

“Foul, or no foul?” the instructor asked. The class of referees was divided. I argued my case, but the instructor’s opinion was one I had learned to expect: either outcome is acceptable, so long as you defend your decision using the laws of the game. My colleagues were relieved to have legal cover, but I was not satisfied. This approach treats decisions in isolation, with the correct application of the rules as the end goal. I do not think of the rules that way.

Subjectivity exists because written rules inherently fail to capture the spirit of the game, that is, the intuitive understanding of fair play that emerges naturally among those who live and breathe soccer. This creates a problem with an excessive focus on the rules, because rules can be used to justify decisions that feel wrong to the stakeholders. I approach soccer as a system where my role is to serve what players and fans understand as fair play. When faced with a subjective decision on the pitch, I consider not just what is technically correct, but what will best serve the game's integrity and competitive spirit. While the spectators might not all use the same words to describe what they want, we really do all want the same thing: a fair and beautiful game.

As I stepped into the field of economics, with its elegant models and theorems that promise efficient outcomes, I viewed it as a new rules-based system ripe for management. But the economy is more complex than the soccer field. There is no shared sense of a fair outcome, and the rules themselves are contested. With countless variables, many immeasurable, objectivity becomes difficult not just in enforcement, but in defining success at all.

My attention gravitated toward the difficult problems where models broke down. In these gaps between theory and reality, I found two types of economists. The first confronts complexity by drawing ever-more-intricate models, adding new variables in an attempt to perfectly map the world. The second reminds us that the map is not the territory, focusing instead on principled thinking and practical impact.

While there is value in both approaches, I aligned with the second group after studying competition. In class, I learned that risky and costly ventures to gain market power, like firms engaging in predatory pricing, were typically irrational. Firms would suffer diminishing returns to scale and struggle to recoup investment, making such strategies self-defeating. Efficient markets, therefore, required

minimal intervention. But these rules did not seem to apply to the world I witnessed, where firms like Uber and Amazon adopted a growth-before-profits approach, chasing market dominance while scaling their networks and accumulating user data. As more people joined the network, the platforms increased in value, making recoupment unnecessary.

I realized that, while economic theory continues to evolve, models invariably lag behind market realities, meaning their predictive ability is the weakest in the uncharted territory where it is needed most. Because dominant firms will only shape this territory to benefit themselves, lawyers must act as architects, establishing practical safeguards to ensure markets serve all stakeholders. As our economy becomes increasingly dependent on digital services, the centralization of data poses a serious risk. What is at stake for my generation is whether our economy and our data will work for us, or if we will only work for them.

This realization drew me to law. Unlike in soccer, where competition itself is the guiding principle, in the marketplace, competition is valued for the progress and democratization it spurs. I am preparing to become a lawyer who understands that the role of a rules-based system is to serve the people within it, even as that requires creative thinking and balancing tradeoffs. In platform markets, for example, tailored solutions like data sharing mandates could empower new competitors and foster innovation without disrupting network benefits. Law school is where I will develop the tools to craft these solutions, positioning myself to ensure that markets remain engines of innovation and fairness for generations to come.

While my studies taught me to see fairness in systems, my background taught me to fight for fairness among people. Growing up as a Latino first-generation college student, I have found that many of my peers share a common sentiment: that school is not a place for people like us. I became frustrated by the idea of talented individuals steering away from opportunity and decided to make a change.

While I cannot repave the path for an entire community, I can help individuals find a new one. I formed relationships that have lasted years beyond high school, often acting as a mentor to younger students. I helped soccer teammates with their homework, volunteered for the Hispanic Development

Fund, and guided fellow first-generation students through college. One student I mentored raised his GPA by two points and is now starting college on a full-scholarship, a possibility he did not see for himself as a freshman. It feels odd to be thrust into this role before I even graduate from college myself, but this is what it means to be committed to uplifting a community.

I still have many friends who have left academics behind, choosing instead to enter the workforce and start young families. I see them live happy lives and make great contributions to society. I continue to learn to embrace that. But when I have the opportunity to help Latinx-Americans see that we belong in higher education and professional careers as well, that is always what I will do. Now, it is time for me to become a leader and to introduce my perspective to academia and the field of law.

In the future, I want to contribute to more effective antitrust law, help to regulate new technologies, and to work on the largest transactions in the world. A legal education will provide me with the opportunity to build the leadership, professional skills, and interdisciplinary network to accomplish these goals and to inspire future first-generation Latinx leaders.