

February 09, 2010

2010-02-09: Inspired by the law's power to create

Jason Kornwitz
Northeastern University

Recommended Citation

Kornwitz, Jason, "2010-02-09: Inspired by the law's power to create" (2010). *News@Northeastern*. Paper 511. <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20001754>

This work is available open access, hosted by Northeastern University.

Inspired by the law's power to create



Law student Angela DeVries, left, participates in a traditional Laotian Buddhist farewell ceremony. White strings were tied on her hands for good luck. *Courtesy photo.*

February 9, 2010

Living in Bolivia during the impoverished nation's "Cochabamba Water Wars" in 2000 inspired second-year law student Angela DeVries to study law in developing countries when she arrived at Northeastern more than eight years later.

A decade ago, citizens stormed the streets of Cochabamba, Bolivia's third largest city, protesting the privatization of the country's municipal water supply. DeVries was inundated with coverage of the rebellion—a constant reminder that people who have nothing to lose would fight hard to defend basic rights.

Today, she wants to use the law to help the world's developing countries build sustainable infrastructure, strengthen their judicial

systems and grow their economies. She chose Northeastern's School of Law because it offered her the perfect opportunity to pursue her goals.

"I could do co-op and create my own way of learning about law and development," said DeVries, who graduated from the University of Toronto in 2006 with a degree in political science.

Last spring, she traveled to Vientiane, Laos, to work on co-op with a legal firm, Lao Law & Consultancy Group.

Prior to enrolling at Northeastern, DeVries had backpacked through Laos for five weeks. But working there was a whole different story.

Laos' legal system has existed for only a decade and the country has fewer than 100 lawyers and just 80 laws. There is neither judicial precedent nor penalties for failing to appear in court.

"Most laws aren't enforced because Laos doesn't have the manpower to enforce them," she said. "I went to Laos wanting to see where they were in terms of developing a legal system and which factors play a part in developing and enforcing new laws."

As part of the group's commercial law team, DeVries spent half of her time researching the country's laws and drafting contracts between the government and foreign investors.

In an effort to create more jobs and boost the economy, she helped draft a new law to create Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in Laos, which would provide incentives for foreign investors to develop businesses in the country.

She also worked on a project for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that examined the legal implications of any future disaster relief efforts in the country. The federation recommended that the Laotian government improve existing laws and create new laws that would facilitate relief efforts in case of a large-scale emergency.

DeVries said she learned more about law and development in four months on the job than she could ever imagine learning from a book or a lecture. "I was able to see it happen," said DeVries, who also participated in legal conferences held by the Laotian Ministry of Justice and developed contacts with individual members of the United Nations who work in Laos.

"I was able see the different actors and economic influences and see how NGOs operate," she said. "I was able to experience everything that interests me about underdeveloped countries. It was just what I was hoping to learn."

After she graduates, DeVries hopes to conduct more legal research on developing countries before pursuing

Archives

The following news stories and features are available. For information about older content, please contact University Communications and Public Relations at (617) 373-5471.

2010

January
February
March
April
May
June
July
August
September
October
November
December

Share



Like

Sign Up to see what your friends like.

work on legislative drafting or rule-of-law projects, possibly with the U.N. or NGOs. She wants to keep the interests of those less fortunate in the front of her mind, to always think, "How can I make a better life for people in developing countries?" she said.

For more information, please contact Jason Kornwitz at 617-373-5729 or at j.kornwitz@neu.edu.