January 19, 2018

Thank you father Wildes and Provost Borofsky for such an introduction.

This award is especially significant for me as a Bolivian immigrant because there is a common notion about Bolivia, as a place where there is nothing, as being the last place on earth. The main character in an Argentinian film, tells her husband: “Let’s go away just the two of us, EVEN if it is Bolivia.” So, this award, finally, gives me the opportunity to answer to that notion by saying: “Even a Bolivian can get a Dux Academicus Award”.

I want to specially thank the selection committee and most of all I am deeply grateful to the two students who wrote on my behalf and whose presence in the classroom was a true honor for me: Arianna Efstathiou and Karla Rosas.

Quiero agradecer a todos los que me apoyaron con la nominación para este premio: Nathan Henne, Barbara Ewell, Uriel Quesada, John Clark, Eileen Doll, Al Alcazar, Naomi Yavneh, Marcus Kondkar, Joe Berendzen, Peter Rogers, Alice Kornovich, Isabel Durocher, Jean Brager y la querida Hillary Eckland, También agradecer el apoyo de mi familia aquí presente, Sofia y Sebastian y de mis ahinietos, Violeta, Faustina, y Joaquin y sus afortunados padres Antonio y Sonia y de mis amigos no presentes.

As an acceptance speech, please allow me to share some first impressions of coming to know this community and this wonderful city.

32 years ago, when I arrived to New Orleans, coming from Washington D.C, it seemed that I had left the US. First, that August I was met by a hurricane, and when scared I was told by some colleagues from Tulane, that we needed to go hurricane shopping and then to a hurricane party. Soon afterwards, while taking the streetcar to work and timing it, (according to my learned efficient management of time of what I thought was “American” culture), the streetcar came to a stop and the driver got off, at the corner of Napoleon Ave and St. Charles and walked to the K&B store that had a public phone on its wall, and made a call that lasted what I thought was a “long time”. To my surprise, no one said a thing about it. The following semester I was welcomed to the “Foreign Modern Languages Department” by my dear colleagues, some no longer here, Robert Dewell, Cassandra Mabe and Peter Rogers, with what I later learned was Southern hospitality, and with their actions they were silently saying, do what you like, yet they showed respect to others, were so amiable, dignified and so autonomous. These were some first impressions of the Loyola community, the institution and New Orleans.

Of course, as we all know, things change, and it had to be Hurricane Katrina, that changed many things, not just in this institution but also in my life. I had always seen myself as a “foreigner” and people would remind me of that. Upon detecting an accent, they always ask, where are you from? And I always answered: Bolivia. After I came back to New Orleans, I realized that this was home. However, my children had become aware of this much earlier, while still in the Boston area, waiting to see if Loyola might re-open or not. I told them that may be, I should look for work elsewhere, they answered: “You can stay here mom! But we are going back!” So, much for motherly bonds here, New Orleans seemed to have become the place that defined all of us. The same spirit seemed to be present here at Loyola, in rebuilding the student body, bringing such creativeness to the classroom and bonds that will never be forgotten, people donating furniture, opening their doors and administrative assistants, like Avia Alonzo spreading their loving spirit. This was the community here after such a change.

As an undergraduate student, I first wanted to major in Sociology, later in French, then Philosophy, so I was an undecided major until my junior year. I would say I am still an undecided major, since my research has taken me in many directions.

As a result, Loyola has provided the perfect environment to be an undecided major since it seeks teachers with interdisciplinary orientations, especially to teach in the Common Curriculum. To me this is a valuable asset for any undergraduate. It was while teaching a course in Latin American film (my new interest), on a day we were to discuss *Colosio*, a Mexican thriller about the murder of this presidential candidate in 1994, that I had one of those wonderful moments in teaching. After introducing a philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, and his essay on detective films, I asked the class if anyone had heard of Deleuze. One student raised his hand and said, yes. So, I immediately asked him to tell us what he remembers about him. In less than 5 minutes, he gave one of the most lucid summaries of this complicated thinker that us teachers would struggle with. He said he learned about him in a class with Prof. Berendzen, and to me, this was a moment that a teacher lives for. His name was Daniel. Another student, after her presentation on a Chilean film, *The Battle of Chile*, and the struggle of Chilean workers trying to keep the factories running while the Allende government was being deposed, said in class, “I think I am a socialist,” proving that this film had an effect on her and made her socially aware. Again, it was one of those moments that students really become empowered, which makes one’s job so rewarding.

I am optimistic that Loyola can live up to the standards that students expect of us, as I look at all the faculty here. I just hope that the institution will adhere to the core Jesuit values, and will have the strength to face the menacing numbers and dollar figures that try to codify human relationships in today’s world.

In my case, I will always cherish the memories of all of you as I approach the end of my time here.

Muchas gracias amigos por todo el apoyo y por los buenos recuerdos.