

A Conversation with Laura Sofia Castro Fonseca, Class of 2019. (2018). *Medium*. Retrieved 12 January 2018, from

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Minerva Schools

A Conversation with Laura Sofia Castro Fonseca, Class of 2019



Quick Facts

Name

Laura Sofia Castro Fonseca

Hometown

Bogota, Colombia

Class

2019

Major & Concentrations

Social Sciences, concentrations in Global Development Studies and Brain, Cognition, and Behavior

Why did you choose to attend Minerva?

Prior to Minerva, I attended Li Po Chun United World College of Hong Kong. When I first heard about Minerva's undergraduate program, I thought it had been created by an alumni of UWC — the similarities were startling. Minerva and UWC both have extremely diverse student bodies, for example. When decision time came around, I realized that being part of the Minerva experience, particularly as a member of the first graduating class, was an opportunity I couldn't pass.

What do you like about Minerva academics?

I like many things about Minerva's academics: the interdisciplinary curriculum, the focus on applicable knowledge, the recognition of essential soft skills... My favorite thing, however, is that our classes are taught in small seminars, not lectures. The smaller class sizes improve the overall experience and allow students to focus on sharing our ideas and refining our arguments. Personally, I enjoy arguing and conducting analyses, so I like getting to discuss interesting topics with my classmates in a structured environment.

What do you aspire to do when you graduate?

I have very different short-term and long-term goals. Immediately after I graduate I would like to keep doing what I do at Minerva: learning and traveling. I'm passionate about social justice and making the world a better place, so I want to continue learning to understand key challenges in different parts of the world, as well as the different ways these challenges have been addressed so far.

In the long term, I would like to tackle the challenges associated with global governance. I believe as a species we won't be able to realize our full potential if we don't learn to collaborate. I think the United Nations (UN) has a lot of potential, but there are also many ways in which it can and should improve. As globalization increases and humans face more challenges, the UN

will need to adapt to stay relevant. I aspire to contribute to the organization's transformation process.

How are you starting to do so already?

First of all, I am studying global history and the way the world works right now. The classes I'm taking at Minerva are critical to my understanding of how to tackle the world's most pressing challenges; I am analyzing its complexity by studying different levels of interactions: individual's psychology, group behavior through sociology, and the nuances of systems like politics and economics, for example. Additionally, I have been trying to gain experience in different fields and industries to evaluate the kind of work environment I'm most interested in. So far, I have collaborated with an [individual conducting benefit auctions](#), [a small educational NGO](#), [an established, world-renowned NGO](#), and the corporate social responsibility team of [a large multinational organization](#).

Tell us about one challenge you are passionate about addressing in a city you live in, or will live in, while at Minerva?

I'm passionate about gender equality, especially in Latin America. There are a lot of concepts and problems discussed in the U.S. and Europe on this topic that are barely talked about in Latin America. Living in Buenos Aires was particularly interesting because it has what I consider to be one of the most vocal and organized feminist movements in the region. I attended some meetings and protests and was able to see firsthand how they have achieved such a strong community of advocates.

Tell us about a collaboration you are proud of with a Civic Partner.

I just finished a project with the Corporate Social Responsibility team at SAP South Korea. It was very challenging but rewarding. We spent the whole semester ideating and designing a workshop for Social Entrepreneurs, and last week we finally tested our final product on a team

of social entrepreneurs. It was very successful! In the feedback survey, 100 percent of the participants said they were highly likely to recommend it to someone else. Our boss, my two classmates, and I are all very proud of what we have accomplished.

What are some of your other passions and interests?

I enjoy public speaking and design. Both allow me to take a break from the ever-present laptop screen in front of me. Regarding public speaking, I am passionate about debate, although sadly I have yet to find a space to continue practicing at Minerva — at least not in the formal sense. I debate with my classmates during class very frequently. I also love spoken poetry. I spend hours watching and writing it. I recently participated in a Minerva poetry slam and the room was so full of good energy; it was probably my favorite night of the semester. On design, I like that it allows me to express myself in a visual way, different from the words we use all the time. I do some illustration and general graphic design, but also enjoy photography and film.

