The South African sun bore down as we entered the township of Langa, one of many impactful stops during my Semester at Sea journey, but it wasn't the heat that struck me—it was the stark absence of basic amenities like electricity, running water, and reliable healthcare. The dusty roads, lined with makeshift homes constructed from salvaged materials, reflected the resilience of a community that had adapted to immense scarcity. Yet amidst the hardship, there was a warmth that transcended circumstance. Children ran toward us, laughing, and families welcomed us as though we were long-lost friends.

One moment in Langa remains particularly vivid: a woman crafting jewelry from recycled materials. Her pieces, though simple, carried a richness beyond their physical form; they symbolized a community's resourcefulness and dignity, a determination to hold onto its traditions despite immense poverty. The perseverance I encountered left a lasting impression, revealing how solutions to healthcare challenges must account for socio-economic realities alongside biological needs. This experience marked a turning point, sparking my interest in bioinformatics as a field where data-driven solutions can address complex, interconnected healthcare challenges, especially those shaped by social and economic factors.

My academic journey has since been a deliberate effort to cultivate this multidisciplinary expertise. At Cal Poly, my involvement in the Student Managed Portfolio Project (SMPP) deepened my understanding of the financial dimensions of healthcare. Managing $1.6 million of the university's fund, I focus on analyzing actively managed healthcare funds like ENSIGN. This work has sharpened my data analysis skills and underscored how financial insights can optimize healthcare delivery, improve resource allocation, and enhance patient outcomes. Through SMPP, I've learned that effective healthcare strategies must bridge both economic and clinical perspectives, as financial sustainability is crucial to delivering impactful, long-term healthcare solutions.

…