

2020 MOLA Scholars



Santiago Ávila

Santiago is a first-year medical student at the University of Chicago, Pritzker School of Medicine. He's originally from Bogotá, Colombia and grew up in Houston, Texas. Santiago is a Rice University alum and spent a year conducting clinical research at MD Anderson Cancer Center. Santiago's experience as an immigrant drives his research interests in cancer care disparities and ethnic representation in clinical trials.



Ivonne Beltrán Lara

Ivonne is a third-year medical student at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Psychology from Kennesaw State University in her home state of Georgia. As a first-generation immigrant who witnessed the challenges her family faced navigating the health care system, Ivonne has chosen to address the needs of underserved patients in a Chicago-based clinic for her MOLA project.



Jackelyn Cantoral

Jackelyn is currently enrolled in the Master of Science in Biology program at Northeastern Illinois University. Jackelyn's desire to enter the medical field was motivated by the challenges faced by the Latinx community when navigating the healthcare system. Through her MOLA project, she plans to investigate symptom burden among Latinx cancer patients, as well as familial involvement in the transition to survivorship.



Karen Dueñas Ruiz

Karen is a third-year medical student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She received her B.S. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she majored in molecular biology and minored in chemistry and global studies. Karen emigrated from Ecuador and spent her youth in Miami, Florida. Karen aspires to become a physician that will work primarily with Latinx communities.



Damaris García Sandoval

Damaris is a third-year medical student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is originally from Los Angeles, California and attended the University of Southern California, where she got her bachelor's in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. Damaris's passion lies in helping eliminate health disparities that impact underserved communities of color. For her MOLA project, Damaris plans to address immigrant access to healthcare.



Jaquelin Solís

Jaquelin is a first-year medical student at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. Jaquelin has a breadth of experience in service and leadership. She volunteers as a Spanish-interpreter at a primary care clinic, mentors minority high school students, teaches Medical Spanish to her classmates, and serves as the LMSA Conference Chair. Her exposure to different aspects of community medicine, has fueled her passion for health equity.



Richard Gómez

Richard, a Dallas native, is a third-year medical student at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. He completed his undergraduate studies at Stanford University, where he majored in biology. Richard is a proud member of the MOLA medical student committee and is passionate about mentoring the next generation of healthcare professionals. Richard plans on training in psychiatry, to address critical mental health issues in the US.



Yanina Guevara

Yanina is a second-year medical student at Rosalind Franklin University Chicago Medical School, with interest in pursuing Emergency Medicine. A child of Colombian and Honduran immigrant parents, Yanina is an advocate for uninsured and undocumented patient healthcare access. They are a MOLA student representative and co-chair for MOLA's Advocacy Committee. Yanina's MOLA project will expand their prior work on sanctuary hospital policies.



Reniell Xavier Íñiguez

Reniell is a first-year medical student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Being a son of Mexican immigrants, Reniell understands the issues that arise when striving for more while preserving one's heritage. Thus, he mentors a small cohort of Latinx high students through the Medicina Academy Apprentice Program to help facilitate their development. Reniell's MOLA project will be public health oriented.



David Mata Vaca, MS

David is a second-year medical student at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. Despite the challenges growing up undocumented and arduous personal adversity, David was able to find his purpose by courageously advocating for immigrants' rights before DACA existed, which shaped his philosophy in medicine to be a physician for vulnerable populations. David's MOLA project will focus on health disparities that affect the Hispanic/Latino communities.



José Peláez

José is currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at Denison University. His passion for public health started in his home on the Southside of Chicago. As a first-generation Mexican American student and future public health policymaker, José aims to increase the access impoverished communities in the City of Chicago have to public health clinics, and health resources and information. José's MOLA project will be public health oriented.



Ana Reyes

Ana Reyes, New York native, is a second-year medical student at Northwestern University. She is also pursuing a Master of Public Health with an interest in health services research. Ultimately, Ana hopes to become an emergency physician and combine her interests in medicine and public health to improve healthcare delivery for populations most affected by health disparities.



María Gabriela Valle Coto

María, who is originally from El Salvador, is a first-year medical student at the University of Illinois College of Medicine. Having experienced many difficulties accessing health care in her home country, and then later in the United States as an immigrant, Maria developed a passion for accessible health care and equity. María's experiences have cemented her desire to serve as a reproductive health care provider for the Latinx community.