Who inspired you in high school?

I was the leader of my debate team during my last two years of high school in Santiago. The core team had three girls, myself included, and we used to call ourselves “Las Chicas Superpoderosas,” which is the Spanish translation for “The Powerpuff Girls,” but the *literal* translation is “The Super-powerful Girls” — way more empowering. The best debate teams were from all-male elite schools, so it was rare to see a team of all girls like us. And we were good! My teammates were older than me, and I remember being very inspired by their intelligence and dedication. Having female friends that, like me, cared about doing more than what was expected of us was incredible. We got second place in that year’s tournament.

As you attended a UWC, you took International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. What advice do you have for current IB students interested in attending Minerva?

They'll know what it means to complete a demanding curriculum, so Minerva's academics won't be as much of a shock for IB students as it might be for others. If you want to continue with a demanding education system, one with rigorous academics, and you enjoyed the holistic approach of the IB, then Minerva might be the best fit for you.

In your opinion, how is Minerva shaping the future?

I believe there is a lot of power in bringing students from different nations together, encouraging and helping them to enhance their knowledge and intellect. I also think Minerva is directly shaping the future of higher education by showing that it is possible to do things differently and institutions *can* switch the focus from rote memorization and cramming to active learning. Indirectly, I think Minerva is helping to form students that will shape the future of the world as we know it.

Why did you decide to attend a UWC school?

I moved from Bogota to Santiago because of my dad's job when I was 14 years old, and I was mind blown. I couldn't believe that two cultures could be so different, yet share the same language and be so near one another. It made me begin to wonder what lay even further beyond, across oceans. Then, UWC came along. I had the opportunity to move to Hong Kong, and explore the other side of the world alongside a group of people who embodied the same values as me and had a passion for changing the world.

How are Minerva and UWC alike?

Minerva is a natural extension of UWC. Having an international student community is the most similar aspect. You can't find this much diversity at most colleges. The culture of a student body is mostly created by the students, and there is a very noticeable difference between living amongst people from a single nationality and living with people from all around the world.

How did living away from home during those formative years help shape you?

UWC shaped a lot of who I am. I grew up in a family that always ensured that I had everything I needed, perhaps to a fault. Being at UWC made me realize I had to be able to do things for myself. Mostly through trial and error, UWC taught me independence, responsibility, and decision-making. I realized mistakes are necessary to learn, but that I can't keep making the same mistakes over and over. UWC also gave me perspective; I have been so privileged throughout my life! It made the world seem both bigger and smaller at the same time. Lastly, it taught me humility. It was the first time I felt challenged both academically and personally. Everyone around me was so smart, had interests outside of class, and so many skills. It showed me that there were no limits to the person I chose to become.

What do you enjoy most about being a part of the Minerva community?

What I enjoy the most about being a part of this community are the opportunities for city immersion that come from not having a campus. At Minerva, I feel free. Of course, with freedom comes responsibility — and at Minerva, responsibilities abound. You have to be an adult. There is no food given to you, for example. You have to search for the resources you need. It can be tremendously taxing at times, but the feeling of freedom and independence is very empowering.

What would you tell students who are considering Minerva?

Are you ready to be challenged? I would also encourage them to ask themselves what they want out of their college experience. Minerva will challenge them, it will be hard, and they will have to make many sacrifices. But the experience is immensely rewarding and will make them grow as a person. If they are expecting an easy ride, this is probably not the place for them. But if they have an intrinsic motivation to learn and want to dig deeper, there's no better place. If they're a UWC student, the diversity found within Minerva's student community is probably more like

UWC's than any other school. They have also already coped with what it means to live away from home and family, which is one of the things students find hardest at Minerva.