



Feature

Hispanic Law Students honor a former Graduate with the Graciela Olivarez Award

This article talks about the prestigious Graciela Olivarez Award and the recipient in the current year, to be given the honor. Graciela Olivarez was the first woman and first Hispanic student to graduate from Notre Dame Law School. Every year the Award is bestowed upon a Hispanic lawyer or judge who carries on the Olivarez commitment to community service.

What is so special about the Graciela Olivarez Award? Of course it is a special award because it was founded for an incredible Notre Dame Law Graduate who being the first woman graduate was in tandem the first Hispanic to receive her law degree at Notre Dame Law School.

The reason the award is really special, the Hispanic Law Students Association at Notre Dame Law School are responsible to select the Hispanic lawyer who is the best at continuing Olivarez’s commitment to community service. There are very few awards bestowed by Law Students and this is one of them given annually.

A Bio of Graciela Olivarez

Before Graciela Olivarez ever attended Law School she worked at a radio broadcasting station and made her way through the ranks till she became the Women’s Program Director. She also worked with the Choate Foundation in Phoenix, where she focused on finding solutions to poverty and educational needs of Mexican-American children. Just prior to entering law school, Olivarez served in the Arizona State Economic Opportunity Office.

Finally, Graciela Olivarez was admitted to Notre Dame Law School without a high school degree in 1967. Olivarez’s first position after law school was director of Food for All, a community action program that provided improvement to the federal food programs. The areas of improvement were in state programs such as

- Food stamps
- School lunch

- Surplus food distribution in Arizona

From 1972 to 1975, Olivarez was a professor of law at the Albuquerque University Law School. This was just the beginning of her career as she was nominated by Jimmy Carter to be director of the Community Services Administration in 1977.

This was a snapshot of the life of Graciela Olivarez and her years of service to her community and country. She leaves a long road of service to follow. Who did the Hispanic Student Association choose to be honored with her award? A Bio of Rodolfo “Rudy” Monterrosa - 2009 Award Winner

In 2009, the Graciela Olivarez Award was presented to Rodolfo “Rudy” Monterrosa. Attorney Monterrosa is now a Notre Dame Law School Graduate who lives and has a private law practice in South Bend, Indiana. Attorney Monterrosa’s externship in St. Joseph County, Indiana led him to continue his work with the office as a bilingual public defender long after his graduation.

Monterrosa is on the Hispanic Alumni Board of Notre Dame and also on the Board for a local Hispanic community center in his town. Monterrosa gained appointment by the Indiana Supreme Court to its Race and Gender Fairness Commission.

Every year he flies back to his hometown for a Latino Leadership Conference where he speaks to youth. Why? He remembers it was at a Latino Leadership Conference where he first saw another Latino Lawyer speak and was impressed by him and set out to follow his career. Monterrosa carries on with his own career doing community service to benefit the Hispanic people.

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