The oldest of five children and a first-generation American growing up in New Haven, Catalina Brennan-Gatica PC ’15 dreamed of someday attending Yale. Now a student in Pierson College, Catalina is making the most of an opportunity she says will change her life.

Catalina has charted an unconventional academic path, planning to major in English while also completing Yale’s pre-med track. With encouragement from a freshman counselor who had pursued a similar course—pre-med and linguistics—Catalina weathered her first year of chemistry problem sets and is already looking ahead to medical school. “It was great to have someone backing me up and saying ‘you can do this,’” she said.

Her favorite class so far is one that combines science and the humanities in a compelling way: Professor Laurie Santos’ Sex, Evolution, and Human Nature, which focuses on human behavior in an evolutionary context. “The class related so many fundamental ideas to basic evolutionary theory,” said Catalina, “from human mating strategies to the biology of warfare to the evolution of morality. When you reflect on our origins through the lens of evolution, you see ways we can better ourselves as a species.”

Outside of class, Catalina is busy as a coxswain for the men’s heavyweight crew team. She also joined the Oye! spoken-word poetry group. “It’s exciting to perform my own poetry for my friends and the Yale community,” she said.

With four younger sisters also planning for college, Catalina is grateful for the financial aid that makes all this possible for her. “Yale has given me the opportunity of a lifetime,” she said.

A robust financial aid program brings exceptional students like Catalina 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.