



## **Larua Camille Gomez, The 2020-2021 Carl & Betty Helmholtz Gateway Fellow at International House, UC Berkeley**



My name is Laura Gomez and I am an incoming Biophysics Ph.D. student interested in computational and systems neuroscience, in particular how microcircuits in the brain encode sensory information and perform the computations that drive behaviour.

I was born in Bogota, Colombia and immigrated to Calgary, Canada with my parents and younger sister in the early 2000's. From a young age, I was fascinated by the immensity of space and the complexity of nature, inspiring me to focus on science and math in school. I was interested in medicine and life sciences in high school, driving me to pursue a B.S. at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver.

While at UBC, my interests in life sciences deepened, as I began to learn about the brain and different biological processes. This prompted me to join a cellular neuroscience lab studying neuronal plasticity. Through my coursework, the quantitative reasoning and problem-solving nature of physics fascinated me and to integrate these two interests I declared my major in Biophysics. Through the cooperative education program part of my degree, I spent 2 years in Germany and France working in various research labs spanning single molecule biophysics and cellular neuroscience. I not only got to participate and learn about cutting-edge research, but also immerse myself in different cultures, gain new insights and ways of thinking and form great friendships abroad. Lastly, during my time at UBC, I also got involved in a variety of scientific clubs and outreach programs aimed at inspiring kids from underrepresented backgrounds and underserved communities to pursue paths in STEM.

Aside from science, I enjoy staying active through swimming, biking, hiking and skiing and love exploring the great Rocky Mountains in Calgary's backyard during the summer. In my spare time I enjoy cooking new recipes from various cuisines for friends and family and reading philosophy and Portuguese poetry. I am passionate about portrait and street photography, music (I play piano and saxophone) and enjoy watching/discussing new and old films.

I am excited to be moving to sunny California after my snow-filled days in Canada! I am grateful for this incredible opportunity made possible by the Carl and Betty Helmholtz fund and I am looking forward to bringing my diverse background and rich set of experiences to the vibrant international community at UC Berkeley.



**The Carl and Betty Helmholtz Gateway Fellowship** was initiated by Professor of Biophysics, Emeritus, Howard Mel. After Carl Helmholtz passed away in 2004, this endowed fund began accepting donations from various friends of the family to honor Carl and Betty for their many contributions, and was later established as a fellowship in 2007. Carl served as Chair of the Physics Department and Betty served on the International House Board of Directors for nine years.