

**Lauren Sanchez**  
**Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholar Class of 2013**  
**Studying biology at The University of Texas at Brownsville**  
**Interned at The University of Texas at Brownsville**

While most students were thrilled when they heard about being selected as Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholars, Lauren was terrified. Lauren has had anxiety problems since middle school. Her panic attacks make her feel helpless. As a teenager, she wanted to be “normal,” to go to the mall or sleepovers without a second thought. But just leaving the house was sometimes a challenge. “It was very alienating,” she said.

Despite thinking of “a million excuses” she might give for missing the Alliance’s program in Washington D.C., Lauren came. Her first day in D.C., a few students invited her to go to Starbucks. Lauren was nervous, but she went. “I’ve just learned that if you say yes, you’ll have fun, you’ll have memories and it will be okay.”

As an Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholar and with the support of the Alliance, for her summer internship Lauren researched the play behavior of parrot offspring under the guidance of one of her university professors. Lauren watched countless hours of video recordings of two parrot nests in Venezuela. Her goal was to explore whether the order in which parrots were hatched influenced their play behaviors. She closely monitored parrotlet sibling behavior searching for patterns and recorded her results. In one nest, she determined the older parrotlets played a parental role, while she found no definitive patterns in the play behavior between parrotlets in the second nest.

Lauren is a true polymath. She plans to become a dentist, but is also keenly interested in birds, history, philosophy and literature.

When she finishes school, Lauren said she hopes to be the kind of person who can answer questions in a relatable way, “to be able to explain and always have an answer when a child asks you why the sky is blue and why the leaves are green.”

Lauren said she’s inspired by her father’s humility, and by her mother’s ability to see the good in others. She also keeps dozens of post-its on her wall with quotes she finds poignant. “People have said great things throughout history, and I think we should remember them.”

When Lauren graduates from school, she will attend the University of Texas school of Dentistry where she received an early acceptance. Her acceptance of the Alliance scholarship was only the first step in what is sure to be a distinguished professional career.