

# Tony Chae

**Hometown:** Bundang, South Korea,  
Madison, Wisconsin  
**School:** College of Engineering  
**Major:** Electrical and Computer  
Engineering  
**Year in School:** Senior

## Why did you choose your field of study?

When I was in elementary school my dream was to become a robotics and AI engineer after reading a book by Dennis Hong, the director of RoMeLa and professor of robotics at UCLA: "Warm technology that changes the world with cold metal." Since then, I've quietly contemplated the differences between robots, AI, and human consciousness-what it means to die or to be self-aware leading me to dedicate myself to research on AI and Brain-Computer interfaces.



**What are your career goals?** I dream of a world where humans overcome their sensory limitations and transcend their biological constraints through breakthroughs in positive ways, and to re-understand our conscious research and would like to put my passion into a career where I can interdisciplinary pursue my passion in high-risk with high-return (e.g. DARPA program manager, Bio-tech startup, specifically. 1) Developing real-time neural decoders that could generalize across small/large neural populations with a minimally invasive technique. 2) Bi-directional neuromodulation with closed-loop feedback. 3) Multimodal neural prosthetics to achieve high-resolution in speech/somato/visual/motor.

**What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?** It could be a relative, friend, a public figure, an event, an organization, a sport-whatever you feel has been most important to you. At UT, I truly dedicated myself to the lab research for three years and actively contributed to my brain-computer interface school club Longhorn Neurotech. I have co-founded this club and grown up to more than 200+ active members. I initially started it just for fun, but hearing from so many people that our club's projects, guest speakers, competitions and journal clubs became a life-changing experience for them has been incredibly motivating. It has helped me grow so this neurotech community thrives in Texas to benefit more, bridging academia, industry and students in these new brain-computer interface research fields. Through these experiences, I was able to work with one of the smartest, passionate people and groups as well as learn lots of real-world details that benefit not just me, but also beyond ourselves.

**What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?** I came to the United States alone from Korea two years ago, I have faced significant financial difficulties, especially after undergoing personal surgery. Balancing research, school work, clubs and two parttime jobs has been challenging. I truly want to let you know this support means a lot and that I can confidently move forward.

**Outside of class, what are your interests – hobbies, volunteer work, etc.?** For a hobby, I have been trained in jiu-jitsu for seven years, training in short-track speed ice skating (I even have a sliding board, training gear for skating and a professional uniform lol) and I love to read classic books and papers. I am a big cooker who loves to try and make authentic foods from different countries (e.g. Peruvian, Chinese, Greek, Korean, Japanese, Indian, Georgian, Mexican, Italian, etc.) Lastly, I try to meditate every day, which I see as diligent work, not a hobby.

**If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?** I would be happy to read a book that has always been important in the long term, but was not a priority in my recent life, so I postponed.

# Nathalia Becerril

**Hometown:** Dallas, Texas

**School:** College of Liberal Arts

**Major:** International Relations and Global Studies

**Year in school:** Senior

**Why did you choose your field of study?** I chose to study International Relations because I've always been drawn to understanding how countries interact and how global systems impact everyday lives. Growing up, I saw firsthand how international institutions and legal systems affect individuals, and I wanted to be part of the work that bridges gaps between policy and people. This field allows me to combine my passion for global affairs with my desire to advocate for fairness and accountability.

**What are your career goals?** My ultimate goal is to become an international sports lawyer with a focus on protecting athletes from exploitation and promoting transparency in global sports organizations. I'm especially passionate about soccer and I want to work toward a future where both players and teams are treated fairly across borders. I plan to attend Texas Law after I finish my undergraduate studies at UT. I hope to use my legal training to bring lasting change to the sports industry.

**What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?** My biggest influences have been my parents. They've worked incredibly hard to give me opportunities they never had, and they've taught me the value of resilience, humility and perseverance. As immigrants, they faced countless challenges while building a life for our family; all without ever losing sight of the importance of education, community and staying grounded in our values. Their sacrifices are the reason I am at UT today, and I carry their strength with me in everything I do. Moving forward, I hope to honor their example by building a career that not only makes them proud, but also others who face systemic barriers. Their story is my motivation to pursue law and use it as a tool for empowerment and justice.

