As the first cohort of Duke University’s Master of Engineering in Artificial Intelligence for Product Innovation gets set to graduate, a new adventure is only a few months away. For Eduardo, this means relocating to San Francisco where he will start a new position as a machine learning data scientist. He took some time out of his busy schedule to talk about his background, experiences in the AIPI program and his advice for future AIPI students.

Q: Tell us a little bit about yourself and your background.

A: Growing up, I was very active. My mom was active and from a very early age, my younger brother and I learned how to swim, played sports, and used activity to bond with her. I grew up in Guatemala and my immediate family still lives there. I would spend summers in the US with extended family, which I feel helped my transition when I moved to Durham to attend Duke University.

Q: What will you miss about being in graduate school?

A: I will miss being in school the most. I feel it is such a privilege to spend all your time learning something you love. Technology is so fast paced, we need to keep learning and improving. I will also miss having dedicated time to explore different topics brought up in lectures. The atmosphere on campus supports learning and exploration. It’s a very low stress environment and the campus is beautiful.

Q: Which class has been your favorite and why?

A: I have two favorite courses which I am taking this semester. The first is AIPI 540, Deep Learning Applications, with Jon Reis Schneider. I enjoy the module structure of the course because each module has a project that is open ended, which allows us to play around with new methods. The main reason this is my favorite class is we have to tackle problems with novel ideas, and we really have to stop and ask ourselves how we can add value to this project. The second class I am taking is a Biostatistics elective, where we are learning about causal inference. The assignments and examples are a little out of my league, but I enjoy the challenge. The class focuses on clinical trials, and it can be heavy with medical terminology, but the majority of the methods used to do solid causal inference coincide with how experimentation is done in the AIPI industry.

Q: If you were granted three wishes, what would you wish for?

A: This question gave me some pause and I really had to think about this one. My first wish is to be two inches taller. Not much taller than I am now. My second wish is to reduce economic inequality to the extent we experience equity, and my third wish is to be able to fall asleep wherever I am, whenever I want. I have had a lot of late nights where I stay up working on projects and when I lay down, I can’t fall asleep! So that would be nice.

Q: If you didn’t have to sleep, what would you do with your extra time?

A: I would finally learn to play the guitar and sing. I have always wanted to learn how to play the guitar and have tried a few times, but this is what I would want to learn.

Q: What’s the one thing you never get bored of?

A: Listening to podcasts. I love listening to podcasts and have gotten used to having a second voice in the background.

Q: If you could go back and do the program all over again, what would you change?

A: The program was great and there isn’t anything I would change in that regard. I would have liked to join more clubs at Duke. I was always interested in the social and cultural clubs as well as those related to the arts. In the beginning though, you aren’t sure how much time you will have, and you don’t want to over schedule yourself.

Q: What three pieces of advice would you give to the incoming AIPI class?

A: I would advise students to come with an open mind and be open to learning. The first semester feels like drinking from a fire hose but be open to the program curriculum, mentorship, and friendships. The second piece of advice is to not pay too much attention to what other students are doing. Try to find your own path. The third piece of advice is if you want to get into industry, apply early. Don’t wait until you are “ready”. You will never be 100% knowledgeable or ready. Once you start the process, it will push you to continue. While it is a personal journey, start early to get comfortable with tech interviews.

Q: What do you do for fun?

A: I go running a lot since I moved to Durham, especially the trails around campus. I used to enjoy mountain biking back home, but I don’t have a bike with me. I also enjoy spending time with my friends and going out to eat or grabbing a drink. It took a while for everyone to become social because that first semester in school is a little overwhelming and intimidating.

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