

# Balitaan

Newsletter 75

Fall 2022

rpcvphilippines.org

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## PCAFPD Now Supporting Scholars with Laptops!

*By Ricardo Espitia, PCAFPD Student Affairs*

Earlier this year, PCAFPD began providing laptops as part of our scholarship program. This initiative came out of PCAFPD's efforts to meet the moment and the realities of our scholars who are schooling in a 21st century, COVID environment. Prior to this effort, many scholars were conducting their school work on smart devices, writing essays on phone keyboards, and using crowded internet cafes to accomplish their studies. Currently, all eligible scholars enrolled for the 2022-2023 school year have been offered laptops by PCAFPD, and future batches will receive laptops as part of their onboarding. PCAFPD collaborated with our alumni to ensure the specifications and models were appropriate for the scholars. Special models are given to students in Information Technology related courses, which require specific processing power.

*“As a student, it’s been a blessing for me to have the opportunity of being one of the scholars who are eligible for the PCAFPD laptop. In the past, I faced challenges making PowerPoint presentations, video presentations, doing excel, encoding and the like. Most of the time I borrowed laptops from my classmates or teachers or went to the computer shop to make my outputs.”*

This initiative was made possible due to our supportive donor community and in large part due to

a very generous bequest made from a late batch 1 RPCV, Eleanor Whitlach. The legacy bequest allowed us to procure a large amount of laptops at once for nearly 100 current scholars.

PCAFPD hosted two turnover ceremonies for scholars in the Metro Manila and Negros Oriental area. The rest of the units were sent via courier. On June 12, 2022, a turnover ceremony was held at Jollibee in Pasay City, Metro Manila. The ceremony was attended by Mr. Roland de Jesus, PCAFPD Vice President for Philippine Operations, members of the Ituloy Team, and 15 scholars from batches 2019-2021 who reside in the surrounding area. The local company which sourced the laptop, Vertice Solutions, Inc., was represented by Ms. Lalaine Zulueta, Sales Director, and two personnel.



*Pictured above: PCAFPD Scholars, Ituloy staff, and Vertice Inc. Representative at the turnover ceremony on June 12, 2022*

In their remarks, both Mr. de Jesus and Ms. Zulueta highlighted the goal of the grant which is to provide

the scholars a piece of equipment to help them in achieving their degrees. Ms. Zulueta also stressed that Vertice Solutions, Inc. will provide help to the scholars if they need servicing for their laptops.



*Pictured above: Scholars from Negros Island receives their laptop during the Turn-over Ceremony. From right: Hector Philippe Plame (Alumnus) Floribeth Misa Jessa Mae Catid Jean Estrellado (Alumna) Janine Timbal April Dajao Ronalyn Iligan Homilo Gerard Abiera*

On Sept. 26, 2022 a laptop turnover ceremony was held at Talipapa Beach Club, Bayawan City, Negros Oriental for Scholars in the Negros Oriental area. The ceremony was hosted by the Negros Cluster and led by Alumni Jeanalyn Estrellado and accompanied by fellow alumni Hector Plame.

The words of our scholars speak for themselves regarding the positive impact of this effort.

***“As a Computer Science student, I badly need a laptop where I can practice and learn the field of programming because learning programming on a smartphone is a big struggle. That's why I am beyond grateful that PCAFPD provided that need. Thank you so much to the people behind this generous foundation. My heart is happy to be part of this beautiful family.”***

***“I thank the PCAFPD community and I am blessed to be one of your scholars. Thank you for the laptop you gave me, it is a big help to me as a college student. The course I am taking is Bachelor of Elementary Education and we always make a lesson plan as part of our task as a student. This laptop will help me a lot in my studies. I am very grateful. Thank you very much.”***

PCAFPD thanks its generous donor community for enabling this effort and for its ongoing support to achieving their educational dreams.

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## SCHOLAR ESSAYS

### **Eating *lugaw* with my mom is a drama**

*Elaine Desoloc is pursuing a BS in Accountancy from Polytechnic University of the Philippines*

There are very few serious moments between me and my mom. When we do not gossip, we joke about everything. For the past five months, we have been having more serious talks than usual. We usually do it outside, when we go out to purchase goods for our small retail business which we do at least once a week. We would go to our favorite *lugawan* in Taytay, Rizal. It was, for us, the most convenient place to talk about our problems because *lugaw* when served hot, takes us an exceedingly long time to eat, thus giving us enough time to mull over our thoughts and pour our hearts out. During those times, I was always the one doing the pouring.

