Ruben Santos
Alliance/Merck Ciencia Scholar Class of 2012
Studying Electrical Engineering at the University of Texas Pan-American
Interned in the department of Electrical Engineering at the University of Texas Pan-American

As a child, Ruben would tear apart brand new action figures to see how they were made. His seemingly destructive tendencies harbored a powerful curiosity about the ways objects are built and ultimately led Ruben to study engineering.

Ruben was accepted into the University of Texas at Austin, where he received the Exemplary President’s Achievement Scholarship.

When Ruben was a sophomore, his father lost his job at a shipyard. Ruben then transferred to South Texas College and, later, to the University of Texas-Pan America, where tuition was more affordable. He also began working full time at Marshall’s.

Back in high school, Ruben applied for and was accepted into the Alliance/Merck Ciencia Scholars program. The summer stipend given by the Scholar’s award allows him to take a break from his job in retail and to spend his summers in the lab instead.

Last summer, while interning at the University of Texas at Brownsville, Ruben led a team in designing a renewable energy system. More recently, at the University of Texas Pan-American, Ruben tested whether certain inexpensive plastics might conduct electricity and serve as less expensive conductors in renewable energy circuits.

Juggling work and school can be overwhelming but Ruben said he does not feel sorry for himself. “I see how hard my mom and my dad work, and I see how my sister looks up to me. They’re my inspiration to keep going, to obtain my degree.”

After graduating college, Ruben wants to work in renewable energy systems, in robotics or in the medical field. He is particularly interested in prosthetic limbs and organs. He is currently postponing his plans for graduate school so that he can help support his family financially. “I want to see my sister grow up and be able to go to college and have the opportunities that I have,” he said.