Janelle Rivera  
Alliance/Merck Ciencia Scholar Class of 2012  
Studying animal science at Rutgers University  
Interned at the Department of Animal Science at Rutgers University

When Janelle’s parents separated a few years ago, her mother brought her and Janelle’s brother from New Jersey to Puerto Rico. She spent a year living in the country-side, in an area unlike any she’d ever known. The students teased her American ways, but Janelle ignored them and devoted most of her time to the menagerie in her yard. There were ducks, chickens, roosters, dogs and “a bunch of cats,” Janelle said. There was also a lot of animal cruelty and neglect. “I claimed them [the animals] to be mine because the owners didn’t really feed them.”

Now that Janelle is back in the U.S., she’s studying animal science at Rutgers University with a focus on pre-veterinary research and medicine.

As an Alliance/Merck Ciencia Scholar and with the support of the Alliance, Janelle interned at the neuroendocrinology laboratory in the Department of Animal Science at her university last summer. She helped to conduct a high fat diet study involving the hormone Estradiol. In the lab, she helped gather data related to weight, body composition and the administration of estrogen. She also assisted the surgeon by prepping mice for ovaryectomies. She anesthetized and shaved them before she injected them with a local analgesic. “I love doing that. I like the hands on stuff,” she said. In addition to her lab work, Janelle recently began volunteering at an animal clinic.

As the first person in her family to attend college, Janelle’s family sometimes questions her choice but Janelle knows she can help them more in the future when she earns her degree. Asked where she gets her inspiration, she said, “I’m just a determined person. Sometimes you have to be self-reliant.”

Janelle gets frustrated when people tell her they can’t afford college, or that “I come from a broken home, so I’m not going to make it.” To her, these are just excuses. “It doesn’t matter where you come from, it’s who you choose to be,” she said.

Janelle is deciding between becoming a veterinarian or a scientist devoted to animal research. She is grateful to The Alliance for supporting her dreams and hopes to inspire others in the Hispanic community to reach their goals.