**What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?** Receiving a scholarship is more than financial support. It's a vote of confidence in my potential and in my future. Knowing that retired UT faculty and staff have chosen to invest in students like me means everything. It helps ease the financial burden on my family and allows me to focus on my studies and long-term goals. It also reminds me that I'm part of a larger UT community that believes in supporting the next generation.

**Outside of class, what are your interests – hobbies, volunteer work, etc.?** I'm involved with Campus Events and Entertainment and MACC (Mosaic of the Americans Culture Committee). I help plan cultural events that bring students together and celebrate diversity on campus. I enjoy attending Longhorn games, especially soccer and football and exploring Austin's local food scene. When I have time, I like watching movies, spending time with friends and walking around Austin with my dog, Chanel.

**If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?**

I would spend more intentional time with my family and work on personal reflection. Being a full-time student with big goals often means my schedule is packed. I would call my parents more often; make recipes I've saved or just go for a walk and think. Those moments of reflection and connection would make me more present, balanced and motivated in every part of my life.



## Frederick Richardson

**Hometown:** Houston, Texas

**School:** College of Liberal Arts

**Major:** Linguistics

**Year in School:** Junior

### Why did you choose your field of study?

I chose Linguistics because I love language and communication. They are pivotal in having a functioning society and being able to study all aspects of language has truly been an amazing opportunity. My favorite linguistics discipline is phonetics, which is the study of speech primarily concerned with speech production, speech perception and acoustics.

### What are your career goals?

I am certain that I will go to graduate school. I am still debating whether or not I want to pursue either a master's degree or doctoral program. I am interested in a Master's in speech language pathology and with that I would go on to be a speech pathologist. Additionally, research is something that interests me a lot. I am a very inquisitive person, and I would love the opportunity to answer questions I have about language. I am still not completely sure if I would go to the more harder science side of linguistics or the more sociological side.

### What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?

My friends have influenced me the most in my life so far. They continue to empower and embolden me to reach for fulfilling career and education opportunities. We learn from each other and are there for one another when plans fall through or when school gets tough.

### What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?

Receiving this scholarship means that I do not have to stress about financial issues while I am taking classes. I will not have to work as much, and I can pursue opportunities that will enrich my education.

### Outside of class, what are your interests?

I work at Texas Performing Arts in the department of Education and Engagement and one of the things that we do is have Broadway shows and invite schools in the Austin area to come for a reduced price. Being able to see the looks on children's faces after performances is quite fulfilling. Outside from work, my hobbies include reading, knitting and watching movies.

### If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?

If I had two extra hours in a day, I would spend it with my friends volunteering. One of my favorite volunteer opportunities my friends and I have done was when we painted personalized mugs for people that could not afford to purchase their own. Being able to help out members of my community directly has always been very important to me.





# **Jerry Herrera**

**School:** College of Liberal Arts  
**Major:** French Studies and Italian Studies  
**Year in School:** Senior

## **Why did you choose your field of study?**

I want to become a government interpreter and/or translator to help spark international cooperation.

## **What are your career goals?**

Currently, I would love to work at an institution such as the State Department or CIA, as I love intercultural interaction and traveling, and such a job might offer that with my interpreter aspirations.



## **What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?**

My brother has been the biggest influence on me, and I plan to continue benefiting from his influence by having someone to look to for advice and examples of what hard work can do for you.

## **What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?**

Receiving a scholarship, to me, means receiving an opportunity to focus on what truly matters, at least to me, which is getting more involved with both the University and local community. It allows me to focus on being an exceptional student while still having fun, instead of “when the bills are due.”

## **Outside of class, what are your interests?**

My absolute favorite thing is participating in my organizations/clubs because it allows me to socialize with other students in fields that we are both passionate about. For example, participating in the French and Italian conversation clubs at UT, or even volunteering for the department or clubs to spread awareness to others who might have a love for the same thing as me. Additionally, I am a huge fan of mystery and sci-fi media such as Star Wars, Dune and The Sandman, so I always try and make time to keep up to date with today's shows and movies.

## **If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?**

If I had two extra hours in a day, I would sleep more. Currently, I do not get enough of it because I almost always spend my days hanging out with either my family, friends, or both, and sometimes a show or movie; I can be quite sociable some days.

