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*What do the stoles mean to you?*

Stoles represent individuality. They give a glimpse to a story behind the individual. In the same ways that we bring diversity of opinion, culture, and ambition to the Wesleyan community, stoles show the ways in which our college experiences have impacted our lives, or vice versa. Just like our individual style represents a glimpse of who we are, would like to be, or how we want to be perceived, stoles represent a means by which we communicate our stories. Wearing a stole physically communicates to the rest of the Wesleyan community all of the ways in which we have been affected in our goals for academic achievement, in ways that are unique from other students in the graduating class. Having a stole represents for me a way to show the Wesleyan community my personal diversity, particularly being amongst the first generation to attend an American university, and being the product of immigrant parents. Particularly when I think about the type of legacy I would like to leave, and what I will carry with me in my post-Wesleyan life, a stole plays an important role in representing that transition and what I have gained from this segment of my life.

*What effort or relationship with a person (or people), organization(s), or office(s) impacted your social and academic successes and achievements at Wesleyan? You may specifically address efforts that focus on breaking the cycle of oppression, as you define it, in order to cultivate an educational environment in which all students can thrive.*

While many organizations have impacted my experience at Wesleyan, a few have stood out as most influential to my success and my interest in achieving social justice. I can most easily split these into three major categories: the personal, the collegiate, and the community. At the personal level, my involvement with the organization Nosotras (of which I am currently the Chair) allowed me to connect with other inspirational Latina women in ways that uplifted me and gave me voice as I came to Wesleyan. I grew up in a predominantly white area, and Wesleyan's diverse student body was, to me, its greatest asset. I did not have an extended network of minority women to connect with. At Wes, Nosotras was my main social entry into college, and the one that has helped my identity

formation in the largest capacity. My connections with women of color were not limited to this organization, but Nosotras incited my interest in even fostering those types of relationships with women of color in the first place. I used the women on campus as mentors in my quest to understand my complex situation in academia, my issues with beauty and body consciousness, and my oppression on a much more global scale. I relished finding other students who identified with my background, as well as those who gave me personal knowledge and advice. Now I strive to inspire those same sentiments in young girls entering Wesleyan by developing programming that fosters community amongst Latina women and other women of color, including dinners, discussions, movie nights, and other social functions.

On the collegiate level, I have been most inspired by my participation in the Wesleyan Diversity Education Facilitation Program (WesDEF), in which I was responsible for developing discussion topics and facilitating discussion with a focus on diversity issues amongst freshman and sophomore students. This inspired me because it exhibited how social change can occur at the most base level: through talking. I really did not imagine that my influence could change the way in which people think, but it did. WesDEF didn't occur in my dorm when I was a freshman, and I am sorry it did not. There were many problematic dynamics on my hall that could have easily been avoided had someone facilitated a constructive discussion. My main hope with the program was to prevent fragmentation in dorms that often happens after almost as soon as the first few months of school. WesDEF is important for many students who are dealing with such diversity for the first time. Just as we talk about sexuality and gender, race is just as pressing of a topic- and something that deserves discussion amongst students. I was honored to contribute based on experience to the social justice issues that affect our collegiate community. Helping students think differently also made me think differently about the ways in which I interact with the diverse world around me, and how words and actions affect the world around us in a huge way.

Finally, on the community level, I gained much knowledge in volunteering as a tutor in the English as a Second Language Program (ESL). I was responsible for coming up with lessons and tutoring an immigrant Spanish-speaking member of the janitorial staff. Because my parents were immigrants, I understood the cultural and linguistic barriers that

immigrants often face in this country. I felt that by narrowing the language barrier to some degree with one person, I could make a tremendous difference. I want to make it easier for immigrants in this country to gain access to language-learning programs. Teaching, as I came to learn, is very difficult. I had never been responsible for coming up with lessons, implementing them, and making them work. There were many things that didn't work, but ultimately I learned what was right for my student and used her skills to make her a better speaker. To a certain point, I was the connection between my student and the rest of the community. Often misunderstood and disrespected on the job, I helped provide her with tools in fighting such oppression. She is an intelligent woman, and I feel because of her occupation and remedial English, she is often regarded as juvenile and incompetent. I wanted to change that perception. I focused on building up her speech confidence, hoping she would one day communicate with students and colleagues in a more meaningful way and gain the respect she deserves. While I have the luxury of living in an area where most speak the same language as I do, I understand on a broader perspective, how social justice can reach those who do not have this luxury and the ways in which I can use my tools of success to help others.

All of these organizations have enhanced my personal growth on campus, while allowing me to bring connections with other members of the Wesleyan and greater Wesleyan community. I have come to know myself much better as a result, and the diversity that I sought at Wesleyan taught me tremendously about my own.

*What is the most valuable lesson that you have learned about advancing social justice efforts at Wes that you would like to share with your peers?*

Collectivity is essential for successfully achieving social justice. Unfortunately, too many social justice efforts at Wesleyan are impeded by the lack of community cohesiveness. The typical trend is: first large meeting with many students, next meeting with a few students, and a final event- with one or two faithful contributors. And ultimately, the community becomes fragmented, and the original effort loses its meaning and force. This is the constant pattern that has plagued particularly minority efforts on campus and prevented our community from reaching some potentially effective goals. I strive to maintain collectivity in some capacity in my own efforts to perform social justice in the

Latino community. But still, many students allow complex schedules, personal disagreements, and social biases to inhibit the community that is essential to collectivity. It is draining to stand alone without support. One can easily look at history's greatest social movements and see that their successes were a result of a large supportive network. Wesleyan students of the future should take heed of such plight in our community. The dynamics already in place are difficult to change, however not impossible. The main way to overcome these dynamics is confronting them head-on as they emerge. Name the elephant in the room. Say what you feel, while understanding the dynamics of your own position. I believe collectivity can occur, but only through concessions. Too many of us come with egos and ambitions, and often these must be set aside to achieve a common goal. And once we understand that the acquisition of the common goal will enhance the potential for us to achieve our individual efforts, that is when we will truly understand the meaning, and effectiveness, of collectivity.