

WHAT SOME OF OUR RECENT GRADUATES HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE
IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES AT LOYOLA CHICAGO

María Eugenia Cairo, MA (2018): *I would do it all over again...*

The Spanish M.A. program was a life-changing and rewarding experience: it changed my perspective on my own language, igniting in me a love for it, and rewarding me with friends for life; it provided me with a knowledge that goes beyond a theoretical approach and delves into the discussion and in-depth analysis of Latin-American and Spanish literature and culture; and it allowed me to work with professors who not only guided me through this wonderful program but were also invested in my academic as well as personal success.

Along the shores of Lake Michigan, the Lake Shore Campus of Loyola University Chicago is a magical place where learning, for me, was almost like an accidental occurrence in an academic adventure. Overlooking these waters, the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures was my home away from home for two of the best years of my life!

In spite of the many challenges, including the cold days of a Chicago winter and the long but fulfilling nights spent writing essays, I would gladly do it all over again – just to attend those lectures that introduced me to the vast world of Spanish literature and culture. The graduate program in Spanish helped me improve my writing and reading skills and, more importantly, encouraged me to develop a love for research which, hopefully, will come to fruition in the form of a doctoral degree.

There is no doubt I enjoyed every minute of my M.A. program. But above all, my time at Loyola allowed me to achieve academic goals as well as personal growth. I am more than grateful to the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Nadia Mufarregue, MA (2017): *The Art of Reasoning*

Attending graduate school often comes after a period of careful discernment. It involves making difficult decisions, listening to people's advice based on their own experiences and viewpoints, and assessing the implications that the decision will have on your personal life.

My experience in graduate school was enriched by all the people I encountered there. Each professor at Loyola worked tirelessly and with great passion to teach me and my classmates how to approach the subject matter of our classes—whether it was a poem, a novel or a film. The questions they asked encouraged us to consider not only the texts themselves, but the meaning beyond what they explicitly say. We spent each seminar communicating, exchanging ideas, and learning from each other, while trying to determine the greater point of view.

As graduate students we also learned how to apply the analytic skills of the classroom to our own surroundings, always looking for the answers and solutions that would enable us to contribute to society. This, the art of reasoning, is the priceless gift that I received from Loyola. Overall, my time as a graduate student has provided me with a new outlook on the way in which I face the world. Each new challenge in my life is an invitation to put into practice what I have been exercising at Loyola. I am able to look at my circumstances, reflect on them, and learn from different perspectives. Ultimately, I am able to consider the consequences of my decisions and how they may have an impact on the world around me. I have seen this demonstrated in my professors, and I will keep working with great effort and enthusiasm to find the best solutions to the challenges of life.

Tyler Gebauer, MA (2017): *Woohoo!*

From my first interviews as a prospective student up to when I completed my thesis, I always had a tight-knit support system while earning my Masters in Spanish at Loyola University Chicago. This support system allowed me to engage rigorously with complex and exciting topics related to literature and language in Spanish in a welcoming environment, and I was encouraged to go outside the limits of my comfort zone. Because of this, I was able to explore topics as diverse as: studying films depicting Central American migrants; volunteering at the Loyola Law School Tax Clinic to help translate documents from English into Spanish; and participating in book-readings by authors from Spain and all over Latin-America.



Graduate Assistants (left to right): Tyler Gebauer, Nadia Mufarregue and Antonio Gazís; May 2017

After graduating with a Masters in Spanish from Loyola University Chicago, I was confident entering the workforce with a diverse set of skills. Alongside a solid foundation in literary analysis, I gained classroom experience as a teaching assistant and learned to manage my time while working on my thesis and other long-term projects. Working as a Teaching and Technology Assistant in the Language Learning Resource Center, I became familiar with using and explaining language-teaching technologies of all sorts. Knowing that these skills are applicable to a wide variety of jobs—both within and outside of academia—gave me confidence as I began the job search process.

Although I was very excited to graduate with an MA in Spanish from Loyola (woohoo!), I was hesitant to leave behind the support network that I had developed during my two years studying at Loyola. Thankfully, that concern was unwarranted! Even though I'm not physically in Chicago anymore, I can still count on the Loyola networks of peers, professors, and friends to help me in my job search and other professional pursuits. Professors and peers continue to give me advice and support, and I'm grateful for their continued presence in my life.

Allyson Doorn, MA (2016): *Nothing Has Ever Been So Rewarding*

The decision to apply to graduate school was a difficult one for me, not only as a first-generation college student, but also because I took several years off before applying. Although I had lived in Spain after completing my undergraduate degree, I was not sure what graduate school would really be like.

The Spanish MA program at Loyola is unique because it admits a small cohort of students. Due of the size of the program, both fellow graduate students and faculty will genuinely get to know you as a person, not as a number or a face in the crowd. Before I entered graduate school, my friends told me horror stories about meetings with their advisers, who were never on campus or were “checked out” in other ways. Loyola's faculty members come from top universities in both the United States and abroad, but unlike other programs their focus is on the well-being of their students. I never once encountered a professor who was too involved in her or his research to help a wayward graduate student who needed help with a research paper or the comprehensive exams. At Loyola, our professors are devoted to building us up to be the best that we can be, preparing us for life both inside and outside of academia.



