

**SHOWCASE CHICAGO**  
LASTING BENEFITS TO TRANSIT, HOUSING, VENUES

# **JOBS**

STRENGTHEN U.S. FRIENDSHIPS  
AROUND THE WORLD

**DIVERSITY**

**INCREASED TOURISM**  
**GREEN CITY**

**PUBLIC TRANSIT NEEDS**  
**AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS**

**ENVIRONMENTAL**  
**IMPACT**

ROADS IN NEED OF REPAIR

COST OVERRUNS BILLED TO TAXPAYERS

# **HIDDEN COSTS**

**UNDERFUNDED SCHOOL**

# POLICY IN THE STREET

“The city of Chicago, having obtained the least number of votes, will not participate in the next round,” announced the International Olympic Committee (IOC) president, sending a shock through the stunned crowd of Chicagoans gathered in the Loop. Though many were appalled, some breathed great sighs of relief. Among them was Francesca Rodriquez, a first-year MPP student, who 10 months earlier had joined No Games Chicago, a grassroots protest against the city’s 2016 Olympics bid.

“It completely eclipsed my life,” said Rodriquez of the whirlwind experience. “It was such a polarizing issue. If I told people I worked in this protest, they would look at me like I said something blasphemous.” But Rodriquez emerged armed with tangible community organizing and communications skills, equipping her just in time for her foray into formal public policy studies.

Rodriquez first became interested in pursuing a career in public policy after volunteering in 2007–08 at a Chicago charter school where she saw a “depressing” lack of resources. It was this concern for schools that motivated Rodriquez to join No Games, especially after learning that city officials were designating a \$500 million taxpayer-funded cost overrun guarantee to the Olympic bid while Chicago Public Schools were suffering a \$475 million deficit.

No Games initially stunned Rodriquez with their high level of organization. She was likewise intrigued by the varied reasons others had for joining the protest, including concerns about the Olympics’ environmental impacts, government corruption, and privatization of public parks. She began to help out with the communications team and before long found herself as a lead writer and editor distributing hundreds of newsletters and posters, contacting IOC members, and eventually giving media interviews. “The guys at Staples got to know me really well, and soon they too were against the bid.”

Rodriquez did all this work despite having no prior experience in public policy, community organizing, or communications. Though initially hesitant to serve as a spokeswoman to the media, Rodriquez appeared several times on live news programs, including WTTW’s *Chicago Tonight*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *Fox Business News Live*. CBS even traveled to the University campus to interview Rodriquez on her lunch break. On the morning of the IOC decision, Rodriquez was up before 5 a.m. prepared to represent No Games in back-to-back interviews. “Everyone wanted to get this story,” she says. “Somehow No Games became the face of the opposition.”

In the aftermath of the IOC vote, Rodriquez and her team expressed hope that Chicago leadership can focus on the city’s current challenges without the distraction of the Olympics. And Rodriquez is proud of the effort. “I don’t know if No Games really moved the needle, but [we] did become the alternative voice that needed to be heard.”

All in all, Rodriquez said, the experience reinforced her choice of public policy for graduate school. “Having worked on the Obama campaign, I knew that I wanted to explore issue-based, grassroots efforts. No Games certainly dovetailed well with my interests and deepened my goal to [pursue] non-partisan, policy-related communications.” ■

**Francesca Rodriquez, MPP’11**

*Volunteer*

No Games Chicago