

Immigration law is graduate's calling

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Alexis Ruiz, who will graduate from Tulane Law School on Saturday (May 14), wants to pursue immigration law because of the difficulties her family faced in coming to the United States. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

As a teenager, Alexis Ruiz considered a career in marine biology. But life kept steering her toward the legal profession.

While spending a high school summer in Mexico with a family on a mango plantation, Ruiz, now a third-year [Tulane Law School](#) student, found the disparity between the family members' living conditions and the opulence enjoyed by local drug traffickers dismaying.

After college, as a White House intern and then a staffer on President Barack Obama's 2012 re-election campaign, she saw the passion and credentials of people around her, and she decided, "I needed to keep up."

Ruiz later worked on immigration policy for the United Auto Workers, which connected with the challenges her own family had faced: Her father had crossed the U.S.-Mexico border illegally but gained legal status through a 1986 law endorsed by then-President Ronald Reagan; her mother overstayed a visa and wasn't able to become legalized in the U.S. until 2009.

"I want to practice immigration law because my parents have gone through so much trauma and difficulty," said Ruiz, who was born in Chicago and moved to Georgia at age 7 with her mother and two sisters.

At Tulane, Ruiz has built leadership skills along with her legal training. As [Student Bar Association](#) president (the first Latina to hold the post) and a member of the Dean's Advisory Committee, she's served as a voice for students and built trust with administrators. She also helped spearhead a Class of 2016 fundraising drive that has reached a record 75 percent participation, with all proceeds going to need-based scholarships.

Ruiz said she was warned against attending law school because of the debt and uncertain job market, but she's found the camaraderie with classmates, even in a pressure-filled atmosphere, "a very positive experience."

Law school, she said, "opens doors of opportunity you didn't know existed before."

The 2016 Commencement ceremony will be [streamed live online](#). Follow us on social media at #tulane16.

Linda P. Campbell is Tulane Law School's director of communications.

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