

Title: "Yes people"

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My journey with Emory University began on January 24, 2024, the day my status changed to "ACCEPTED." I was overwhelmed with joy and disbelief. That evening, I couldn't even access the official decision letter, so I nervously sent an email, a screenshot attached, asking if it was really true. When I received confirmation, I knew I had become part of something extraordinary. From that moment on, every email I received was like a window into a new world, filling me with anticipation and a sense of belonging. Although I often struggled to navigate the endless processes, training, and tools, Emory's community was always there with kindness and guidance, answering every question with patience and care.

Balancing my daily life in Ecuador while preparing for this new chapter was challenging, but the excitement never faded. My mind buzzed with thoughts of the upcoming adventure in Public Health at one of the world's best institutions. When I received the news of my merit scholarship, relief and honor washed over me knowing that I would be part of Emory's prestigious Rollins School of Public Health, the third-best program in the U.S., was surreal. On August 8, 2024, I left behind my family, my boyfriend, and my home, ready to embrace my new academic life in Atlanta.

One memory that stands out vividly is my early visit to campus, just a day after arriving in the U.S. With the sun barely up, I stepped onto Emory's grounds at 6 a.m., eager to experience the place I had only seen through screens. While I didn't meet any of the familiar faces that day, I felt an undeniable warmth in the atmosphere. Then, I met Larry, a complete stranger who welcomed me with open arms. His warmth made me realize that this community was more than just an academic institution—it was a home.

Choosing one impactful experience at Emory is nearly impossible, so I'll share three that have profoundly shaped me. First, meeting the Career Development team was a

transformative moment. As an international student navigating an entirely new environment, their support was invaluable. They helped me realize that no matter where you come from, you belong here, and you have a purpose. Their advice and constant encouragement were a hug to the soul, reminding me that this was a place where I could thrive both personally and professionally.

The second experience that marked me was a simple lunch conversation with a fellow student, an inspiring, curious individual who identified herself as a “yes person.” Her mindset resonated deeply with being open to new opportunities, saying yes to the unknown, and embracing the challenges that come your way. That conversation was a turning point for me, solidifying my belief that growth comes from curiosity and openness, principles I now carry with me in everything I do.

Finally, my elective class on Water and Sanitation (WASH) opened my eyes to issues I had never considered from a global perspective. I had always focused on the consequences of poor sanitation, especially in medicine, but this class taught me to see these problems differently. I was particularly struck by the gender disparities in WASH access—how women in parts of the world face daily risks to access water, and how these barriers hinder their education and opportunities. This perspective challenged me to reflect on my own country and the struggles that women may face there. It inspired a deep desire to explore how I can contribute to improving global water access and equity, particularly for vulnerable populations in Latin America.

At Emory, I’ve learned that being a “yes person” means more than just being open to new experiences—it’s about embracing opportunities that challenge your worldview and push you to grow in unexpected ways. This mindset has become my guiding principle,

reminding me that my journey is not just about personal success, but about using my experiences to help others grow as well. In this way, Emory has not only been an academic home but a place where I've learned to serve, to give back, and to carry that "hug to the soul" forward to others.