

## Josefina Fernandez Davila Contest Essay 2018

Two years ago, I embarked my journey from the capital of Lima to the first state of Delaware, away from my family, my friends, and all that I found familiar. It was a scary thought; leaving everything behind to start over. However, I was determined to step out of the little social bubble I had been living in for eighteen years, with an open heart and mind. I had been to the US before starting college, so I was well aware of the several traditions Americans embrace, but I was an outsider. I watched their portrayal in movies, casually rubbed against it on the streets during my travels and glanced while in golf tournaments. While I did this, I was still under my protective cloak of my own culture and family, but it was quickly stripped off as I stepped on campus for the first time, knowing this would be my home, my new reality, for the following four years. Holidays like Thanksgiving, Saint Patrick's Day and Fourth of July were insignificant to me, since I had no clue what they really meant to those who celebrated them. The idea of living with two roommates at eighteen seemed peculiar to my relatives and friends. I had no clue that, after two years in campus, I would become part of my own family of sisters and brothers that, I am sure, will last a lifetime.

In Peru, you operate in different spheres that rarely communicate with one another: there is a designated time and place for study, for family and for friends. Here, the lines pertaining work and friendships are blurred; I will go study with my colleagues and grab lunch with my peers before class on a daily basis. My two roommates, which are also my teammates, are my family away from home; they will always be there for me. I have merged my bubbles into one. However, aspects and thought processes my culture praised me remain embedded in my brain.

There are some cultural aspects that differ between Peru and the U.S.A; for instance, in Peru it is completely normal for a young adult to live with their parents while going to college

and continue to do so until they get married or are financially stable to move out on their own. I have found that, in the States, this is sometimes frowned upon. Teenagers and young adults are usually encouraged by their parents to be independent, move out of the house and get a job as soon as they get out of college. I have noticed that most even move out of their home state to pursue career opportunities and further develop themselves at a professional level. That is what I found the most appealing out of all. Back home, I would have never considered moving out of my parents' home. Although the idea still seems foreign to me, I have slowly been starting to understand their value to others.

The Hispanic culture has a very distinct approach when it comes to family. In one sense, everyone is family. Our greetings are physical and way of talking flamboyant compared to the way it is done in America. I clearly remember move in day, when I was a freshman on campus. I was extremely excited and nervous about meeting new people and making new friends. Since I had never shared a room with anyone before, the thought of having two roommates was daunting. Will I like them? Will they like me back? Are we going to get along? What if they snore really loudly? I was full of questions. After I was done dropping my belongings in the tiny move in cart, one of my older teammates, Victoria, helped me climb up to George Read's third floor, room 312, ready to meet my new fellow hens. As soon as I open the door I saw Sarah, a fellow student athlete freshman from the field hockey team, and my new roommate. She came up to me with a confident stride and huge smile on her face, stretching her open hand towards mine. However, I didn't shake her hand back. I went for the standard, habitual Peruvian greeting; a big hug and a kiss on the cheek. Sarah was completely taken aback. She had never been greeted in such a way, specifically by a complete stranger. I was quick to realize my mistake and took immediate action to explain myself. I quickly pointed out that kissing and hugging strangers is a

normal act in Hispanic countries. She laughed it off and we kept talking about all the differences our cultures had and how unique they were from one another. On that day, thanks to Sarah, I learned that Americans value and respect each other's personal space. Greeting are formal and small talk is expected. Slowly, I learned how to accommodate myself into the status quo, while I made sure to give the occasional kiss and hug when I greeted a fellow peer. Fitting in does not mean changing one's habits to accommodate those of others; it means to teach others your ways, and them teaching you back, so we can be accepting and understanding of different cultures.

I always thought that my life in the States would be utterly different to my life back in Peru. Nevertheless, to my surprise, I have found the pleasures of friends that turned into family, a passion for golf that became my job, and a chance to receive an exceptional education on the land of opportunity and freedom. What I am most grateful for is the encouragement I had from my peers to embrace and be proud of my culture. I am proud to say that I am a Latina woman studying in Delaware. And I am proud of this cultural journey I have embarked on. I am excited to see what this amazing institution has instore for me for the next two years.