lifted, I had brief moments of panic about forgetting my mask. But now, as a 3L, the pandemic still affects us, but has mainly leveled out.”

Rojas ended up serving as the SBA president during her third and final year at Indiana Law, allowing her to continue serving her peers and sharing her story with prospective students as an Admissions Fellow. The Admitted Student Days Rojas and others didn’t have a chance to attend in the spring of 2020? She spoke at both this year. In person.

After graduating Saturday, Rojas—who will become the first attorney in her family—will spend the summer studying for the bar exam and likely working with Indiana Department of Child Service’s Bloomington office. From there, she hopes to join the state agency full time, working to protect Indiana’s youth.

Graduation will mark a major milestone for her and her peers. They will have started and finished law school during one of the most challenging three-year stretches in recent history.

“It’s going to be so bittersweet,” Rojas said, “but I’m really proud of everything I’ve accomplished, and all that my friends have accomplished.”