

Iris Marion Young Award Speech
Lauren Hasek

I'm so honored to be here today, receiving an award that is so extensively representative of all that I strive for. I would like to thank Dr. Morrison for such a flattering introduction, but more importantly, for agreeing to entertain every bizarre idea I've thought up. She is a remarkably powerful woman and a phenomenal mentor. I would like to thank the Women's Studies Program for seeing my efforts as something to be commended. I'd also like to thank Iris Marion Young for living her life in a way that would improve others. A final thank you to my family for accepting the path that I have chosen and supporting the adventures I'm taking, and a special thank you to my mother, for letting me go. The last thing my mother told me before I stepped on the airplane last summer was that she had never been so mad at me in all my life. I cried so hard that night. I woke the next morning in an airport in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to an email saying how proud she was of me.

I hope to leave you today with a slightly unconventional view of the world, particularly the developing world. I hope it will challenge the way you think and perhaps encourage you to do more. What I am striving for is advocacy at it's finest; a passion to live outside yourself. Let me begin by reading a short excerpt from a piece I wrote about an experience I had this past summer while conducting research in Lilongwe, Malawi.

Dusty panes of glass scattered unpleasantly warm light, illuminating the yellowing posters hanging off dirt streaked walls. I slid my feet across the ground listening as a coating of dust and dirt crackled beneath. The air was heavy and each breath drew a thick musk of human exhaustion. I reached across the desk, the wood splintering against my tender skin. I watched as the time began advancing on the small screen of the recorder, readjusting my stack of papers and glancing up at the woman sitting before me. Her skin was taut and a dew-like coating of sweat shimmered just slightly. Her age was apparent in her hands; large soft pads, overworked. Her downcast gaze presented a strong, determined woman as meek and timid. I couldn't help but feel guilty. I had done nothing to deserve the power I held in that situation. There was a woman who has overcome great barriers to provide the simplest necessities. She redefined both emotional and physical strength yet she wilted in front of a slender college student accredited by nothing other than an audio

recorder, pen, and stack of papers. A plump fly landed on my wrist, its iridescent wings twitching. I instinctively twitched. Across the table the woman remained motionless as another fly landed on her collarbone, its beady iridescent eyes taunting her. She was unaffected. The flies are by far the most lavish creatures in all of Malawi. I had never been so uncomfortable in all my life.

As badly as I wished to continue interviewing, the desire to breathe fresh air quickly took precedence. I hunched my back, extending my neck forward as I struggled to navigate out of the small structure. I passed a group of men dressed in mismatched suit jackets and slacks. They sat in a dreary room on an assortment of different sized plastic chairs. One of the village headmen motioned outside and thanked me repeatedly in Chichewa, his old eyes disappearing under heavy folds of skin. For my spoken language I received great praise. For a small suitcase of second hand goods I received great praise. For the little I had done I received great praise. I have never felt so guilty in all my life for making these people feel so small, so in need of aide.

The experiences I had in Malawi left me with a very skeptical view of aid and the presence of foreign volunteers. Foreign aid has the power to victimize; to create a culture dependent on their position as the impoverished and underserved. While there is undoubtedly a need for some degree of foreign intervention to facilitate the growth of developing countries in our rapidly globalizing world, the extent to which many of these nations have become dependent impedes their eventual success.

Aide work makes us smile and warms our hearts, but it inevitably does little but place a Band aide on a gaping wound. Improving the global health disparity begins not with foreign clinics and eager aide workers, but rather with mobilization of the populations themselves, provided the opportunities and resources necessary to actively improve their own socioeconomic situations. As far as my contribution to social justice and democracy in the developing world, mobilization can begin with me. I have a passion and a desire, and a phenomenal encouragement within the University and at home. The most beneficial thing I believe I can do is learn.