

Without Fear of the Future

I was 16 years old when I made the decision that would shape the next four years of my life. I would be leaving the familiar streets and landscapes from my homeland Venezuela to study abroad in the United States, in the University of Delaware, located in the city of Newark, a calmed and friendly place, the perfect place for an immigrant to adapt smoothly to a new culture and system. But...was it?

When I first chose to leave my country, I relied on my abilities (or the ones I thought I had) to accomplish that goal, convinced of the fact that my mastery of English was flawless, and my ability to adapt to new environments and circumstances unmatched. But all of those thoughts would fade away as soon as I arrived at the university. It took no time for me to realize that I was indeed, by myself, and as a consequence, alone. But I always knew that loneliness was going to be a part of the change, and an inevitable part of the process of moving to another culture, another country. But definitely I, and many other international students probably, underestimated the level of loneliness I faced, and still face on many occasions.

I was prepared for the worst and hoping for the best since the day I got here. I was expecting to arrive here, hoping to make new relations quickly, with the same ease I did in my hometown, and I did also arrive hoping to understand every class the same way I understood every single one of my english classes in Venezuela, but all of those suppositions couldn't have been further from reality.

The communication with my peers wasn't as fluent or as easy as I expected it to be, with me many times not understanding clearly what they wanted to say and having to ask up to three times for them to repeat the sentence. And my classes were not easy either. I arrived at the first

class full of excitement, my microeconomics class I remember, and I left it with lots of questions and doubts, without even knowing what would be a good place to start asking. I tried to understand what my professor just said, and that pattern repeated in every other class. The first few days I arrived at my dorm drained from any energy, not because of the classes and because of their difficulty, but because I had to spend more time translating in my head every single word my professor was saying rather than actually understanding the class itself. All of those issues and difficulties combined made me doubt my skills and abilities, and in general made me doubt myself, about my own capacities, about the very same abilities that encouraged me to study abroad in the first place. In only one month I felt utterly unsure about myself, lonely and isolated. Even the communication with my family back in my country grew more challenging everyday, with constant problems with the electricity back home which made it almost impossible for me to call them and to have a call that lasted more than 5 minutes. And not only did I walk away from my family but also from my friends, many of them who went to Europe and many of them that stayed in the country. That's how I found myself lonelier than ever and not only that, also struggling with classes. Wanting to speak but not being able to, wanting to communicate but without anyone waiting to hear me.

But in those days when I didn't find anyone, I stepped back and stopped looking outside of me, and started a process of introspection. That's when I found myself, and that's when I realized that I didn't need anything or anyone else to feel accompanied. With that process of self-examination and realization came a motivation to keep me moving forward, finding and creating a meaning that would make me jump out of bed everyday with all of my energy, and that meaning is the pursuit of a better future, for me, for the people I care the most about, and for my country. But I always keep in mind that the future is a mystery, even when it is my motivation, and that the days

where I felt lonely are in the past, which is already history, but what is about to come is forged today, and today is a gift and that is why it is called “present”. So I chose to make the most out of every day. I had to reinvent and rediscover myself, I had to stop looking for the things I needed for succeeding outside of me, and I started to build myself from the inside to the outside, rather than the other way around, changing my perception of many things. I had to build a new self esteem, and I also had to reinforce my self confidence which was greatly damaged the first month, a month where I asked myself more than once if I was in the right place, but now I can say that there is no better place for me, and that my initial thoughts and assumptions about Delaware being the best place to start because of its peaceful nature weren't totally wrong, I just had to approach it with a different mindset and perspective, changing my own view about myself along the way, re-understanding many things, rediscovering myself, and at the same time, discovering a thrilling and exciting foreign land, which I am grateful received me with open arms, I just had to open my arms too. Today I know that things will be getting better, that a shining future awaits me and that the University of Delaware will always have a big meaning in my life and development as a person, because it taught me that no matter the challenge we are faced with, we have to advance without fear of the future.