This semester, we had dived into the deeper aspects of accounting. Sadly, I got the lowest grade I ever got. One of my classmates said, “That is only normal. That is still better than what half of the class got.” Of course, that did nothing to make me feel better. For a week, I felt horrible about myself. That subject was Intermediate Accounting 3, the one subject I poured most of my time into. Because I studied extensively for this subject, I was able to learn about leases and interests and how they are fundamental to a business. I realized leasing a space makes more profit than just selling the property. This gave me an idea of what business I should build someday to improve my income.

My favorite subject this semester was Income Taxation. I found it more difficult than most of our major subjects because it involved a great deal of memorizing due to its relation to the law. It was hard but I was motivated. My college friends and I agreed

before the semester started that we would take the CTT examination next year. We all wanted to be certified tax technicians and this subject would be our starting point towards that goal. In one of the videos I watched about Philippine taxes, and it was mentioned that tax evasion was something that had always been an issue in the Philippines. Even some government officials were reported to be not paying their dues. This is unethical and we, as citizens of a country devastated by corruption, should not condone such practices.

Last week, when the serving girl at the *carindera* served me and my mom our bowls of *lugaw*, I did not want to touch it. I knew that if I started eating and talking, I would break. It just had that effect on me. Or it had probably just become a comfortable moment for me—sitting across from my very understanding and always smiling mother. She urged me to start eating. Told me the porridge would get cold. I ate and began telling her about how hard school was. I told her about my grades, my upcoming exams, and my plans of being a tax technician if I pass its exam. I told her everything: my self-doubt, my misgivings, even my being stressed about the election results! She listened to all this with ears open, eyes kind, and mind without judgment.

By the time I was done with my tale of woes, my bowl was empty. Hers was not. She started telling me, “I know you can do it. You know you can do it. I am not expecting anything from you except you finish college. You have all that it takes to someday be successful and rich. That is what I want for you.” She said it in Tagalog so hearing it was very heartbreaking for me. It was a miracle I was able to hold my tears back at that time.

Despite feeling pressured, I want to prove that what my mom always says is right. I have always had it in me. I just do not want to believe in myself. I think I need another lengthy talk with my mom. I will have to take her to the *lugawan* soon.

## **Intentional Connections for Personal and Professional Growth**

*Blessie Atonen is pursuing a BS in Environmental Science from Benguet State University Scholar*

Building social and professional connections with the right people at the right time is integral in traversing life. This semester showed me how true this statement was as I focused on building my resume, skills, and knowledge. Last February 2022, I was fortunate to be connected with one of my alums, who invited me to apply for a five-month paid internship under a non-government agency. I immediately applied and was accepted for the *Food and Agriculture Organization – Ecosystem Disaster Risk Reduction Intern* position. Through this internship program, I learned outside the classroom and used the theories I studied for three years in writing reports and performing field activities. Additionally, this opportunity allowed me to connect with people who share the same strong sense of passion for sustainability and conservation as me.

At this time of the year, I had to undergo on-the-job training under a government agency approved by my university. Thanks to the networks built during my internship, I could work with our project's partner municipality. During my stay at this agency, I was able to correlate how important environmental planning is in adapting to hazards and mitigating the impacts of disasters. The experience also taught me how to communicate my thoughts effectively on a community level and with other professionals.

Once again, I've learned the importance of social connection in thriving in college through my network with the Peace Corps Alumni Foundation for Philippine Development. Through the laptop grant and financial support that I got from the Foundation, I was able to perform comfortably in my studies and also in my work. Aside from the physical benefits, I discovered the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Academic Fellowship for Fall 2022 from a PCAFPD alumnus. With his encouragement and mentorship, I passed all

application stages and was selected as a YSEALI fellow among 800 applicants in the country. Through this endeavor, I will be able to fly out of the country for the first time and connect with leaders from other Southeast Asian Nations in the United States.

Inquiry and building intentional networks will always be a part of our lives. These endeavors that I was able to partake in are a testament to that. With this, it is also important that I nurture these relationships formed. It also serves as a reminder to give back what I received to my community so that other students or individuals can somehow replicate this feeling of contentment and excitement I'm experiencing.

