

From PrepaTec to giving graduation speech at Johns Hopkins



When **Kristen Corlay** recorded a one-minute video about why she would like to be her class speaker at **Johns Hopkins University**, she never imagined she'd be picked.

It also came as a surprise to be among the five finalists, since there were only five people in her civil engineering degree program.

"I literally sat down, opened my computer, and started recording. It was a super-fast video, about one to one and a half minutes long and when I started to watch other peoples' videos I said 'Oops, what a shame', because they were very well produced.

*"Then people who didn't know me told me 'Your video caught my attention and I voted for you because you were very authentic,'" recalled the **PrepaTec Eugenio Garza Sada** graduate.*

So, the Monterrey native was able to deliver a message to the graduates and their families, lasting almost 5 minutes, upon finishing her studies at one of the most renowned universities in the **United States**.



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Arriving at Johns Hopkins

In her last year of high school, Corlay didn't know what she was going to study or where she would go.

During her time at **PrepaTec Eugenio Garza Sada**, she was part of **Botbusters**, a robotics team that participates in the **FIRST Robotics Competition**, an event in which she had her first exposure to engineering.

What's more, she was part of **Girl Up Monterrey**, a **United Nations** movement seeking to inspire girls to become global leaders.

"It amazes me because you always help as many people as you can, and it did have a bigger impact than I'd imagined."

For these and other projects, she decided to apply to different universities in the **United States**, with the support of her [PrepaTec](#) professors.

"Applying to universities abroad is not what most people do in general, so a lot of it was like charting a path, carrying out research, talking to my high school teachers, and saying, 'I want to do this.'

"I also received their support of 'Let's sit down. Let's investigate. Let's look at programs.' From there, I made my list of universities," she explained.

She applied to different programs and was selected for [Johns Hopkins University](#).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8SbwVICnzi>

Higher education and academic leadership

Due to the **COVID-19** pandemic, Corlay's first year at university was spent online, and it wasn't until her second year that she was able to live a full student life on campus.

She got involved in the university's Mexican student club, where they held events to celebrate the **Day of the Dead** and **Independence Day**, among others.

She was also part of a **dance group** of various dance styles and coordinated **teams of 60 people**. Furthermore, she acted as a mentor for first-year students.



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These and other activities were what led her to being among the speech finalists and where her classmates were able to get to know her.

“They told me I was a very empathic person and that I’d always shown them a lot of sympathy and inclusivity. I also received messages from my professors telling me that they were very happy for me.

“But it amazes me, because you always help as many people as you can, and it did have a bigger impact than I’d imagined,” she said.

Corlay was also able to meet singer **Stevie Wonder**, as he participated in her graduation ceremony.



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Next steps: Master’s degree at Stanford and Cabilde app

The Monterrey native will study for a master’s degree in **Sustainable Design and Construction at Stanford University**, a subject that she’s passionate about.

“My focus is systems engineering and sustainability and we look at if the city itself were a system, or rather how infrastructure impacts people and how that has an impact, how we interact with each other,” she said.

Similarly, this summer she is working on the **Cabilde** application, which she created several years ago with her classmate Valeria Colunga. The app seeks to provide people with information about

what their political representatives do.

“This came about because we saw a need for people to be able to access online information about what’s happening in Congress,” she said.

Corlay said that she’d like to be an example for new generations of women fitting in and excelling in disciplines such as **civil engineering**.

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