

Good afternoon,

Firstly, I want to thank you and the rest of the scholarship committee for helping me fund my education. On top of my in-school scholarship and external grants, I'm excited to announce that I will be graduating college with no financial burden or loans! I am writing to provide an update about my first year at New York University (NYU) and share the amazing opportunities that higher education has given me.



I moved to Manhattan on August 2017. My dorm on Washington Square Park is named Goddard Hall, and it's the only residential college on campus. Most of my friends either live on my floor or in the rest of my building, and on the first floor is a Starbucks and the Grey Art Gallery. Goddard serves as a community where there's programming and even classes that take place. We also have a student council, in which I was the elected president of. In NYU's recent residential life award ceremony, our student council was awarded the best community on campus! This was thanks to my amazing executive board who has turned our budget into croissant baking classes, Broadway shows, trips to the Bronx Zoo, and more for our 250 residents.

School started in September, and as a student studying environmental science, specifically hydrologic science, I began to do research on irrigation systems in the Philippines. A staff member from our department sent out an email about what I was doing early in the year, and before I knew it, it grew to a research team of 10. Each person began to research Philippine irrigation from different angles: genetic engineered crops, economic stakeholders, cultural value, etc. We narrowed our research to one specific irrigation technology: alternate wetting and drying, which saves money on diesel, and cuts water usage by 30% and methane emissions by

50%. Over the past year, our research team, now called the Philippine Irrigation Project, presented twice at the NYU engineering school to share our findings.



We then used our research to create a platform for farmers to have greater agency over their irrigation methods, as technology coming from research institutions is introduced. We named this venture “Irrigate, Elevate”. From there, we applied to the NYU D-Prize, a social entrepreneurship competition that funds students introducing technology to different parts of the world. We hear back from them this week as we’ve made the final round, but “Irrigate, Elevate” won the Davis Projects for Peace! From that competition, we’ve received \$10,000 on top of another \$1,500 from a separate grant to make “Irrigate, Elevate” happen this summer. After our preliminary research work in Manhattan during the month of June, we will spend all of July and August in the northern Philippines to pilot our platform with the help of a company called Hybridigm.

This fall, “Irrigate, Elevate” will still be going on since we will be hiring local university students from within the Philippines to scale the business and match our 2-year projected plan of growth. Also this fall, we will share our research with NYU, alongside a few other universities who requested to partner with us on our work. Our work will also be part of a water management course being taught at NYU this upcoming year! In addition, we aim to apply for the Changemaker Challenge this fall to create a digitized version of the platform and incorporate it into “Irrigate, Elevate” in summer 2019. We also aim to petition the venture to become a 1-credit course since students will be doing hands-on research in the Philippines.

I am so lucky for how many opportunities this grassroots research project opened. All of my teammates have been offered research positions this summer and grants of their own. A company called Future Labs even flew me out to Guatemala for a week this past April to mentor some of their students in creating their region’s first waste management business!

The Philippine Irrigation Project also received the Green Grant to host the first ever sustainable social entrepreneurship festival this fall. This will include graduate level projects alongside the Philippine Irrigation Project in hopes of bringing more students on-board with existing social entrepreneurship opportunities and grants with which they can create their own.

I cannot believe that all of this happened within my first year of college, but don't worry, I am still loving life and making so many amazing new friends! My floormates and I, along with a bunch of other friends in Goddard Hall, are living in the same building next year across the street from Chinatown and Little Italy. Each weekend, we've been going to museums, cheap but delicious restaurants, and beautiful parks. On Fridays and weekends, I am also part of a weightlifting team in Brooklyn. This has truly added so much to my life. Being on a team outside of NYU connects me to the rest of the city and reminds me of who I am outside of the "student" context.

Over the next few weeks, I will spend my time here in San Francisco catching up with everyone. Then, during the month of June, I will be in NY for a three-week job I got hired for to consult in social entrepreneurship (specifically in career education). Then, I will be in the Philippines for July and August to pilot "Irrigate, Elevate", while also interning part time for the Philippine Rice Research Institute to learn about genetically engineered rice breeds, and also the Balesin Island Club to learn about sustainable tourism.

Thank you for sticking with me through this letter, and I hope this provides good enough insight into my college life. I cannot thank you enough for helping pave this road for me, which has only opened up more opportunities that I never saw coming. Over the next few weeks that I'm here, I would love to pay a visit and give another thank you in person.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Isabela Acenas", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Isabela "Isay" Acenas
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New York University
College of Arts and Science
Class of 2021