Yahira Mendoza
Alliance/Merck Ciencia Scholar Class of 2012
Studying mathematics at Union County College
Interned at Kean University performing independent research

Yahira says she learned her patience and determination from teaching herself to solve math problems.

Since beginning her studies in advanced mathematical research, Yahira has struggled to understand the meaning of her results. Recently, Yahira learned how to apply the language of math to the real world, using examples such as flight patterns and schedules and World Cup tournaments.

As an Alliance/Merck Ciencia Scholar and with the support of the Alliance, last summer Yahira developed her own independent research project working alongside Dr. Louis Beuagris at Kean University. Her work used matrices and eigenvalues and explored how basic mathematics can be applied to real life.

Yahira draws inspiration from her mother, an employee at Home Depot, whose work ethic and energy are something Yahira strives to emulate.

Yahira is also inspired by her father’s resilience. Her father, an electrician, suffered a serious accident when the company he was working for made him conduct repairs with the power still running. Yahira’s family believes the company took advantage of her father because he was an undocumented immigrant. Yahira did not know that she was also undocumented until high school, but that only made her more determined to reach her goals.

This past fall, Yahira worked as a math tutor. Teaching another person is harder, she said, because they sometimes see problems in a different way. But Yahira thinks it’s also rewarding because she gains a deeper understanding of the material.

Yahira is a dedicated student who, because she also works, will sometimes spend her entire weekend studying. When her five-year-old brother starts kicking at her locked door, however, she knows it’s time to play. When she’s with her younger brothers, “I feel like I’m 10,” she said. They remind her that a good life is a balanced one.

Yahira isn’t sure what career she will have in the future, but, with the deeper understanding of math that she gained with support from The Alliance, she knows it will be a profession she enjoys.