# Samantha Jansen

**Hometown:** Austin, Texas

**School:** College of Liberal Arts

**Major:** English, Pre-Physician Assistant

**Year in school:** Junior

## **Why did you choose your field of study?**

I have always loved to read and write and wanted to pursue a major that I was passionate about but would also bring diversity to my future and its possibilities.

## **What are your career goals?**

After graduating I hope to attend Physician Assistant school and then go on to be a Physician Assistant.

## **Who or what has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?**

My parents and family have been the greatest influence in my life so far, through witnessing how hard they've worked to give me a happy and healthy life (and more) and how endlessly they support me. It has inspired me to work hard for my own future and to strive to achieve things I once would not have thought I was capable of.

## **What does receiving this scholarship means to you?**

Receiving this scholarship from the Retired Faculty Staff Association means the world to me because it not only shows the extensive support given at UT but also enables me to continue my education without the stress and burden of finances.

## **Outside of class what are your interests?**

I spend a lot of time volunteering as a Board Member for Project Yellow, a student organization promoting mental health in public schools around Austin, working as a UTeach Physics Learning Assistant and taking walks around Town Lake/campus.

## **If I had two extra hours in a day what would you do?**

If I had two extra hours a day, I would love to spend them reading or spending extra time with friends!



# Emily Kim

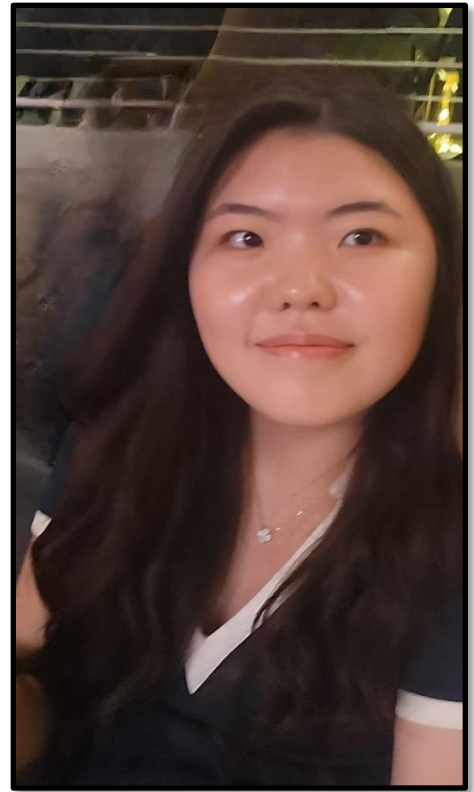
**Hometown:** San Antonio, Texas

**School:** College of Liberal Arts

**Major:** Health & Society

**Year in school:** Junior

**Why did you choose your field of study?** When I thought about healthcare, the first thing that always came to mind was the medical and biological aspect. However, as my interest in the healthcare system grew, I realized that there are so many obscure factors that can significantly impact a person's well-being. This includes the environment they live in, the support and connection they have, the barriers they face, etc. I wanted to better understand these subtle layers. Health and Society has given me a deeper, more human-centered lens on healthcare, and I am certain that it will help shape the kind of professional I hope to become one day.



**What are your career goals?** Beyond UT, my dream is to become a competent health professional where I can center my work with empathy and compassion. I want to be part of building a system that can truly support and empower others. I cannot wait to carry what I learned at UT into the world.

**What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?** It could be a relative, friend, a public figure, an event, an organization, a sport-whatever you feel has been most important to you. My family has influenced me the most so far in my life. They were the first to instill values of perseverance and compassion as I grew up and they were always there to support me. Their belief in me has always given me the confidence to pursue my goals and ambitions. Moving forward, I plan to continue to spend time with my family and carry these lessons with me as I face new challenges.

**What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?** This scholarship means a lot more than just financial relief - it shows me how I am not alone on my academic journey. It makes me realize that I am well capable in reaching my endeavors and further gives me confidence in my potential as a student and individual.

**Outside of class, what are your interests – hobbies, volunteer work, etc.?** I enjoy volunteering at the hospital and other community events around Austin. But aside from volunteering, I enjoy watching movies or catching up on K-dramas, spending time with my family and dog, and listening to music. Music is a big part of who I am so I like to hop on to the piano or take out my violin from time to time.

