

Laura Bedoya

Good evening everyone, I hope you are all doing well thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

My name is Laura Bedoya, I am from East Haven, CT. I am an undergraduate student studying Political Science and Latin American Studies. I am also in the Master of Public Administration Fast-Track program at the University of Connecticut.

I am the proud daughter of Colombian immigrants who instilled in me the importance of education. As a first-generation college student being in my final semester holds a lot of sentiment as it is the realization of both my personal dream and my families.

I was accepted as part of the Student Support Service known as (SSS) Program, which is a program that serves First Generation, low income, and underrepresented College Students. SSS helped me navigate a huge campus and prepared me academically and professionally. It even allowed me to discover second major Latin American Studies.

The University of Connecticut has given me so many opportunities to become a student leader and to get involved with initiatives that builds my skills as a part of a wider Latino Student Network on Campus. Through the Puerto Rican Latin American Cultural Center also known as PRLACC and El Instituto. In PRLACC I served as the Cultural Representative and liaison between the Colombian Student Association and the Latinx Student Leadership Council. While at El Instituto, I was able to be a research volunteer in drafting policy blueprints on education for Latinos in Connecticut

The University of Connecticut has also provided me with many opportunities to build my research and advocacy skills. In 2019, I won the Bold Women's Leadership Network Scholarship which focuses on facilitating opportunities for women's leadership on campus through scholarship funding, programming, and engagement in service/leadership projects.

The BOLD Scholarship has supported my senior thesis, titled: *Gender, Equity and Political Participation in Colombia from 2000-2020*. BOLD allowed me to design and execute my own research project and combine my passions for research, advocacy and paving the way for my graduate studies in Public Administration at UCONN and eventually International Human Rights Law.

I have been reflecting a lot on my experience and the opportunities UCONN has given me. All of the communities at UConn that I have shared with you at today Student Support Services, The Puerto Rican Latin American Cultural Center, El Instituto and The BOLD Women's Leadership Network have invested in my academic, personal and professional life. In reality a Culture of giving will always inspire a culture of giving back.

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Thank you for supporting UConn, As Connecticut's only public research institution it is important and necessary to support diversity, maintain the University affordability and access while also maintaining and expanding research development. Your commitment to funding our university supports students like me in achieving our dreams which allow us to give back to our communities. Thank you for granting me the space too share my story.