

Roxana Garcia
Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholar Class of 2009
Studied Neuroscience at Pomona College, Pomona CA
Online GED tutor for Children of the Night Without Walls (WOW) and is applying to medical school

Roxana has been serving her community all her life. As a teenager that meant helping her Bolivian parents run a small store. The connections she made with customers allowed her to understand her community's needs and the hardships others endured.

"It's really those relationships that drive me now."

Beyond her concern for her community, Roxana first became interested in neuroscience because of a book she read on phantom limbs in middle school. "It sounded like something out of a science fiction movie. I thought the brain was so fascinating." She decided to study neuroscience in college.

Getting to where she is has not been easy. The first barrier was tuition. Her acceptance into the Alliance/Merck *Ciencia* Scholars program helped defray the cost and made it possible for her to attend Pomona College. It also made summer research a realistic option. "It allowed me to earn money over the summer and at the same time advance my interests," she said.

The second barrier was her coursework. In high school, Roxana spent any time outside of sports and school working in her parents' store. She never developed strong study skills and realized too late how important they were.

In college, she battled with Chemistry. After Roxana failed the course, Marcela Gaitán, the program director for the Scholars program, encouraged Roxana to study in a Chemistry lab over the summer. Without Marcela's help, Roxana says, "I'm not sure that I would have continued being pre-med. I was really close to giving up on this dream that I'd had for a long time."

Retaking Chemistry was a humbling experience as well as one of her proudest achievements.

After graduating college, Roxana participated in a post-baccalaureate program to help her learn more about medical school and to connect with mentors in the field.

She currently works as a tutor for a non-profit that helps children and adults who are former prostitutes obtain their G.E.D.s. Much like a doctor-patient relationship, tutoring requires Roxana to quickly develop a rapport, to deliver clear and careful instructions and to show compassion even when others don't appreciate it.

"Being an ally doesn't mean that they're always going to be thankful about the work you're doing. Your only goal should be to provide them with the resources they've asked for," Roxana explained.

Roxana aspires to become a primary care physician who is also involved in health policy in her community. She hopes to one day visit Bolivia and build a library.