

## NOVA Testimonial – Luisa Trujillo Lopez



**Luisa Trujillo Lopez** (Colombia, Northern Virginia Community College – Annandale, Business Administration, 2019-2020)

Luisa Trujillo Lopez has always been fond of different cultures and literature. When the opportunity to study at Northern Virginia Community College arose, Luisa applied with little expectation. She didn't realize that her life would be impacted in so many amazing ways.

Luisa studied leadership development at NOVA during her exchange year with the CCI Program between 2019-2020. While attending the program, she was introduced to various cultures, participated in internship and volunteer opportunities, and even met her current partner Aswin, who also studied at NOVA for the same program.

**Tell us a little about yourself and your background prior to studying in the U.S. (your interests, education, and professional experience):**

I was studying for a bachelor's degree in modern Languages. In fact, when I applied to the CCI Program I was only in my fourth semester of school (in Colombia we normally have from nine to ten semesters to complete an undergraduate program). Before traveling to the US, my life was mainly focused on reading literature, learning languages, and helping my family with the coffee business.

I'm proud to share that I come from a family of coffee producers in the middle of the Andean mountains. My city, Pereira, is known for being part of the Coffee Cultural Landscape. I was raised within the

“montañero” culture, listening and dancing to traditional music, strong family values, and a cheerful view of life despite all odds. In 2018, my cousin, Alejandro Bedoya, started the company Combia Mountain Coffee and soon after all of us were involved with the business.

From 2017 to 2019 I had been learning English at the university and it opened giant doors to my life. One day, Ana María, one of my best friends, sent me the link to register for the CCI Program. I did it without much thinking and with zero expectations. I truly had no idea how much my life was going to change after sending those essays.

### **What classes did you take at NOVA?**

Initially, I was planning to study Public Relations. Yet, for different reasons, I ended up studying Leadership Development. I had English with Mr. Perra, Principles of Management with Richard Nagel, Business and Professional Communication with Peter Kent, Composition I with Yu-Hui Hwang, Promotions and Sales and Marketing Management with Zulma Westney, Leadership Development with Cameisha Chin, Organizational Behavior with Antoinette Jenkins, and Human Resource Management with Denise Simmons.

### **What would you tell another international student coming to study at NOVA?**

Sometimes we can get too comfortable in having a “normal routinary” life: Waking up, studying, coming back home. However, in many senses we have a set of delicacies served on a nice table. It’s up to us to take them and taste all the different flavors. There are fun activities, physical and mental health aid, and tech facilities, among others. I’d finally say to any international student at NOVA: take advantage of all the opportunities that the community college provides and make the most out of it.

### **What career and/or educational pursuits are you exploring?**

I have recently graduated from my bachelor’s program in Modern Languages and I was working as a high school English teacher at a private school here in Colombia as a part of my final year dissertation. At the same time, I have been working part-time as a fully remote Digital Marketing Coordinator at a US-based realty tech startup since coming back from the US in 2020. It was the same company where I did my internship as a part of the CCI Program. I really enjoy being in the marketing world and would ideally like to grow more in the field.

In 2021, Aswin and I started a podcast called Masala of Cultures to share our experiences of being an intercultural couple in a foreign country and then in a long-distance relationship after that. This project of ours not only helped us spend more quality time together but also gave hope to many other couples from such relationships that our differences are what bring us together rather than act as a deterrent.

### **What was your favorite part about attending NOVA?**

I’d say the library, classes, and participating in Student Life’s activities. I’m naturally a bookworm and I spent many hours in the library enjoying my alone time. Similarly, I had the opportunity of meeting many people in my classes from the US and diverse countries with such views of life.

### **Why did you decide to participate in an international exchange program?**

Before the CCI Program, traveling abroad was a far dream for me due to my economic situation and limiting beliefs. I used to think about it as something hard to achieve. Once I applied, I saw it as a possibility to change my reality and break with old paradigms that were not useful to me anymore.

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The CCI Program is a one-year, non-degree academic program designed to build participants' technical skills, enhance leadership capabilities, and strengthen English language proficiency. The program also provides opportunities for professional internships, service learning and community engagement activities to build relationships between U.S. citizens and other countries. Northern Virginia Community College administers this U.S. Department of State program in cooperation with the NOVA-led Community College Consortium. For further information, please contact CCI Program Director Leeza Fernand at [lfernand@nvcc.edu](mailto:lfernand@nvcc.edu) and/or the NOVA CCI Team at [CCCIP@nvcc.edu](mailto:CCCIP@nvcc.edu) and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at [eca-press@state.gov](mailto:eca-press@state.gov).