

Laura Garcia

Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholar Class of 2010

Majored in biology at University of Texas at Austin

Pharmacokinetic Lab Technician at the Cancer Therapy and Research Center in San Antonio, TX

Growing up in her mother's pharmacy in Mexico, when a customer complained of pain, little Laura was at her mother's elbow listening to the advice her mother gave them. Laura's mother explained how each drug worked and why it would make them feel better. Often, she would ask Laura to look up the medications in a heavy pharmaceutical book, stirring a life-long interest in medicine.

Not long after her family left Mexico for Texas, Laura's grandfather, also a pharmacist, passed away from prostate cancer. Laura was 11 years old. She was devastated to lose her grandfather, but his death prompted her interest in cancer research.

While finishing high school at the Math and Science Academy in Brownsville, Texas, Laura learned about and was selected for the Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholars program. Laura loved the tours of different science companies and agencies during the program's symposium in Washington, D.C. and was inspired by the story of Jane Delgado, the Alliance's CEO. "She had a lot of obstacles to overcome too," Laura noted.

Through the Alliance, Laura found an internship researching prostate cancer. Her study involved testing the effects of fish oil on the methylation patterns in cancer cells. On top of learning basic lab skills, and how to develop hypotheses, Laura also learned how to engage a crowd. She presented her research at the Cell Signaling Conference in South Padre Island, Texas.

Cancer research touches every part of Laura's life. Along with a team of other student volunteers, Laura recently biked from Austin to Anchorage, Alaska giving presentations to raise money and awareness for cancer research. One team member died from his cancer before the trip began. They carried his ashes on their journey.

Along the route, Laura's team stayed with families whose lives had been affected by cancer, many of whom shared their stories with her. They dedicated each ride to a person who was fighting cancer or to someone whose life had been taken from it.

Today, Laura works at the Cancer Therapy and Research Center at the University of Texas Health Center, helping conduct experimental trials of cancer medications by collecting blood and other samples from patients.

She plans to take the MCAT this January and apply to medical school.