Raquel Aldana

Raquel Aldana is an immigrant from Central America, and a first-generation college and law school graduate who paved her way into the legal profession to further the rights of immigrants, undocumented university students, and women and Latina lawyers. She uses her voice to fight for diversity in the field of law for both Latinx students and women lawyers.

Raquel Aldana is currently the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Diversity at UC Davis, and a professor at the School of Law. She joined UC Davis in 2017, after 17 years as a Law professor at the William S. Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; and the McGeorge School of Law where she also served as Associate Dean for Research. She has achieved excellence not only academically and professionally, but also in her devotion to the rights of immigrants and refugees.


As a law professor, Aldana has started several programs centered around intercultural understanding. She instituted service-learning initiatives to provide legal services to immigrants. Her study abroad programs were designed to instill in future lawyers the values and attitudes of intercultural sensibility. She also produced engaged scholarship focused on transitional justice, rule of law reforms in post-conflict societies, and immigrant rights.

Since joining the UC Davis faculty, Aldana has initiated a symposium between the Nursing School, the Medical School, and the Law School, seeking mental health solutions for California's refugee population. Subsequently she's initiating a conference in Tegucigalpa, Honduras to address the refugee exodus from Honduras and strategize with its citizens about systemic solutions. Often referred to by colleagues and students as a mentor, she also works with first-generation female Latinx law students as part of UC Davis' First Generation Initiative.

While on faculty at the McGeorge School of Law, Aldana founded and directed the Inter-American Program which trains bilingual and bicultural lawyers for transnational careers or to work with the growing Latino population in the United States. She waded into the difficult waters of creating this program teaching cross-cultural sensibilities to both American and Guatemalan law students. Raquel designed the program and recruited university professors, students, and partners in both the US and Guatemala. The program broke down perceived borders and allowed students to find common ground in the law. One of her colleagues says, “The impact Raquel had on these former students—who are now leaders in the profession—is immeasurable. Indeed, I was equally transformed. I would go on to write an academic article on the experience, and it fundamentally changed the way I approach teaching.”

Aldana has received many other supportive comments from colleagues, students and friends including:

“She helped instruct her students to think like a lawyer but also helped to instill confidence that they could make a place for themselves in the legal field.” –Professor Blake Nordahl

“It was during Raquel Aldana’s immigration class that I decided to become an immigration attorney. She taught me about the injustices that immigrants have lived through and show me that by following this path, I would be helping many individuals accomplish their dreams. Without her, I am not sure I would have found this career that I love and so passionate about.” –Attorney Raissa Morris

“She will continue to an inspiration for me in my legal work and critical thinking. She is the hardest working person I have ever met and one of the most compassionate. I am very grateful to have been her student.” –Attorney Sahreen Manzar

“Professor Aldana is a dedicated and passionate human being. She is dedicated to making the world a better place through immigration policy and instilling her passion in educating amazing practitioners. Professor Aldana gave me the skills and courage to go out on my own and do this very rewarding work.” –Council Member Mariam Aboudamous

In addition to her role as an academic, Aldana has transformed lives and built future leaders. Her professional excellence and tireless efforts are unparalleled when it comes to her activism and mentorship. She pours her heart and soul into giving a voice to underrepresented women and immigrants and providing opportunities to help them rise to their potential.

Raquel Aldana’s commitment to her students and her passion for changing lives through public policy continues undiminished. She is a driven trailblazer who challenged obstacles and rose to success, which makes her a deserving recipient of the Margaret Brent Award.