Keeping it in the family: Three relatives call Freeman home

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Family members (pictured left to right) Alvaro Arcia-Lopez (MFIN ’28), Maria Emma Arcia-Lopez (MANA ’27) and Bernardo Chamorro-Diaz (MFIN ’28) each enrolled in master's programs at the Freeman School of Business this semester.

For international students, starting a graduate program in a new, unfamiliar city can be lonely, but three Freeman students from Nicaragua figured out a way around that. They brought family.

Bernardo Chamorro-Diaz (MFIN ’28), his wife, Maria Emma Arcia-Lopez (MANA ’27), and her brother, Alvaro Arcia-Lopez (MFIN ’28), natives of Chinandega, Nicaragua, all enrolled in Freeman School master's programs this semester, creating their very own support network more than 1,200 miles from home.

“It was like a domino effect,” Bernardo says. “I applied, and I got in. After I got accepted, I told Maria Emma, ‘You should apply for the business analytics program.’ Then she was admitted, and then Alvaro.”

Bernardo and Alvaro are both pursuing Master of Finance degrees while Maria Emma is earning her Master of Analytics and AI. Tulane was originally on Bernardo’s radar for his undergraduate degree, but the university wasn’t accepting spring applications at the time. He first became aware of the university through another family member: His father, Bernardo Chamorro (BSM '96), attended the Freeman School 30 years ago.

“It was one of my top choices because of my father. He always told me Tulane is an amazing school, especially for business,” Bernardo says.

Bernardo ultimately attended Auburn University, while Maria Emma enrolled at the University of Kansas and Alvaro went to St. Mary's University. Maria Emma and Bernardo began dating in high school in Nicaragua, but they spent their undergraduate years nearly 800 miles apart at different universities in the United States, maintaining a long-distance relationship.

“We wanted to have our own college experiences,” Maria Emma says.

After graduating, the couple reunited in Kansas, where Maria Emma worked in analytics and Bernardo worked in accounting. They married in December 2025, and Bernardo and Alvaro, longtime friends, became brothers-in-law. In August 2026, the three were brought together once again, this time on Tulane’s campus, when their master’s programs began.

“We do feel that it is a blessing for the three of us to be here at the same time, because it can get a bit lonely when you're trying to pursue any program outside of your country, your culture, your family,” Maria Emma says. “I think that the three of us being together is very special; it's part of the experience.”

Although homesickness and culture shock may arise at times, Bernardo, Maria Emma and Alvaro are eager to explore the opportunities available to them in the United States after graduation.

“Freeman is granting us the chance to explore many different career paths that are not available in Nicaragua,” Bernardo says.

All three are interested in remaining in the United States after graduation through Optional Practical Training, an immigration program that allows international students to stay in the country for a limited period after completing their studies, with the possibility of remaining longer through employer sponsorship.

“I would love to take advantage of the opportunity of having three years of OPT here and potentially extending that time,” Alvaro says.

He believes that students from other countries can provide a competitive advantage to the workforce because of the perspectives and skills they develop while studying abroad.

“For international students it requires us to be more adaptable, to be more open-minded and to develop skills that are beyond our curriculum,” Alvaro says.

“It’s about getting out of your comfort zone,” Maria Emma adds. “So many experiences can build your character, and then you can apply those lessons in the workplace.”

Bernardo and Maria Emma also hope to make use of OPT after graduation, but both ultimately envision returning to Nicaragua and bringing the skills they have developed back home.

“We want to return to our home country,” Bernardo says. “Nicaragua has always been limited for business and investments, so I think there are many ways to give people and investors the opportunity to grow their businesses there.”

In the meantime, the three are enjoying their new home of New Orleans. One aspect of the city’s culture has already made a lasting impression.

“The people here in New Orleans, and I think at Tulane especially,” Maria Emma says, “they make you feel like a family.”