**If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?** I would like to spend more time with my family. Ever since I started my premed journey, our time together hasn't been like it used to be. And I realize how life will only get busier, so I'd use those extra two hours to reconnect and recharge with the people who mean the most to me—my family.



# Mykal Montgomery

**Hometown:** Plano, Texas

**School:** College of Liberal Arts

**Major:** Government

**Year in school:** Junior

**Why did you choose your field of study?** I have always loved learning about government and the people in it. I take such an interest in the current and past U.S. political happenings and would love to be a part of it one day.

**What are your career goals?** I would certainly like to go to law school. I'd love to either go into politics or continue down the law path after that schooling.

**What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?** I am most influenced by my dad! He always supported my interests and made me into the person I am today, whether it was from listening to self-help podcasts in the car or getting my friends and me food during debate practices in high school. I want to pay it forward in my life by supporting all the people I can in their interests and by showing them the infinite kindness my father has shown me.

**What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?** Receiving the scholarship opened the door to even attempting to study abroad, a door that had been shut before due to financial concerns. It means a renewed dedication to my studies because of the faith that has been put into me by complete strangers.

**Outside of class, what are your interests – hobbies, volunteer work, etc.?** Outside of class, I really love to keep up with my physical fitness. I like to run and work out and do yoga as much as I can. I also really love to keep up with current happenings in the U.S. I love to read. My favorite books range from really cheesy romance books to horror books that make me afraid of the dark again.

**If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?** I would dedicate more time to learning how to cook. I am really bad at it unless I have a step-by-step recipe with pictures.



## Anika Ma

**Hometown:** Amarillo, TX

**School:** College of Liberal Arts

**Major:** Sociology, Pre-Optometry

**Year in School:** Senior

**Why did you choose your field of study?** As an aspiring optometrist, I realized the importance of patient care lies in understanding people and what forces shape their experiences. Sociology has, and continues, to change my perspective on human interaction and care, and through what I have learned here at UT, I can apply to my future studies in optometry school and career helping those with their vision needs.

**What are your career goals?** After finishing my bachelor's degree in sociology, I hope to attend optometry school at the University of Houston and practice in my hometown following board certification. After a few years, I hope to eventually practice optometry at the Department of Veteran Affairs, giving veterans like my father the vision care they need.

**What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?** It could be a relative, friend, public figure, an event, an organization, a sport- whatever you feel has been most important to you. My biggest influences are the mentors I've had including my parents, previous teachers, and my own optometrist. My parents have taught me the importance of education, and through their guidance I have seen the value of human connection and why no dream is out of reach. My high school English teacher, Mrs. Hair was the person I could rely on not only for help with my writing, but many hardships and difficulties I faced in my journey through college. My optometrist, Dr. Nossaman, was the optometrist I've had since I was a little girl. I am inspired by his compassion and am thankful for the many years he's cared for my family. I plan to utilize their teachings, actions, and wisdom as I continue through adulthood and my career.

**What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?** Receiving a scholarship always means a weight it lifted off my shoulders. I know that I can pursue my educational goals with less of a financial burden, and it truly is a blessing that donors are selfless in giving to students like me who are just trying to survive and pursue their dreams.

**Outside of class, what are your interests – hobbies, volunteer work, etc.?**

Outside of class, I love cooking and spending time with family and friends. As a creative outlet I love making art and experimenting with different mediums. Most of all, I love relaxing and just dedicating time to take care of myself!

**If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?** I am a firm believer in the importance of rest and recharging, so with two extra hours in a day, I would sleep!





# Thanh Dat Nguyen

**Hometown:** Da Nang city, Viet Nam

**School:** Aerospace Engineering

**Major:** Aerospace Engineering

**Year in school:** Junior

## **Why did you choose your field of study?**

I decided to pursue Aerospace Engineering due to my passion for rocket design and dynamics. Space travel movies such as Interstellar and First Man also inspired me to explore the mechanics behind those intricate rockets.

## **What are your career goals?**

My goal is to become an aerospace engineer and take part in building a real rocket.

