Beth Maldonado, MA (2019): A Complete Transformation

Although all students begin their graduate school journey with different personal goals, most hope that when they graduate they will feel transformed in the way they approach their subject. I too shared this goal, and was hoping to be transformed in the way I read, write, and communicate in Spanish. The Master of Arts in Spanish program at Loyola greatly surpassed this goal.

I came to Loyola as a burned-out elementary and middle school Spanish teacher hoping to advance my career. As a Graduate Teaching Assistant, I was excited to use my education background to teach basic undergraduate Spanish classes. However, I did not expect to be mentored in such a caring way as a teacher. Dr. Clara Burgo’s Teaching Methods class challenged me to consider how people acquire language and to recognize the importance of information exchange tasks, transforming my approach to teaching Spanish. This class also fueled the writing of my research thesis, ultimately giving me the skills to obtain work as a Spanish instructor at the university level.

In addition to transforming the way I teach Spanish, reading so many wonderful works allowed me to comprehend more fully the history and daily life of Spanish speakers. The extraordinarily dedicated faculty members at Loyola lead us in active, thought provoking conversations, encouraging us to put these works in their historical and cultural contexts. This special exchange of ideas helped me answer some of the questions I had formed about Spanish-speaking cultures. Having completed the program, I can now use my knowledge as a tool to help comprehend the layers of cultural nuances that exist. On a personal level, having read books like Doña Perfecta and Primera memoria continues to assist me in understanding the culture of my Spanish relatives because I am able to put the life experiences they share with me in context.

The incredible professors and scholars who lead these seminars embody the Jesuit pedagogical approach of caritas personalis. I had never experienced such deep care for the whole person as I did at Loyola, and this exceptional modeling has also transformed me, encouraging me to go forth and demonstrate the same care not only for my students, but for all the people in my life.

The Master of Arts in Spanish program at Loyola—and the people behind it—have transformed me. I hope you will allow this program, and this nurturing community, to do the same for you.

David Iacuzzi, MA (2019): Say Yes!

The Spanish MA program at Loyola Chicago equipped me with the skills I needed to be an effective college teacher and scholar. Thanks to this formation, I am now working as Visiting Faculty at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the Department of Modern Languages and Classics.

One of the extraordinary aspects of the program is the chance to teach introductory Spanish classes at the university level. This opportunity not only helped me grow pedagogically but also provided me with valuable work experience in an otherwise competitive academic environment. Thankfully, Loyola does not simply throw us into the classroom without preparation. Dr. Clara Burgo researches the latest methods of foreign language acquisition, and MA students benefit enormously from her expertise. There is an entire semester dedicated to learning how to teach successfully. We leave the program with the pedagogical tools we need to be competent Spanish language instructors.

Fascinating classes in literature accompany our linguistic and professional development. The program places an emphasis on eloquencia perfecta, the ability to speak and write well,” in order to become “good citizens who [stand] to upload the common good.” By reading and analyzing the best writers that Hispanic literature has to offer, we learn from their example in our own writing. Our minds sharpen. Our critical thinking grows. We observe, judge, and act upon the ideas that we read. Loyola has a strong mission and identity around social justice, so many of the novels, poems, and films we integrate into our courses reflect the school’s commitment to social progress. I can say with confidence that my observations on politics, economics, and religion have more breadth and depth because of my participation in the MA program.

Loyola professors encourage their students to present work at academic conferences. Nearly every semester, the department or the university itself organizes a graduate research symposium at which we read papers and receive feedback. There is also funding for conferences and travel outside of Loyola. For instance, I took an essay on Latin American surrealism to a conference hosted by the International Society for the Study of Surrealism at Bucknell University. That experience led to a number of chances for fruitful collaboration with colleagues from other institutions who share my academic interests.

Beyond work, there is also play. There are friendships. There are parties. There are dinners. There are mentorships. The professors are warm. Other MA students are welcoming. The university becomes a second home. Loyola is a great place to grow as a scholar and a person. If you are considering earning the MA in Spanish at Loyola, Say “Yes!”

Karl Groneman, MA (2019): I Was Given All the Tools…

People go to graduate school for different reasons and at different periods in their life. While doing volunteer work in Latin America, I knew I wanted to professionalize my Spanish. I began searching for a graduate program in Spanish by costing my net far and wide. Only a little more than one month after I found the most was Loyola University of Chicago.