Graduate Assistants (left to right): Sharon Almonte, Allyson Doorn, and Cristina Codina; May 2016

One of the qualities that makes the MA program at Loyola exceptional is the support that is offered to its students. Dra. Rodríguez Navas was a great professor and mentor, encouraging me during times when I doubted myself and my abilities. Fr. Hendrickson was my “library,” lending me books and articles to prepare for papers and the comprehensive exams. If I ever had a question about how to improve a lesson plan, Dra. Burgo was always there to help.

Graduate school was not without its challenges. I've never worked so hard in my academic career, but nothing has ever been so rewarding as the time that I spent learning at Loyola. I developed a love for research and greatly improved my writing abilities. I also gained self-confidence, both in my Spanish speaking abilities and in my personal life. As a former graduate student who both taught as a teaching assistant and worked in the Language Learning Resource Center, and also as current part-time faculty member, I have “worn many hats” at Loyola, and I know that my experiences here in this department have prepared me for my future, whatever it may be.

Sharon Almonte, MA (2016): *Leading in the Classroom*

The first day I stepped onto the campus of Loyola University Chicago was also the first day that I arrived in Chicago. I was nervous and excited about what my time in Loyola and Chicago would entail. This was the first time that I would live away from my family, and it was the first time that I would be both a student and a teaching assistant. I had just completed my undergraduate degree a few months prior, and I had grown used to being an active learner, not an instructor. Therefore, I felt unprepared and a bit apprehensive about teaching Spanish to undergraduates. As I led my first class, I did my best to do everything that I was supposed to do, and I enjoyed it so much that I did not realize how quickly the time had passed. Afterwards, I was able to talk with some of the other graduate assistants about their experiences, and it was then that I realized that they too had experienced something similar. And I knew then that with time I would grow even more comfortable leading in the classroom. With the help and support of the section coordinators, the other TA's, and my professors, I was able to learn several methods and techniques to facilitate Spanish language learning for my students.

The Department of Modern Languages and Literatures is full of very thoughtful and helpful people who facilitated my entire experience at Loyola. I believe that the people in my program and others in the department helped me most as I progressed through my degree. I was able to ask for advice about teaching Spanish, studying for my comprehensive exams, writing papers, and so much more. Knowing that I had a support system of people who had been or were in the same position as me was very comforting. During my first year, I grew quite close to the second year students and was witness to the end of their journey at Loyola. Furthermore, I was able to foresee what my second year would entail, and I received great advice and support from my friends for my last year. Although there were many long nights and challenging assignments, I got through it all with the help of some wonderful friends and advisors. Overall, my time at Loyola allowed for much personal, professional, and academic growth, and I am very grateful to those who gave me the opportunity to pursue my MA in Spanish.

Cristina Codina, MA (2016): *Into the Light*

I always enjoyed studying Spanish literature, but never before had I been given the chance to dive into literature so whole heartedly, with the proper guidance and dedication, that I have been honored to receive in the Department of Modern Languages and Literature at Loyola University Chicago. My mentors have taken me step-by-step, in every phase of my academic career. It was a daunting challenge to edit my thesis more times than I can count, but I can assure you that it was all worth it, and that I would do it all over again! In this program I was inspired by the true humility of Loyola's namesake, Saint Ignatius, as I was encouraged to always give the best of myself, while also remaining open to change that which had to be changed.

I had the experience of going to a public university before attending Loyola University, but once a student of Loyola I soon discovered what it meant to be cared for and fully nurtured as a whole person, not only academically, but spiritually, as the members of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Loyola have done for me. It is like no other institution I have been to before.

Currently, I am a happy and enthusiastic Spanish teacher in a local high school, and I am immensely satisfied with the turn my career has taken. I had not envisioned myself in this profession before I came upon Loyola University. I planned to continue in graduate school and earn a doctoral degree. But after close consideration of my circumstances, being a mother of three and wanting to immerse myself in the community through poetry and art, my current profession is just perfect. Now I get to teach my passion: literature! And I have the liberty to be creative with it. Therefore, things turned out to be just right. I can't thank enough the team in the Department of Modern Languages Literatures of Loyola University Chicago, especially Dr. Olympia Gonzalez, who helped me walk through darkness and into the light. Her knowledge, passion and humanity have left a mark on my life and my career. I will always be grateful!

Adrián Cuevas, MA (2015): *One-of-a-Kind Program*

My time at Loyola University Chicago was one of much academic and personal growth. Being part of the department of Modern Languages and Literatures and working on my Spanish MA was by far one of the most gratifying and rewarding experiences I have had. Like any new chapter in life, it was a challenge at first, getting to know a new school and a new city. Yet I quickly learned that I was part of a *one-of-a-kind program*, one that truly cared and saw for the well being of its students. More than staff, professors, and advisors, the individuals I met and worked with have become friends, better yet, family. Their unconditional support made the challenges a whole lot easier and allowed me to better focus on my academic development.

