

ERIKA ORTIZ

Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholar Class of 2011

Studying biology at Rutgers University

Interned at Rutgers University Biology Research Lab

Erika's father immigrated to the U.S. from Peru before she was born. He struggled to find work and sometimes lacked a place to sleep. Ultimately, he located the only person he knew in the U.S., and that friend of a friend connected him with a job.

Erika is proud of her father's achievements. After working menial jobs for years, he now owns a jewelry store and works in the trade his father taught him. Erika says she knows that her family continues to struggle financially sometimes, but "they try to keep it away from me," she said.

Erika's family is equally proud of their daughter, a diligent student completing a four-year degree and contemplating her next career move.

The first two years of college were difficult but her grades improved radically in the last year. "I picked myself up," she said.

As an Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholar, Erika interned at the Rutgers University biology research lab testing African clawed frog eggs to see whether the embryos expressed certain proteins.

Erika says her internship taught her that she's more interested in clinical lab work than pure research. While she likes the social aspect of being around patients, she also enjoys the independence of working in the lab. "It's exciting when you can do it on your own," she said.

After graduation, Erika plans to pursue her master's degree and work in a hospital or a clinical laboratory. She credits The Alliance for helping putting her on the path to achieve her dream of a professional career in science.