Pursuing a Passion for Design and Service

The son of a contractor, Kenny Castañeda ’12 spent his youth building things: finishing his family’s Burr Ridge, Illinois, home and volunteering with Habitat for Humanity in Florida and New Orleans. The experiences instilled a passion for design and service that prepared him well for a Yale education.

“I decided to major in mechanical engineering after a freshman seminar on urban ecology,” Kenny said. “We looked at how cities are constructed, how they function—the materials and energy needed—how parts are connected, and how they can be made more efficient and livable.” What he has learned in subsequent courses, and what he appreciates most about the major, is the knowledge and tools it gives him to solve problems.

For example, one class has him designing an efficient home water heater. “I love the challenge. It brings together a lot of what I’ve learned about material properties, thermodynamics, and fluid mechanics,” he said.

Kenny also finds opportunities to help others. A Yale Alumni Community Service Fellowship allowed him to spend part of one summer with the Urban Ecology Institute, putting into practice ideas covered in his freshman seminar. He serves as president of the Yale chapter of Habitat for Humanity, secretary of Alianza, a pan-Latino student organization, and director of philanthropy at the Sigma Chi Fraternity. He is a member of Yale Students for Christ.

Looking ahead, Kenny hopes to combine engineering and his affinity for public service in a project management role. And he is grateful for the financial aid that has supported his education while opening the door for the many friendships he has made here. “My Yale experience has already taught me that I have a lot to be thankful for,” he said.

A robust financial aid program brings exceptional students like Kenny to Yale, regardless of their financial circumstances. To learn more about ways to support these students, please visit giving.yale.edu or call 800.395.7646.