I was once a very nervous freshman. In August 2013, my parents pulled up to T lot. A student asked me what my last name was so she could direct us in the correct line of cars to head over to my freshman dorm. I timidly muttered it under my breath, the student asked me to speak louder, and reluctantly, I told her who I as. As we waited in the queue, mom, dad, and I received an ever trendy Brandeis towel and some ice pops to cool us down after our three hour drive. It did not help that the first song I heard blasting in the parking lot was Out of My League by the Fitz and the Tantrums. “How fitting,” was my first thought listening along to the song as I stared at the buildings in which I would soon acquire my “higher learning”.

You see, for me personally, it was always hard for me to speak up. My mom would always insist I’d speak a little louder when being spoken to by adults, peers, waiters, even my family members. It’s not like I didn’t have a voice, its just that I didn’t know what it was meant to say. Often times when I’d find myself actually speaking, it would be to apologize for things that I didn’t even do, something I learned in college that women are conditioned to do since its “polite”. It isn’t. I wouldn’t have known that had I not spoken up.

At Brandeis, I studied English. I figured, maybe it would be the same as in high school, in which we would read and formulate our opinions based off of what the professor said and if we disagreed, we were wrong—Point, Evidence, Analysis, Significance—PEAS to guide the way in every paper, yes, that is how easy it would be.

But when I was first asked—challenged by my own professors to disagree with them, I was at a loss for words. Upon being told to synthesize something of my own that showed what I truly thought fancy dead authors were communicating, I panicked. I’m a student, I don’t have the credentials to fulfill such a request!
Charissa Fajardo

Once again the school system has failed me—women having voices, talking back to teachers, what on earth could possibly have been going on? I thought it better to cope with the transition and did what was asked of me, and was rather surprised with the results.

I learned to speak. I spoke of Thoreau, Mendieta, Kahlo, Wordsworth, just to name a few. I spoke of every day people, I spoke of friends, my family, and everything in between. I spoke to poetry, I spoke to acting, I spoke to reading, and all the other things I wish I had done more of.

In these conversations, I would meet people who talked about the same things, but different ones too. When people would speak to me, I would listen, except, I would speak back and respond to their Point, and the Evidence, Analysis, and Significance would just fall right into place without my having to refer to a grading rubric.

I know I do not speak for myself when I say that in the last four years, I was able to acquire not just any voice, but one of my own. One that represents masses of women and Latinas specifically, but the beauty of this is in that in this case I am not unique.

Voices no longer have to be gendered in order to hold significance and represent and defend bigger groups with whom people might not identify. It is with confidence that I can say I am graduating with people who are not afraid to speak against, but also in the name of the social and political troubles that have plagued the world.

Not just through social media, but in group organizations, rallies, among other powerful means of action, this class has represented the voice needed to better the future the awaits us the moment we step out into the world. Voice being singular, as it must be acknowledged we represent a single student body, possessing the two most important anatomical structures: the heart and the brain. The heart, showing the immense care with which we speak up for ourselves
Charissa Fajardo

and those around us, and the brain, to understand one another, learn about one another, and create ways to help one another function in said body. Echoing the words of Ray Bradbury, “The form does not matter. Content is everything.”

The places we came from are merely secondary when placed in conjunction with where we have made it today. We came as equals four years ago and today, we depart as equals. Equal in the power of our voices and their in functions our student body. Although our departure marks the end of our being a single voice, I sincerely hope that we can all take ours individual voices and what we’ve learned from others’ in to aid us in the endeavors we meet on the bright paths which await us.