## **Free Will**

*Ghio Gatlabayan is pursuing a BS in Mathematics at the University of the Philippines*

Throughout my life I have encountered and listened to many folks talk about their college experience and describing their freshman year as “the finest but challenging year” in their college life. It builds my expectations so high before I actually experience the so-called finest yet challenging time of my education life. They are not wrong after all; freshman year is indeed an emotional rollercoaster experience. I have also read reviews where first-year students, particularly those who did well in high school, frequently feel overconfident and enthusiastic in their abilities to manage problems and barriers they would meet throughout their first year of college. They are wide-eyed and eager to begin this new chapter of their life. Because of poor study habits, poor time management, and having to cope with a greater amount of stress in their first year of college, students who performed well academically in high school sometimes suffer greatly.

But those are not really the problem; I find the online set-up to be the root of those challenges because we are all used to learning things easier with face-to-face interaction and consultation with our professors and even with our classmates and friends.

University of the Philippines-Diliman is really a great ground to enhance the student's mind, societal awareness, amplification of voices who are suppressed, and even for a call of inclusivity. I can testify that entering a University like UP allows the students, especially me to see the deficiencies, atrocities, inequality, and the problems that our society has. They will continuously remind us that being silent is not an act of a “Iskolar ng Bayan” because it will be our responsibility to act for those who cannot stand on their own. As I always say, being the iskolar ng bayan and the future of this country we should be the voice for those who are unheard, the eyes for those who have barriers in their face, and the inspiration for those who have lost their hope about moving forward and achieving their dreams.

It is hard to adjust with the workload of college life but I did fine and actually I have listed the highlights of this first year in my college life both the struggles and achievements that I've had. The challenge starts upon enrollment where the quotation of “free will” was emphasized by the sophomores and graduating students. We have the free will to choose which class or subject we will enroll with, but it is not guaranteed that we will get them since there are limited slots considering the demands from the students. It is actually a breathtaking experience because from time to time I need to check the CRS (Computerized Registration System) if I have already earned the classes that I've desired.

For now, they say, and I believe that UP has been so kind to us but as we enter the sophomore year things will be much harder. Professors are great and very insightful, as a matter of fact, most of them are very considerate, approachable, entertaining, respectful, and very accommodating despite the heavy workloads that they are giving. I have some very great instructors who teach about how mathematics works. They actually made me realize and remember that mathematics is everywhere and the application of it really matters especially to the fields where continuous growth and development takes place. Physics have a lot of challenging workloads and the

teacher will say that “this is your preparation for more challenging workloads ahead of you so take it as a practice experience”. Actually, he is right and it makes me ecstatic that I was able to pass his class despite the challenges that I faced with him.

For my PE 2 Line dance, Ms. Aguilar’s remarkable word for me will be “Dance is open for all, but not all of us are willing to dance”. Those words allow me to have some reflection that night, and it amazes me because I see dance to be a way of life where some of us are good at it but some are not, yet we are able to somehow come along with the rhythm of life and continuously move with grace in overcoming the challenges that we’ve had and will be having.

I took advantage of enrolling in midyear 2022 since some of the students are not into enrolling this time and choose to have a rest or vacation from the academic stuff. Math 22 is great class for me. Mr. Pelayo is a great professor that is always open to help his students with the requirements that keep on haunting them. I like him because he is very student-friendly because he will always ask how everyone is and it’s so sweet that some professor is really concerned about the student’s well-being.

Furthermore, the most exciting class of all will be the PE 2 Philippine Games headed by Ms. Yleana. I am not exaggerating it but being able to reminisce and experience the childhood games that we had is indescribable, amazing, and fun. As a matter of fact, this class became my stress-reliever and something that I look forward to because of the activities that we had even though the games are done online. The activities and class discussion are very smooth and interesting every time. This makes me conclude that the 2nd Semester of AY 2021-2022 and Midyear 2022 are a success for me since it ends with me being healthy physically, mentally, and emotionally.

It is stressful to have been isolated for about two to three years with limited interactions of the people around me. I am glad that I am able to manage the obstacles, hardships, and the mental challenges that come along the way.

