

*Self-motivated. Driven. Remarkable.*

The same inspirational words were used again and again by those who had the pleasure of working with Myla Cruz during her two years in Minds Matter. Four years after graduating from the program, she continues to make her high school guidance counselor and her Minds Matter mentors and team leader proud by accomplishing the goals that she set for herself as a Minds Matter mentee. A senior at Columbia University double-majoring in Economics and Math, Myla will no doubt continue to wow all those who come into contact with her in the years to come.

Myla is the only daughter of her Filipino mother, who moved to New York City to ensure that her daughter would have a good education and make the most of what the future had to offer her. Myla's gratitude for her mother and the sacrifices that she made is what drives her to excel both academically and professionally. As she wraps up her final year at Columbia, Myla is using her experiences from her summer internships at places like Salomon Smith Barney, Merrill Lynch, and Lazard Asset Management to pursue a career in the financial services industry.

After participating in recruiting season earlier this year, she received several job offers and has decided to accept a Research Analyst position at Lazard Asset Management. She hopes this will give her an opportunity to apply her love for economics and math in the real world as she paves the way to attend business school in a couple of years.

As a student at the High School for Environmental Studies in New York City, Myla hit the ground running when she joined the Minds Matter Junior Program in the fall of 2002. As one of her mentors, Corrine Kang, puts it, "I had my job cut out for me."

Her combination of "maturity, sophistication, and poise beyond her years" made it quickly obvious to those on her team that Myla would have no problem excelling in the program.

As a conscientious and self-aware young woman, Myla says she jumped at the opportunity to join Minds Matter at a critical time in her high school career — a time when the once far off dream of a college education was transforming into an attainable reality. While she was sure that

she would attend college, Minds Matter provided Myla with the support network that she needed to attend a top university like Columbia. The commitment and dedication that Myla's mentors added to her already existing determination to succeed were the extra boost that led her to accomplish her dreams of a college education. "Minds Matter helped me become who I am today," she says.

While at Minds Matter, Myla attended the summer program at Phillips Academy Andover, where she took an intensive chemistry course because of her growing interest in pursuing medicine in college. In 2004, she graduated third in her class with gold and silver medals in math, biology, and non-native Spanish as well as two scholarships for academic achievement.

After taking an introductory course in economics at Columbia, Myla became intrigued by how she was able to apply her classroom experience to the real world. She decided to change her major from biology to economics and mathematics in the hopes of pursuing a career in finance. An inspirational leader and entrepreneur,

Myla designed a class called Virtual Enterprise for the Columbia Grammar School, where she teaches fifth to seventh graders the ins and outs of starting their own business. The class is developed around encouraging the students to explore their own passions and develop them into a product or service.

As her Minds Matter team leader, Mary Elisabeth Plowden, described her, "She is a great example for other students in the program of what you can achieve if you stay focused and always look for the best in life." When asked what word of advice she would give to Minds Matter students today, Myla said,

"You joined Minds Matter because you are bright and motivated and you have to understand what that really means — no matter where you come from, if you work hard, you can reach your highest potential."



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—Mary Elisabeth Plowden