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## Chichilnisky-Heal GRD '18 remembered as “intellectual force”

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Natasha Chichilnisky-Heal GRD '18, a Ph.D. candidate in political science, died Tuesday night in her New Haven apartment. She was 27 years old.

In a Wednesday morning email, Graduate School Dean Lynn Cooley conveyed the news to graduate school students and faculty, extending her sympathy and sorrow and urging mourners to take comfort in one other. The New Haven Police indicated that there was no evidence of either foul play or an accident, she said. According to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of Connecticut, both the cause and manner of death are pending further study.

“I encourage you to seek support from your fellow students, faculty and from chaplains, advisors and others who can be helpful,” Cooley wrote. “We mourn the loss of Natasha and extend our deepest sympathy to her family and friends.”

Chichilnisky-Heal received her Bachelor of Arts from Columbia University in 2009 after just three years of study. A speaker of French, Russian and Spanish in addition to English, she worked at the World Bank, the World Energy Forum and the Nexus Global Youth Summit before coming to Yale.

At Yale, she was heralded as a top student by professors and an excellent friend by her classmates.

“There was absolutely no limit to where she could’ve taken her talents,” Allegra di Bonaventura, assistant dean of the graduate school, said.

On Wednesday afternoon in Rosenkranz Hall, roughly 50 people came together for a department gathering, at which political science professor and department chair Steven Wilkinson, director of graduate studies Frances Rosenbluth, University chaplain Sharon Kugler and director of clinical services for University Health Services Howard Blue, spoke. Attendees discussed memories of Chichilnisky-Heal, recalling everything from her sharp seminar comments to watching baby elephants play in Africa while there for a conference.

This spring, despite being on leave from Yale, Chichilnisky-Heal organized a conference in the political science department, inviting guest speakers to discuss the Russian involvement in Ukraine.

Friends and professors remembered Chichilnisky-Heal for what they described as her incredible kindness, wit and intelligence.

Lynn Hancock GRD '18 described Chichilnisky-Heal as her best friend in the political science department. When Hancock first arrived at Yale, lonely and loaded with belongings, Chichilnisky-Heal devoted the

entire weekend to helping her move in, she said. This type of unsolicited kindness was characteristic of Chichilnisky-Heal, friends said.

“She was funny, sarcastic, unbelievably bright and always willing to give of herself,” Hancock said.

“Everyone who met Natasha was struck by her enthusiasm, sense of humor and brilliance, and I am no different.”

Hancock added that Chichilnisky-Heal was always there for her, whether she was struggling with formal modeling problem sets or personal setbacks.

William Kwok GRD '18 also remembered Chichilnisky-Heal as one of the most loyal friends he has ever had. At the beginning of this year when Kwok did not yet have a place to stay, he said, she let him stay with her though she had just moved in to her apartment herself. Kwok said he will miss singing The Smiths songs with Chichilnisky-Heal, as well as the random, encouraging text messages she would send him. Kwok also recalled some of her quirks, such as the time she adopted a stray cat who she referred to as “nameless.”

Lisa Gilson GRD '17, a classmate and friend, said that Chichilnisky-Heal was capable, witty and funny. Gilson recalled details like her friend's bookshelf — stocked with texts about everything from comparative studies of Mongolia to psychological phenomena — and the delicious apple and brussels sprout dish she made. After sharing dinner or tea, the two would talk until Gilson was crying from laughing too hard, she said.

Political science professor Susan Rose-Ackerman, one of Chichilnisky-Heal's advisors, described her as a wonderful student, full of energy and life. Rose-Ackerman remembered her in particular for the brave and creative fieldwork she did in Zambia and Mongolia, and how much she cared about the issues of developing countries.

Political science professor John Roemer, another one of her advisors, said she was “ebullient, brilliant and inquisitive,” adding that the faculty who interacted with her will remember her fondly and mourn for her.

Gilson also described Chichilnisky-Heal as an “intellectual force to be reckoned with” — but an accessible one.

“A lot of people who are like that are kind of intimidating,” Gilson said. “But she was really human. She cared about people and you could tell.”