

# ASU Law student advances HR career with master's in employment law

By Crystal Jimenez, ASU News  
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**Editor's note:** This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2025 graduates](#).

As a department human resources specialist at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University, Itzel Torres Alvarez wanted to deepen her understanding of U.S. labor laws and their application in the private sector.

So, she enrolled in ASU Law's [human resources and employment law online master's program](#), which has given her the knowledge and tools to enhance her expertise in the area.

"The MHREL degree will significantly expand my career opportunities, particularly in roles such as HR manager, where I can focus on employee relations or in providing HR legal advice for law firms," Torres Alvarez said. "Additionally, I am exploring freelance HR opportunities to offer guidance and support to workers who may not fully understand federal and state laws, helping them navigate their rights and obligations more effectively."

With over 20 years of experience in international HR and U.S. government roles, Torres Alvarez wants to eventually get her Society for Human Resource Management certification, along with other relevant certifications that help complement and enhance the knowledge she gained through her master's degree. She ultimately wants to be an expert in the field of HR and employment law.

The path to getting her degree, however, wasn't so simple. Originally from the Republic of Panama, Torres Alvarez moved to the United States seven years ago and had trouble adapting to and learning the U.S. judicial system.

“Particularly because I am originally from a country with a legal system based on Roman or Civil law, while the U.S follows a common law system,” she explained. “Understanding the terminology and legal structure was a steep learning curve. Additionally, reading case law and understanding how one court decision references another required a lot of time and effort to master.”

With graduation around the corner, Torres Alvarez is ready to take the next step in her career.

*Note: Answers may have been lightly edited for length and/or clarity.*

**Question: What was your “aha” moment when you realized you wanted to study the field you majored in?**

**Answer:** While searching for my first real job, I was hired as a personnel assistant. I had a great supervisor who believed I had the potential to pursue HR as a career, not just a job. She not only mentored me but also exemplified what it means to be an outstanding HR professional. After years in the HR field, I realized that a bachelor’s degree would not be enough and earning a master’s degree in employment law would expand my career opportunities and support my professional growth within the industry.

**Q: What’s something you learned while at ASU Law — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?**

**A:** I’m constantly surprised by how much I learn each day. After every lesson, I often find myself thinking, “That’s a new thing I learned today!”

**Q: Why did you choose ASU?**

**A:** I chose ASU because I work here and the MHREL program aligns perfectly with SHRM guidelines, supporting my professional goals.

**Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?**

**A:** The professor who taught me the most important lesson was Professor Joel Friedman. He consistently reminded us that employment in the United States is governed by law and that knowing and understanding legal terminology is essential. His insights extended beyond his class — his goal was to ensure we truly grasped the legal principles of employment law and knew how to apply them in our everyday HR work. His perspective influenced how I approached not just his course but the entire MHREL program.

**Q: What’s the best piece of advice you’d give to those still in school?**

**A:** Don’t procrastinate. Read consistently and start your week by tackling the easy tasks — it helps build momentum.

**Q: What was your favorite spot, whether for studying, meeting friends or just thinking about life?**

**A:** My backyard is my favorite power-studying spot. It's peaceful and quiet, and it helps me focus.

**Q: What are your plans after graduation?**

**A:** After graduation, I plan to earn my Society for Human Resource Management certification and continue advancing my HR career and perhaps creating an HR consulting business.

**Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?**

**A:** If someone gave me \$40 million to solve a problem on our planet, I would use it to help fight climate change and support environmental restoration. Over the years, I've noticed how rainfall has decreased and how the seasons have shifted. Even walking or running through an area with trees versus one filled with concrete and asphalt shows a dramatic temperature difference. We shouldn't have to stay indoors because the heat is unbearable — planting more trees and creating green spaces can help us reclaim the outdoors and restore balance to our environment.

**Q: Highlight an interesting moment, story or accomplishment while at ASU Law.**

**A:** One interesting thing that happened during one of the luncheons organized by the online master's program team was when I ended up sitting with a group of people who had the most amazing conversation about movies — even ones I had never heard of! It was such a fun and unexpected experience. The takeaway for me was that through this program, you don't just connect with others professionally — you also bond over shared personal interests.

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**Text image(s)**



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