Having been part of the Spanish MA at Loyola Chicago has truly prepared me professionally. Due to the intimate nature of the program, its small class sizes, and individualized mentorship, my academic skills in the subject matter flourished beyond my expectations. I was reading and writing like never before. I became more confident in myself and the work I was producing. I was also fortunate to have been awarded a Teaching Assistantship, which allowed me to develop my teaching style and gain experience in the classroom. The overall positive experience was one that truly fulfilled the Jesuit mission of the university and prepared me in an unparalleled way.

I truly feel that my time at LUC is what paved the path to where I am today. With a better professional and academic skill-set in hand, and the support of amazing professors, I find myself at Teachers College of Columbia University working towards a PhD in International and Transcultural Studies. It is an opportunity that I do not take for granted, nor an achievement that I only merit to my efforts. I wholeheartedly feel that what I learned and the instruction of the professors of the Spanish department at Loyola University Chicago afforded me my present opportunities.



Alex Korte, MA (2015): *Prepared to Succeed*

I look back on my time at Loyola with great fondness. The Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, just steps from Lake Michigan, is full of kind and intelligent faculty members whose backgrounds are as diverse as the subject matter they teach. Under their guidance I explored worlds of reading, writing, theory, and literary analysis. Their support helped me cultivate my skills as a professional academic and student of Hispanic cultures and literatures. The most enjoyable work I studied was *El Cid*, a medieval poem about a heroic Christian soldier who, unjustly exiled into enemy territory, fights in the name of God and king to reestablish his honor.

While reading works like *El Cid* was fun, the program is also very demanding and—in a word—difficult. The course work and expectations of the faculty are on par with the rigors and rewards of a career in professional academia. I kept busy with a full class schedule, while teaching undergraduate grammar courses and working in the Language Learning Resource Center at the same time. Currently, I'm serving as a Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene volunteer for the Peace Corps in rural Perú. When I start applying for doctoral programs after my service, I will do so with the confidence that my time at Loyola Chicago *prepared me to succeed* in the next phase of my professional development.

Arelis Rivero-Cabrera, MA (2014): *Go Set the World on Fire*

Studying history and literature is the strategy I have chosen to get down to the roots of the diverse cultural, political and socioeconomic realities that I have been experiencing throughout my multicultural life-journey in Cuba, Brazil, Spain, and the United States. In 2012 I began my MA in Spanish at Loyola University Chicago, a program in which learning and research harmoniously converged with the improvement of my skills as an instructor of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Literature. During these two intense and extremely productive years of immersion in an encouraging intellectual community, I had the opportunity to take courses covering a wide range of movements, genres, and authors from an interdisciplinary perspective. This approach allowed me to reflect on gender, ethnicity, religion, and identity in a dialogic relation with my background, while also opening new and exciting projects, both academic and personal.



Since 2014 I have been working toward my doctorate in Spanish at the University of California, Davis, with an emphasis in Latin American Literature and Cultural Studies. It may sound pretentious, but I think that I will succeed in achieving this new goal in my career; after all, I was –and will always be– part of the Loyola University of Chicago’s family, where students grow in knowledge, passion, and hard work. I will always remember my last day as a Loyola graduate student and Teaching Assistant. I had already passed my comprehensive exam, and once I had finished teaching my last Spanish lesson to undergrads, I silently said to myself while erasing the board: “Ok *muchacha*, now go set the world on fire, because no matter how big is the challenge, you are totally prepared to face it.”

Marie Bold, MA (2014): *Language is a Powerful Thing*

It's funny how things come full circle. I loved language as a young child, even keeping small binders full of words in different languages I picked up from books and movies. When I had the chance to study a foreign language in middle school, I opted for French. As it turned out, it was at the same time as orchestra practice, so I took Spanish instead. Little did I know how much that "detour" would effect the rest of my life.



After studying Spanish in high school, I studied Spanish and Global Studies in college, and realized that I might want to teach Spanish as a profession. I was profoundly impacted by my professors and their commitment to their students, academic growth, and social justice. After graduation I was able to teach abroad in Málaga, Spain for one year, and then began my MA in Spanish program at Loyola Chicago.

I will always be grateful to Loyola for giving me the chance to dive deep into teaching, giving me a real, holistic experience as an instructor. I am grateful for the examples of my professors, especially Dr. Deni Heyck, who truly invested in me and my personal and professional growth. Her passion for learning, her work in Latin America for social justice, and her example of drawing out students, helping them make discoveries by empowering their voices, have greatly inspired and encouraged me in my own career. I recently accepted a job at All Saints School Portland, in Oregon, teaching all levels of Spanish. It is a challenging and exciting environment, and I am very fortunate to work with enthusiastic colleagues and students. I especially enjoy doing cultural units and employing the communicative method for teaching foreign languages, which I learned as a student of teaching methodologies at Loyola. I think often of that class and the techniques and strategies that we were taught. I find myself and my students encouraged and excited to experience measurable language growth as we seek out authentic examples of spoken and written language, and find practical, contextualized ways to speak in class.

I am so privileged to work alongside students as they move forward in their learning processes. The teaching models, use of technology, content, and commitment that I saw in my colleagues, professors, and mentors at Loyola University Chicago have made me a better educator and global citizen. *Language is a powerful thing!*