## **What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?**

My mother has influenced me the most since she always supports my decisions and gives me advice when I need. From her, I've learned perseverance, responsibility, and how to make thoughtful choices. Going forward, I plan to use these lessons to guide my studies, career decisions, and the way I support others.

## **What does receiving a scholarship mean to you?**

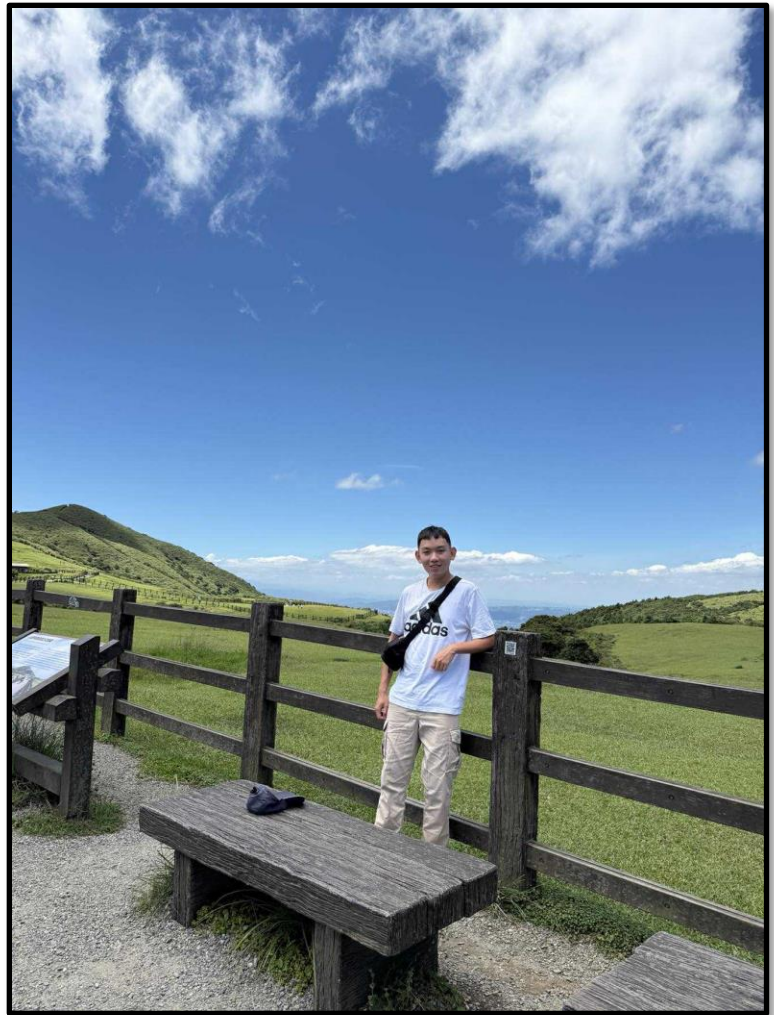
Receiving a scholarship helps me to cover my educational expenses such as textbooks and school supplies. It also relieves my financial burdens on housing and food while sparing me more time to study and participate in clubs and organizations.

## **Outside of class, what are your interests – hobbies, volunteer work, etc.?**

After studying, I often spend a few hours watching movies or reading at night. I am also a team member of Longhorn Rocketry Association, in which I learn to build a rocket and use analysis software. I also love playing archery, and I am an active member now at UT Austin Archery.

## **If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?**

I will go join another club that is relevant to my career because I want to enhance my knowledge about aerospace dynamics.



# Valeria Meza

**Hometown:** Dallas, Texas

**School:** McCombs School of Business

**Major:** Economics/Minor: Accounting

**Year in School:** Senior

**Why did you choose your field of study:** I

chose to study economics because it helps explain how the world works and it's the perfect foundation to pair with accounting. Ranging from why people, businesses, and governments make the decisions they make and how those decisions affect society.