Before I end this essay, I would like to thank the PCAFPD Family for opening the door in meeting new people, and giving us the opportunity to grow, learn, and be part of this wonderful family. To the sponsors, thank you very much for all the support and generosity that all of you are giving us. The laptop grant is very useful, actually I am using it now and remembering this moment makes me emotional. I owed these opportunities to all of the sponsors and partners of the PCAFPD, on behalf of all the scholars we thank you all. May our God continue to bless all of us. *Lagi’t lagi para sa Diyos at para sa Bayan!* (Always for God and for the People!)

## **Cherry on Top**

*Dexter Gumangan is graduating with a BS in Management Accounting from St. Mary’s University*

Reaching the pinnacle of a long-awaited dream bounces an astounding sense of fulfillment from within. The path is not a walk in the park in which sometimes I find myself down for the count. The constant cons the pandemic causes affect not just one but everyone regardless of standing. As a student myself, it affected my schooling through the sudden shift on the mode of learning. It then limits how I stay put on online classes for which the environment I am located does not have enough flexibility to adopt for distant learning. Although, there is a feeling of drawing the line, the dreams I have serving as my inspiration always stay luminous and lightens my disposition to persevere and finally clinch that paper with my degree written on it. I went and finished my internship full of learnings that left me an amazing idea and a glimpse of how the corporate world works. That is where I also cultured to put myself, to always perceive on looking everything with a bigger picture.

What a journey it has been! Looking back on those days I first entered JVD 206 at the School of Accountancy and Business, I came to realize how much I have grown and learned through the motherly care of Saint Mary’s University. The final year of my stay in school was a rough one, but me and my group have persevered in finishing our research paper that was started a year ago. We had both our shares of pain

in tears and tears of joy. It was even a roller coaster of emotions when I read my name at the “LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR JULY 2022 GRADUATION”.



As someone who came from a meager and surviving family, it is with deep and unexplainable gratitude that I would like to give back to the Peace Corps Alumni Foundation for Philippine Development. Without your aid, I wouldn't be where I am now. No words can tell how thankful I am for your help in achieving not just my dream but also the vision of my family. It is now time to give back to the community, I still can vividly remember what I answered to your question 4 years ago, “I will devote myself in serving the community”. I am now a Senior High School teacher and part time college instructor at PLTC, Inc. When I told you that I want to pursue Accounting, I was really thinking on how beautiful it would be to work in banks or government offices and of course living the glitz and glamor of a corporate life.

However, fate has its own way of diverting my plans; I am now living the simple yet noble life in the academe. Additionally, I also am taking Professional Education units at SMU trying to juggle both studying and working plus I just passed the Civil Service Examination Professional level with a rating of 86.12% last June 19, 2022. All thanks to the PCAFPD and glory be to GOD, our Father.

## A Busy Year

*Cielo Bareza is pursuing a BS in Computer Science at Laguna State Polytechnic University*

Greetings! This second semester in my third year of college would be the busiest academic venture I have ever been since the semester covers a lot of heavy load and heavily important subject related on my college course, and it was also the time when we initialize making our own thesis paper. Most activities given to us by our subject leaders were not a lot but all of them does need a lot of time to finish, such as software developing, graphic rendering, animations, reports, information assurance and securities. And the heaviest of them all would be creating the thesis paper.

Although class sessions were still restricted within online meeting, me and most of my classmates would still directly meet up and visit our university a number of times for a variety of reasons which were all related on the subjects on our course, such as borrowing equipment, gathering intel and dissertations, doing some hands-on applicational activities, and other extra-curricular responsibilities we need to fulfill. The current semester was a bit more immersive since there were more applicational activity requirements other than having a bunch of information dumped into you, but either way, I believe one of each had given me a bit of help.

There weren't really anymore variant of other things happening other than me being busy, not only on my academic responsibilities, but also juggling other things unrelated to it as well for the past 4 months. It was exhausting and sometimes it feels like what I did wasn't worth it at all during those academic sessions and pushes me to be a bit cautious on how much effort I would put into some things, since if I'm going to be blunt, I'm still indifferent or unsure of what I'm doing if going with the flow would be the right choice for my existence, but I think it is still beneficial for me one way or another since it did force me out of my comfort zone and trains my vitality during these hectic times and leaves me a bit more critical and have my messy self to be more efficient on doing things. It also made me talk and meet to a lot of people I never knew, I believe that's also good, I suppose.

