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Alexandra Nichipor '12 at her graduation from Harvard Divinity School in 2015.

Alumna Earns Master's from Harvard, Now at Dana-Farber

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After MCLA, and following a year in China to teach English, Alexandra Nichipor '12 went on to earn her master's degree from Harvard Divinity School. She recently accepted a position at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, where she's a research assistant for its Initiative on Health, Religion and Spirituality.

The Initiative's mission, Nichipor explained, is to understand the roles that religion and spirituality play in health – not only in public health on the macro level, but also in the lives of the individuals who come to the Dana-Farber clinic for treatment.

In addition to handling the Initiative's finances and communications, Nichipor conducts research and assists with academic projects, which includes preparing manuscripts for publication. Soon, she'll conduct qualitative interviews with patients to learn more about the roles that religion and spirituality play in the lives of those who face a terminal diagnosis.

Nichipor set a goal to attend Harvard Divinity School when she was in high school.

"It's one of the very few interfaith divinity schools in the world," she explained. "I attended class with Israeli rabbis, Buddhist monks, Catholic feminists, and all kinds of other amazing folks."

With a main interest in the study of women and gender in religion, Nichipor in 2015 earned her Master's of Theological Studies with a focus on women, gender and religion. At MCLA, she decided to double major in sociology and philosophy because of her intense interest in the social, scientific and historical study of religion.

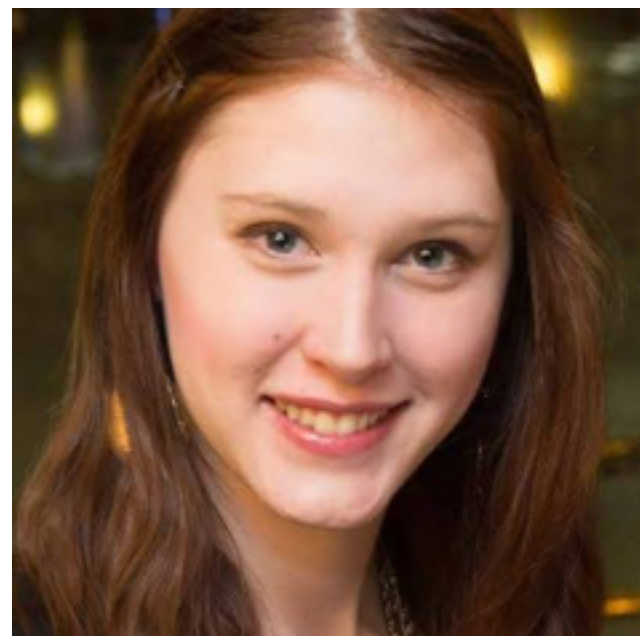
"Philosophy gave me ways to understand religious doctrine, and sociology showed me how to understand the social systems undergirding religions, as well as the ways people actually experience their religions," she said. "It's also a pretty fantastic combination. A background in sociology gave me more factual data to work with in philosophy classes, and my philosophical training gave more bite and rigor to my sociological analyses."

Nichipor said her MCLA professors prepared her well for Harvard by holding her to a high standard and by promoting critical thinking.

"MCLA encourages fresh perspectives and unique ways of viewing old problems," she explained. "At Harvard, I was willing to take intellectual risks and make connections between ideas. Having a network of friends from my time at MCLA also supported me greatly during my graduate studies, and ensured I didn't fall into the isolation that plagues so many graduate students."

Nichipor's "high impact" experiences at MCLA included her work at the Women's Center, which provided her with experience in event planning and writing; her time as a tutor-counselor in the summer Individual Enrichment Program (IEP), where she supported first-generation college students; and her experiences as a teaching assistant in philosophy and sociology.

Although her grant-funded position at Dana-Farber will end after two-and-a-half years, Nichipor already anticipates what's next: she plans to enter a Ph.D program in anthropology or the history of science.



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