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Across Cultures, at Home with Science

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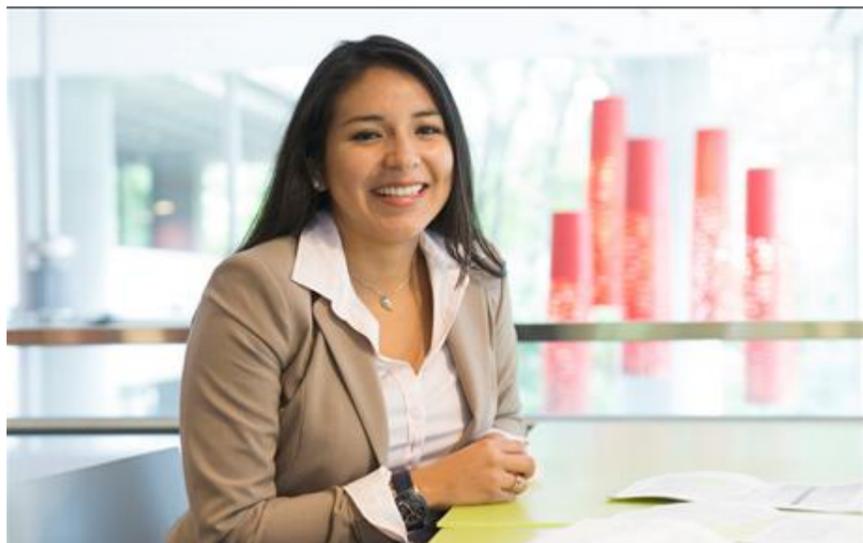
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Face to Face with Bio/Chem grad and ILA Scholar Lisseth Silva '12



May 31, 2011 | Melissa A. Patricio

Born in Lima, Peru, and transplanted to Brockton, Mass., at age 13, Lisseth Silva is a force to be reckoned with. Dynamic, independent and motivated, the self-proclaimed “goofball” has learned to embrace the calmer aspects of life – all while being involved in everything from lab research to admissions, and even the Cross Country team (for a week, anyway).

BABY, IT’S COLD OUTSIDE!

Silva’s most difficult cultural transition wasn’t learning English – it was New England winter. “I didn’t know that school could be canceled because of snow,” Silva recalls. “One day I trekked all the way to the bus stop – and the bus never showed up! It was a snow day and I had no idea.”

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Though she’s been in the U.S. for eight years now, Peru will always be home to Silva. “The U.S. can never really be my home – my family is not here. To me, home is where my family is,” says Silva, who hopes to return to Peru for the first time this winter.

TREASURED POSSESSION

“When we came here all I could pack was one suitcase with clothes. I wear a bracelet I got when I was 10 years old – a friend of mine made it for me in Peru. It’s the only thing I have from back home that reminds me of the place I come from.”

SUMMER IN THE CITY

The summer of 2011 brought Silva to New York where she interned at the Weill Cornell College of Medicine with researchers from Spain, Russia, Armenia and beyond. It wasn’t all research all the time, though. “I would wake up early every morning just to go running in Central Park,” Silva says. “Oh, and I met Will Smith! He was filming Men in Black III in Battery Park.”

ONE OR A THOUSAND

"If you're a doctor, you save lives *if* you can save them – one at a time. But if you're a chemist, perhaps you help make a drug that has fewer side effects than the previous one and you're saving thousands of lives. For me, it was between one life and a thousand lives, so I chose chemistry."

DEUTSCHLAND DREAMS

Currently working toward her Ph.D. in chemistry at Northeastern University, Silva still hopes to study in Germany in the future. Her father, an engineer, went to college in Europe and Munich is the global hub of chemistry research.

IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY

Silva isn't the lone brainiac in her family. Her 16-year-old brother aced the SATs – in junior high. "I'm so proud of him. He's already getting invitations from Cal Tech, Rensselaer... I keep encouraging him to apply to Roger Williams!"

GIRLS IN SCIENCE ROCK!

Though women working in the sciences are increasing at an exponential rate, Silva's advice to budding researchers is to not rest on your laurels. "Work hard," she says. "Things aren't easy in life, and you can't give up. And don't wait until your last year to do an internship! There are so many opportunities out there; it's just a matter of looking for them. And the better your resume looks, the better your chance of getting a job."

ON COMMENCEMENT

"Commencement was crazy. Four years went by so fast! All I could think about was how thankful I am for my parents. They sacrificed so much for us to have a better future and be successful. The moment I got my diploma all I could think was that I hope they are proud of me."

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