Nonetheless, writing the thesis paper was the most challenging for me all in all. It was a project designated to be done by groups and I still have a problem of being cooperative so I kind of just worked on it alone despite being assigned on a group. Although as much as I want to happily announce that my thesis paper worked out fine and well in the end, me being a stubborn silent douche had bitten me in the leg a number of times and tripped here and there so definitely there were lessons I learned.

That's is all, Have a nice day PCAFPD Family.

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## Remembering Tommy

*By Paul Aleckson, PCAFPD President*

Tommy Schultz made it back to America for the final days of his battle with cancer, but his fight ended June 4, 2021 at age 45. Tommy served as a Coastal Resource Management Volunteer in Dumaguete City in Group 263 from 2004-06. His time in the Peace Corps inspired more travel and his love of photography. He spent the last 14 years in Bali as a freelance photographer and writer. His work appeared in National Geographic, Patagonia, World Wildlife Fun, and The Surfers Journal, among others. Admire his photos at [tommyschultz.com](http://tommyschultz.com)

When Tommy's cancer kept progressing, a Go Fund Me campaign raised money for the flight back to Virginia with a nurse. Support from family and friends, including several RPCVs, poured in to more than cover the expenses. Today, his family has decided to donate the excess funds to things near and dear to Tommy's heart such as Surfers for Climate and the Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute Philippines (LAMAVE). The family has also made a \$5,000 donation to the PCAFPD to sponsor a scholar for four years. The PCAFPD thanks the Schultz family for its generosity during such a difficult time. They have given a gift that will bring benefits to a person, a family, and a country for decades to come. Rest in peace, Tommy.

## Grantee Feature: People and the Sea

*By Justin Tabor, PCAFPD Grants Manager*

Today I am fortunate to highlight one of our two 2022 PCAFPD Human Development Grantees, People and the Sea. Started in 2015, People and the Sea is based on Malapascua Island, a small island just north of Cebu. Their mission is to support local livelihoods while also protecting marine biodiversity. Their programming includes waste reduction, sustainable fishing, research, youth education, and economic development.

As per their proposal, People and the Sea was awarded \$1,500 USD to revitalize their elementary education programs. As we know from our PCAFPD scholars, learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was not easy in the Philippines. During the pandemic, students in Malapascua engaged in modular learning, which meant that providing them additional environmental education at the schools was quite difficult. With restrictions starting to ease up, People and the Sea are eager to resume this service to the youth.

Over the course of the 2022-2023 academic year, People and the Sea will work with the local elementary schools to provide monthly auxiliary environmental education and programming to the youth of Malapascua. Included in their proposal are funds to reward the active youth with a snorkeling trip to learn about the biodiversity of their area firsthand. They will also use the funds to resume monthly meetings of their Eco-heroes Club. Prior to the pandemic these activities generated regular participation of nearly 100 local 5th graders.

We are excited to see this programming return to the island and look forward to future reports from People and the Sea. We wish them great success as they implement their projects.

## Join Us for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Holiday Social with PC Philippines Staff

Join us for a 30 min Q&A with Peace Corps Philippines Country Director, Jenner Edelman, followed by a virtual Holiday Social where you can mingle and chat with fellow RPCVs and PC Philippines staff.

**Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup> at 8pm ET**

**Register online at:**

**<http://www.rpcvphilippines.org>**



**For the first time since 2020:**

Peace Corps Philippines  
will welcome 65 new  
Peace Corps Trainees  
on January 27, 2023!

*Mabuhay!*

## Join the Bayanihan Legacy Circle

Have you designated PCAFPD as a beneficiary of an IRA or stipulated a bequest to PCAFPD in a will or trust? If so, we'd like to know.

In conjunction with the upcoming 40th Anniversary of PCAFPD, we have established the *Bayanihan Legacy Circle* to recognize those of you who plan to support the work of PCAFPD beyond your lifetime.

Members of the Legacy Circle will be eligible for special benefits and will be listed on our website and in publications as appropriate.

Send an email to us at [pcafpd@gmail.com](mailto:pcafpd@gmail.com) or snail mail us at P.O. Box 100114, Arlington Virginia 22210 to let us know of your plans or to seek more information. Maraming Salamat!

## Contributions from our generous supporters:

Many thanks to those listed below who made gifts to PCAFPD between May 2022 and October 2022.  
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<sup>26</sup> IMO My daughter, Angela

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