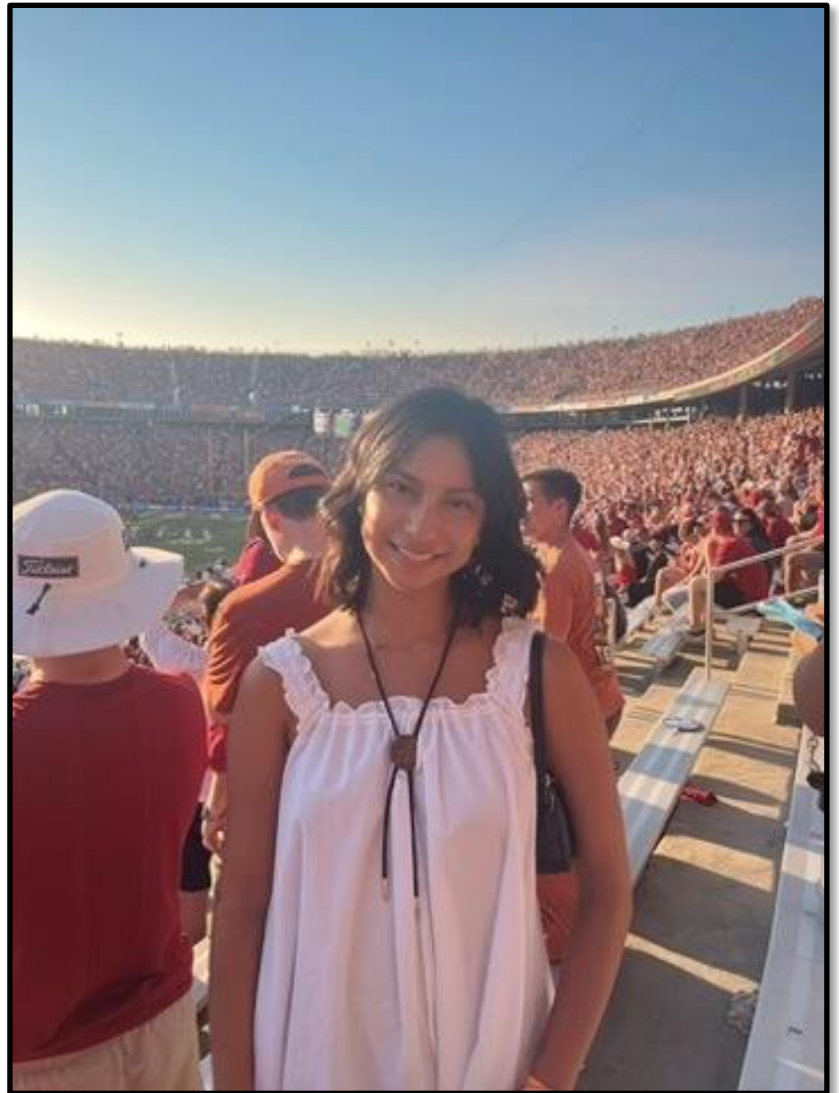
**What are your career goals:** My career goal is to become a CPA and work in either public accounting or corporate finance.

**What or who has influenced you the most so far in your life, and how do you plan to benefit from this influence going forward?** It could be a relative, friend, a public figure, an event, an organization, a sport-whatever you feel has been most important to you: One of my biggest influences has been my parents. As a first generation they instilled in me the importance of hard work, accountability, and perseverance.

**What does receiving a scholarship mean to you:** Receiving this scholarship has been very meaningful to me as I approach my last year in school! This semester I am studying abroad in London and it has relieved a lot of financial burden. It is allowing me to fully embrace my study abroad experience this semester!!!

**Outside of class, what are your interests – hobbies, volunteer work, etc.:** Outside of class, running is my biggest passion. I began running a little under a year ago and it has become both a physical and mental outlet for me. Running helps me manage stress, stay disciplined, and set measurable goals. This year I completed 3 half marathons and will be participating in the Austin Full marathon this upcoming February. Beyond running, I enjoy fitness in general, volunteering, and engaging in my community.

**If you had two extra hours in a day, what would you do?:** If I had two extra hours in a day, I would spend one running, using the time to explore new routes and experience my surroundings in a unique way while abroad. I would dedicate the other hour to studying or reading in economics, so I can continue to grow academically while also making the most of my time abroad.



**Angela Baatar**

**Tarus Bradley**

**Christina Egan**

**Alberto Flores**

**Carolina Gonzalez**

**Sofia Russo**