At Loyola, I found a program where my professors and fellow graduate students knew one another. Given the stress of graduate school, a program that truly nurtures and prepares graduate students for life beyond graduation is essential. The professors were like-minded academics and intellectuals who were excited to share their knowledge, skills and experiences, while my fellow graduate students supported each other and shared in the enthusiasm for the Spanish language, culture, and literature.
Having recently finished the MA in Spanish program, I recognize all this program has allowed me to develop a greater understanding of Hispanic literature, academic writing, foreign language pedagogy, as well as developed critical thinking and greater fluency in presentational Spanish.

When I entered this program, I simply knew that I wanted to somehow use Spanish professionally in the future. Upon graduation, I realized that I was given all the tools to read, write and analyze literary texts in Spanish; teach Spanish at the high school or college level; as well as continue my own academic endeavors. Without knowing the term, I sought to become a Hispanista, and within a month of graduation, I was offered a position teaching Spanish at a private high school. I have Loyola’s Spanish department to thank for all of the preparation along the way: academic, professional, pedagogic, and personal.

María Eugenia Cairo, MA (2018): The Art of Reasoning

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. Guided 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; as well as allowed it 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 flows, was also 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 many of the 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 instilled in me the vast world of Spanish literature and culture; as well as allowed it to work, with professors who I never guided me through this wonderful program but were also invested in my academic as well as personal success.

Graduate Assistants (left to right): Tyler Gebauer, María Eugenia Cairo, and Almyon Asorey; May 2017

One of the qualities that makes the MA program at Loyola truly unique is the support it gives to its students. Dr. 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

Graduate Assistants (left to right): Tyler Gebauer, María Eugenia Cairo, and Almyon Asorey; May 2017

The Art of Reasoning

Although I was very excited to graduate with an MA in Spanish from Loyola (woohoo!), I was hesitant to begin the job search process.

I have a greater understanding of Hispanic literature, academic writing, foreign language pedagogy, as well as research which, hopefully, will come to fruition in the form of a doctoral degree.

I do not wish to ever enjoy 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.

Graduate Assistants (left to right): Tyler Gebauer, María Eugenia Cairo, and Almyon Asorey; May 2017

Admitting 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 dedication 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 words themselves, but the larger significance of the text. 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 at the world with the eyes and solutions that would enable us to contribute to society. This is the art of reasoning, is the priceless gift that I received from Loyola. Overall, my time as a graduate student has prepared me with a new way of doing things. 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 impact others. I will always keep this in mind, as a professor, 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 have worked tirelessly as a tight-knit support system while earning my Masters in Spanish at Loyola University Chicago. This 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 areas on which I had not been focusing before, 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.

After graduating with a Masters in Spanish from Loyola University Chicago, I was confident entering the professional world with a diverse set of skills. I now understand the limitations of a solely academic 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 transferable to a wide variety of jobs both within and outside of academia- gave me confidence as I began the job-search process.

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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 home, and the first time that I would be studying as 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. Furthermore, I felt fresh from all the knowledge and skills I had acquired in 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 students about their experiences. From what they told me, I realized that they too had experienced something similar. And I knew then that with time I would grow even more comfortable.

The overall positive experiences I had been part of the Spanish MA at Loyola Chicago afforded me. It is an opportunity that I may never have again. Through the work I was producing.

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 focus on my teaching style and gain experience in the classroom. The overall positive experiences I had was one that truly cared and saw for the well being of its students. More than professors, I was able to learn several methods and techniques that truly felt unprepared and a bit apprehensive 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 me to gain 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 wholeheartedly, 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 only say that it was only a small step compared to the work I had to do 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 discovered what is 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.

I came to Loyola, and I have been quite 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 opportunities, being a mother of three, I set my heart and mind towards the community through poetry and art, and my current profession is just perfect. Now I get to teach my passion: literature! And I have the liberty to be creative and do it. Therefore, I feel grateful, thankful, and humbled to be part of 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 passion for teaching will always be grateful!

Alex Korte, 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 professors, I was able to learn several methods and techniques that truly felt unprepared and a bit apprehensive 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 me to gain much personal, professional, and academic growth, and I am very grateful to those who gave me the opportunity to pursue my MA in Spanish.

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 at Loyola University Chicago, from Lake Michigan to El Cid, has prepared me to succeed in the next phase of my professional development.

While reading works like El Cid was fun, the program is also very demanding — and — in a word — difficult. The course requirements are extensive and the courses are well supported in the classroom. The program is a career in the world of university studies. I kept busy with a full class schedule, while teaching undergraduate grammar courses and working in the Language Learning Resource Center. It truly was a diverse experience as a Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene volunteer for the Peace Corps in Peru. 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.
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 intimate 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. Demi 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 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!