

First of all I'd like to thank the World Languages Department for offering me this wonderful opportunity to share my experiences of the last four years and what I have gained from my time here at SMU as a World Languages major. When thinking about how to prepare this speech, I first thought to draw from the words of the valedictorian address by one of my ultimate role models-Elle Woods from *Legally Blonde* about believing in yourself and having courage of your convictions. But I hear that someone else has used that speech recently so I needed to find another approach. I considered all of the classes, professors, and experiences I have had through the World Languages program and tried to determine the most important thing I got out of the program. And I found myself focusing less on language and more on the world. My own personal world has always been small. I come from a small ski resort town on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe. And when I say a small town, I really do mean a small town. My public school's graduating class was 68 people. That's it. 68 people with whom I experienced pre-school thru high school and all of the awful angsty preteen years in between. I come from a town where everyone knows everyone else and privacy and secrets are nonexistent. Living in that kind of atmosphere is like living in a bubble. Even now, four years later when I return home, I feel like nothing has changed and I am able to seamlessly slip back into my old life. Coming to SMU was big. I had never really been in Texas before I toured the SMU campus. Coming to a school whose undergraduate population was only a few thousand people less than the entire population of my hometown entirely on my own in a state with a completely different culture was definitely a shock. But after a period of adjustment where I was able to find my place here, I discovered that living at SMU is kind of also like living in a bubble.

We are located within the city of Dallas, but our beautiful campus of brick buildings, sprawling trees, and grass that is watered five times a day rain or shine seems isolated from the more urban side of Dallas. The smaller school size ensures seeing multiple familiar faces on the walk between classes. The numerous clubs and activities offer a full schedule without having to ever travel more than a 15 minute walk. The first time I left campus during my freshman year, I felt disoriented because I had stepped out of a world where I had grown both comfortable and complacent.

College has taught me that complacency is the strongest deterrent to success. Living in one's comfort zone and never stepping out means never achieving progress. Therefore, I have been challenged to break outside of bubbles, to step outside my comfort zone, and constantly challenge myself to do and experience more. The World Languages Department has armed me with the tools to pop these bubbles, to tear down the walls of my comfort zone. This program does not just teach its students how to speak a certain language. It allows students to learn how to think about and relate to other cultures and people.

I believe that one of the greatest weaknesses we face today as young adults is remembering to see beyond ourselves and our own lives. Too often we get wrapped up in our own problems, status, and happiness. The World Languages program has taught me how to see beyond myself. Because of my studies here, I am more aware than ever of how big the world is and how many other people share it with me. My comfort zone is such a minor space compared to what the rest of the world has to offer.

Studying World Languages challenged me to escape from the bubble of complacency in which I lived. In my third year at SMU, I decided to study abroad in order to force myself out of my comfort zone. I chose

a program located in Barcelona Spain where I took classes at the University of Barcelona that were taught entirely in Spanish by University of Barcelona professors. I lived with a host family consisting of two single Spanish women who shared an apartment close to the shopping district of the city. This was my first time outside of North America. It was the longest amount of time I had ever been away from home. It was the first time I had lived in an apartment or a truly urban area. I took public transportation by myself for the first time ever. And while at times it was difficult and challenging, the opportunities and benefits I received from my experiences changed my life. I was experiencing a different culture in a program of full immersion and thus completely escaped the bubble in which I had previously lived. I learned how to adapt to different surroundings and how to relate to and have discussions with people from completely different world experiences. Because of my study abroad experience, my perspective on life broadened because I had such a deeper understanding of the world outside my comfort zone based on first hand experiences. This part of my World Languages education has made me independent, adaptable, and more globally aware than ever before.

Realistically looking to the future, I'm not sure I will be speaking Spanish or French every single day. But while my language skills are certainly valuable, the most valuable aspect I have taken from my World Languages degree is the ability to understand and relate to the larger world with its countless cultures and people. We all know SMU's great saying, "World Changers Shaped Here". The World Languages Department ensures that Mustangs are not State or Nation Changers, not Business or Technology Changers, but World Changers. The World Languages program opens up the minds of its students to consider the rest of the world and arms them with the tools of how to understand and relate to foreign cultures and peoples. And from this understanding and relatability comes solutions for global problems. Only when we understand the world can we change it.

As Alexander Hamilton explained in his self-titled autobiographical musical, "I'm past patiently waitin' I'm passionately smashin' every expectation. Every action's an act of creation." The World Languages program has given me a shot to make a difference in the world because it has made me realize my place in it. I am no longer confined by my comfort zone and I actively push past complacency. I am a World Changer and I was shaped by the SMU World Languages Program. Thank you.

Kayla Goldberg '17