



Maria de Arteaga

Wisconsin Innocence Project – University of Wisconsin Law School

De Arteaga finds dream job working to exonerate Latinos

Maria de Arteaga says she doesn't believe in fate, but when she came across the listing for her dream job at the Wisconsin Innocence Project — a position dedicated to helping Latino inmates pursue innocence claims — she had to wonder if fate played a hand.

At the time, de Arteaga was a recent law school graduate and was traveling in Latin America for six

months with her husband. Although she received two offers for full-time jobs upon graduating from the University of Wisconsin Law School, de Arteaga turned down both in favor of traveling and taking a “reboot and reset.”

That's when she saw the job description online.

“It was this crazy string of fate and fairly perfect that I was in Latin America trying to work on my Spanish,” de

Arteaga said.

De Arteaga eventually got her dream job and began working for the Wisconsin Innocence Project as a supervising attorney in 2016. But her interest in the project — which seeks to exonerate wrongfully convicted persons — dates to her undergraduate years at UW-Madison.

As a psychology and criminal justice major, de Arteaga worked for a

prison-based psychology lab where she interviewed hundreds of inmates and learned about the Wisconsin Innocence Project.

“I became very passionate about the work the WIP did because I could think of no greater injustice than to spend time in prison for something you didn't do,” she said.

Today, de Arteaga spends part of her time working with the Latino Exoneration Program, a team within the innocence project formed using a U.S. Department of Justice grant. The Latino Exoneration Program team works specifically on innocence claims from Latino inmates. De Arteaga also serves as a clinical instructor, teaching undergraduates and law students at UW-Madison.

“I'm proud to have Maria as a colleague and graduate of UW Law School,” said Margaret Raymond, dean of the UW Law School. “She is a dedicated and passionate attorney who is using her legal training to advocate for others and make the world a better place.”

De Arteaga's role at the innocence project is a term position that will end in 2019. Although she's not sure yet what her next move will be, she says a natural step would be to work in civil-rights law.

Regardless of where she ends up, de Arteaga says working with inmates has left a lasting impression.

“Almost everybody has a real capacity to change,” she said. “To be able to see these people for more than the worst thing they've done or been accused of doing — it's really important.”

—Lauren Sieben