

## PARTICIPANT EARNS LAW DEGREE WITH “HELPING HAND” FROM NMDVR

After earning a bachelor’s degree in chemistry from New Mexico State University and a master’s degree from the University of Oklahoma, Jimmy Herndon expected he would go into a career in science. But the research he was doing for his doctorate wasn’t working out. “I was not happy with academia and it was time to make my exit from that situation and try something new.”

The Las Cruces resident went to the Department of Workforce Solutions to help find a new career path. When he told them he was on the Autism spectrum, had been diagnosed with (the formerly used term) Asperger’s Syndrome, and had mild Cerebral Palsy, they referred him to the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Jimmy had always been drawn to reading official documents and did constitutional comparisons as a hobby. (“Did you know Yugoslavia had the longest Constitution in the world?”) He did a career assessment with NMDVR Counselor Elvira Tobias that showed he might do well in the field of law. “The offer to pay for law school came up,” Herndon recalls. “It worked out well.”

That’s an understatement. Herndon received his Juris Doctor (JD) degree in 2026, graduating magna cum laude from the University of New Mexico School of Law, and he has been accepted into the Edinburgh Law School in Scotland—one of the top 15 law schools in the world.

“The (Edinburgh) program focuses on global environmental causes and climate-change law. It’s a burgeoning field and very timely,” says Herndon, adding he is excited to combine his science and law interests in the same high-level program leading to an advanced post-graduate Master of Laws degree. “Environmental law helps communities and people in a real way.”

NMDVR was able to underwrite Herndon’s UNM tuition and textbooks as well as room and board. “It was like having a scholarship. It was very generous and I appreciate that.” Herndon adds support from the agency also made the adjustment to life at UNM easier. “All I knew about Albuquerque was *Breaking Bad*, and they’re not the nicest guys.”



UNM has an Accessibility Resource Center, which provided a few accommodations to assist with his studies. “I had a text-to-speech thing, which helped with reading,” he says. “My disabilities also affect my motor coordination. But unlike chemistry, I don’t need to use a pipette in law school.”

Future plans for the 34-year-old include taking the Bar Exam and clerking for a judge at the state or federal level. “I’m interested in the thought that goes into writing a judicial decision,” he says. “The challenge is when both sides present a compelling argument. It is really complex and you have to connect the dots.”



After that, Herndon is open to whatever comes his way, whether it is practicing environmental law or becoming a judge himself.

“DVR is a helping hand for you to pursue your dreams,” he says, adding, “It’s a wonderful thing that allowed me to do something I would have not been able to do otherwise. It doesn’t matter how old you are, you can still be who you want to be. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation will help you be the best version of yourself. If you’re seeking to change the course of your life, talk to a DVR advisor. They might be able to help you.”

For information about how NMDVR can help you achieve your employment or self-employment goals, contact your nearest office. There are locations across the state: [dvr.state.nm.us/locations/](https://dvr.state.nm.us/locations/).

*The New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation helps individuals with disabilities find suitable employment. Vocational rehabilitation is a voluntary program supporting people who want to work. With a long history of success and proven methodology for making the best fits, NMDVR is committed to helping participants thrive in their communities. For more information, visit [dvr.state.nm.us](https://dvr.state.nm.us) or call 505-954-8500.*

*The Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2025, the total awarded is \$26,800,619. The remaining 21.3% is funded by state appropriations and transfers from the Commission for the Blind and Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.*