

Cecilia Valdez

Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholar Class of 2013

Studying human development and family sciences at the University of Texas at Austin

Interned in the biomedicine department at the University of Texas at Brownsville

Cecilia has always wanted to be a doctor. Her father shared her dream, but became an army nurse instead when he could not attend medical school. Cecilia says being able to help her to achieve her dream makes her dad very happy.

Cecilia also draws inspiration from her mother. When her parents divorced, Cecilia's mother earned her real estate license and quickly grew her business. She now owns a small real estate office and manages 30 agents.

Cecilia hopes to become a pediatrician and help under-served communities. When she was younger, her cousin was born without a critical valve in his heart. The doctor who diagnosed the problem worked with her cousin's parents and reduced the cost of his heart surgery. Today her cousin is a healthy 12-year-old and still visits the doctor who saved his life.

Being an Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholar made it possible for Cecilia to intern in the biomedicine department at the University of Texas at Brownsville. There she helped run several experiments that compared the genes of obese and lean people. The goal of the experiment was to find a correlation in the number of methyl groups present in obese people at certain regions of DNA known as CPG sites—where cytosine and guanine are found together—in a particular gene called the HSD11B1 gene. Before completing her internship, Cecilia says she was able to send several human samples for sequencing and is waiting to find out the results.

Cecilia's greatest challenge has been believing in her abilities. While her grades are strong, medical schools are competitive. Her mother continually reassures Cecilia that she's smarter than she thinks. Her faith in God has also helped her through difficult times.

In addition to a bachelor's degree in her major, Human Development and Family Sciences, Cecilia will also graduate with a business certificate. Whatever her ultimate career, Cecilia has the college degree and real world experience to go far.