



## **LLM Students in Focus: Serving His Country and Pursuing His Dreams**

**Interviews and Profiles**





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My path as a lawyer has made several turns in the short time that I have practiced. Looking back, I see that I have reinvented myself as a professional during many intervals in order to meet the demands of the situation and circumstance; yet, the one constant factor is my passion and love for being a lawyer.

I was born and raised in Quito, the capital of Ecuador. By the time I was 10, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer. I started my career as a solo practitioner, which was a hard task. It consisted of knocking on the doors of friends and family to let them know that I was a lawyer. I had to engage in selling my services and myself because I did not have a steady flow of clients. Being a lawyer was not enough; I had to learn to look at my practice as a business where I needed to differentiate from others in what I offered as a service and product; I was the product and the service was my skills.

In looking for ways to set myself apart, I started to take short courses in new trends such as negotiation and alternative disputes resolution systems. I took courses in specific law topics such as contract law for the private and public sectors. My goal was to become an international lawyer.

My solo legal practice allowed me work as a counsel in different areas. I advised several business people on mergers and acquisitions and controlling stocks in medium and large domestic corporations. I served poor communities in their negotiations with the central government in land expropriations. My skills as a negotiator and a business lawyer grew and I began to gain a reputation that allowed my practice to blossom; yet I was still not satisfied because I still found myself lacking the critical differentiating skills.

It was during this period that I started to look for a job as an in-house lawyer. Finding a job inside a big corporation was not an easy task. But six months into the application and screening process, I was offered a job as in-house corporate counsel at Petroecuador, one of the largest oil companies in Ecuador.

The first weeks at work were not my fondest of memories. Getting into the rhythm of a new form of work was stressful because of the enormous amount of work spread across the different roles that I played. Since my background as a legal professional was not based on litigation, I faced a large number of legal challenges. Much of the litigation was due to the lack of proper processes from within the corporation, which resulted in actions for breach of contract, environmental violations and other violations for the company's actions and inactions. The litigation was both domestic and regional. But I loved the work because this was what being a lawyer was about and I was able to step up to the challenge.

After several weeks of work, I did not know that my career was about to change. One day, looking into the archives, I found a number of cases inside a large, dirty and untouched box. These cases were the company's arbitration and mediation cases. None had a lawyer assigned to them and as I looked at each and every case in detail, I realized I had found a golden egg. Five hours into my in-depth review, where at one point I realized I had forgotten to take lunch, I went to my boss to find out who was in charge of these cases. My boss informed me that there was no one in the company who handed arbitration cases because none of the lawyers in the company liked arbitration. He looked at my analysis of the cases and asked if I would be interested in taking care of them. My life changed when I said yes.

I started to work in all mediations and arbitrations proceedings. Due to the big number of arbitral and mediation process, I transferred all my environmental claims to a newly hired lawyer so that I could only focus on my new assignment. However, the thought of not having sufficient knowledge still

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lingered in the back of my head and I was constantly reminded that I had to go back to school. I needed to get an LLM to allow me to practice as an international lawyer in arbitration.

Given that I had already developed my mediation and negotiation skills, I started to actively engage the cases and found successful resolutions of many issues. Suddenly, I found myself called in by senior management to participate in contractual negotiations with contractors and suppliers. However, it was the arbitration work that was most exciting because it was an unexplored area and a fascinating legal field. For the very first time in my professional life, I felt a sense of fulfillment.

Working as an in-house counsel gave me not only the opportunity to be recognized as an attorney, but it also allowed me to make great relationships and open the door to where I am today. Working as an in-house counsel gives you privileged opportunities to play several roles as a lawyer. If you act ethically and with professionalism, you can be a negotiator, advisor and litigator all in one day. While all the achievements and recognitions sound and feel good, nothing is more rewarding than working for my country, and championing the interest of people. Sadly, my path in the public sector did not last long. I was tempted for new goals, in almost the same field but now in the private sector.

When you base your work on ethics and professionalism, your work and name will always be remembered. My reputation led to an offer as in-house counsel for a multi-national subsidiary where I started working the day of the new offer.

At this company, I focused on contract negotiation and found myself facing the same individuals I had once worked alongside in the public sector.

Here, I had the great opportunity of being part of the team that constructed, in conjunction with the state and other corporations, one of the few mega-projects in Ecuador. However, my involvement came to a sudden end when my acceptance letter from Georgetown University Law Center as a Master in Laws candidate arrived. I knew I had to go because an LLM degree would allow me to hone my English language skills while learning the colossal difference between the common law and civil law systems, which is essential when practicing international law.

I would urge American lawyers to look into an LLM degree at the IE Law School in Madrid, Queen Mary University of London Law School or the Tsinghua Law School in Beijing. The international education is paramount.

Courses from the extensive curriculum in project finance, international business transactions and arbitration have significantly enhanced my skillset in three key aspects of my job. First, it has enabled me to think more critically. All the new knowledge I have acquired has made me see everything from a different and renewed prospective, one that is at par with international practices. This has been a very valuable investment of time, effort and money, which I know will have invaluable returns in my future pursuits.

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