



BALITAAN

Newsletter 80

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Your Impact in Action: PCAFPD's 2025 Scholarship Updates

*By Ricardo Espitia, PCAFPD
Scholar Affairs*

We're excited to share some important updates from the Peace Corps Alumni Foundation for Philippine Development (PCAFPD). Thanks to your continued support, our scholarship program has reached new heights. Last year, we received over 600 completed applications, a record-breaking milestone for us. This incredible response was fueled by a mix of efforts, including word-of-mouth from current scholars and alumni, the return of Peace Corps Volunteers to the Philippines, engaging webinars for prospective applicants, and a brand-new online application system developed by our webmaster (Nick S.). This new system has made the process more accessible for students and more efficient for our review team, helping us ensure we reach the students who need us most.

As we look to the future, we are making some thoughtful adjustments to how we award scholarships. These changes are designed to deepen our investment in our scholars and focus our resources where

they can have the greatest impact. First, starting this year, we will only consider applications from students who need at least three years of undergraduate support. In the past, we welcomed students at all points in their academic journey, but we feel strongly that by supporting students earlier in their college careers, we can build longer, more meaningful relationships and provide the steady support they need to succeed. This change also reflects the added investment of a laptop as part of each scholarship package which is an important tool for academic success.

We are also making a change to our master's scholarship program. Since 2020, we have accepted applications from anyone pursuing a master's degree, whether they were PCAFPD alumni or not. Beginning in 2025, we will return to our earlier practice of offering master's scholarships only to alumni of our undergraduate program. As the primary focus of the foundation remains our undergraduate program; only one or two of these awards are currently given each year, and we want to make sure we are honoring our commitment to those who have already been part of the PCAFPD family and who now seek to further their education. Of course, even for alumni,



"I am truly thankful for the privilege of being one of the scholars of PCAFPD." - Bernadeth Estacio, 2025 Graduating Scholar

these scholarships remain highly competitive, and every application will still go through a careful review process.

These updates reinforce our mission of opening doors to high achieving, service driven students from low-income backgrounds. We will continue to support scholars attending both public and private universities, ensuring that financial barriers never stand in the way of opportunity. While about 70% of our scholars currently attend public institutions, we are equally proud to stand behind those who earn places at highly competitive private universities. For us, it's about ensuring that each scholar is able to pursue the education that best prepares them to lead and give back to their communities.

Since 1983, PCAFPD has helped more than 300 scholars graduate and go on to make meaningful contributions to their country's development. These latest program updates are all about making sure we can continue this legacy; helping as many deserving students as possible to achieve their dreams and become the leaders in the Philippines. Your support makes this possible. Thank you for walking alongside us in this mission for over four decades. Together, we are building futures and strengthening communities, one scholar at a time.

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Do you want to contribute to Philippines Development?
Do you want to grow your resume or learn new skills?
Do you have 1-2 hours a month to give?



**Consider joining the
PCAFPD Board of Directors!**

We are actively recruiting RPCVs to assist with our grants, PCV relations, marketing, and finances. Email pcafpd@gmail.com to get involved!

Groundbreaking Nears for Peace Corps Park in D.C.

By Maureen Carroll, Board Member at Large

For the past nearly 25 years, dozens of leaders in the Peace Corps and the volunteer service community have slowly but steadily developed the design concept, the Congressional legislation and the financial resources to celebrate the Peace Corps in a commemorative work in Washington D.C. to be called Peace Corps Park. A half-acre triangle of land near the U.S. Capitol will hold rounded stone benches encircling a plaza featuring a world map as a contemplative environment for visitors to reflect on the values of peace and service and to learn about the history of the Peace Corps.

At this point in the long and complex journey to realize the dream of the park, the artwork is about to be sculpted and fabricated, ground will be broken sometime in 2026, and onsite construction will begin. With luck, the completion will occur as Peace Corps celebrates its 65th anniversary in 2026.

We highly recommend going to the website (www.peacecorpscommemorative.org) for a thorough description of the history of the project, its current status, the leadership of the organization behind it, and the many financial supporters who have contributed 50% of the \$12 million goal. You will find familiar names there as well as an opportunity for yourself to support the effort as it moves toward reality. Kudos to all those who have nurtured the effort thus far.

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Above: Concept of PC park design (image from <https://www.peacecorpscommemorative.org/>)

The PCAFPD Human Development Grant Continues Delivering

*By Justin Tabor, PCAFPD
President & Grants Manager*

Since 2020, PCAFPD has been piloting a 5-year grant program with the goal of awarding \$10,000 in grants throughout the initial period. Based on the successes we have seen over the last four cycles, the PCAFPD Board of Directors recently voted to make the grant program a permanent fixture. An important factor in this decision was that with the departure of USAID, PCVs have fewer funding options available to them. Our grant can fill a small amount of that gap and support the next generation of RPCVs.

Our 2024 grant cycle has seen highs and lows from our grantees. Shortly before starting their project implementation, a PCV was suddenly separated from service and their water safety work had to be halted. Because of this, we have put in some additional guardrails for our 2025 PCV grantees. At the same time, our other two grantees have shown amazing signs of success despite a challenging typhoon season.

As the grant program continues being a PCAFPD fixture, I look forward to seeing how we can further empower human development in new and creative ways.



Above: Grant recipient PCV Ariel at Colacling National Elementary School helped her site rehabilitate a reading center damaged by intense typhoons.

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.

The Bayanihan Legacy Circle recognizes 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 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!

Thank you to our Legacy Circle Members:

- Maureen Carroll, Sorsogon 1961-63
- David and Patricia Flaccus, Bohol/Cebu 1965-68
- Cathleen Garman, Camarines Sur 1978-81
- Mark Horowitz, Quezon 1965-67
- Lee and Kay Jones, Isabela 1962-67
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Scholar Essays

My Off-Campus Journey

Abegail Bearing is pursuing a Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English at Philippine Normal University – Visayas.

My second term in this fourth-year college was full of unforgettable experiences. This was the time we started our off-campus teaching at Escalante National High School near my hometown. I felt unconfident at first, but grateful as it ends with great memories and learnings.

On my first day there, I felt really nervous and pressured. I knew this journey would be harder than our training inside the campus. It was more serious. It became more challenging for me because I also have my work at night as an ESL tutor. I had to wake up early for school duty, then work at night. It was really tiring and draining.

But one thing that I'm proud to say is that I learned a lot during my stay. I saw what a public-school teacher really does. I saw how busy they were making lesson plans, organizing school programs, making tests, exams, teaching demonstrations, grammar workshops, checking student papers, doing action research, reading sessions for non-readers, and sometimes our critique teacher is asking us, interns, to take over the class. This was the time that I really wanted to surrender because of workloads, but am grateful that I stayed resilient at the end of the day and kept on reminding myself that this is my passion, so I need to face it.

One of the most important things I learned during my stay there was how to make a MATATAG lesson plan. At first, it was hard for me because it was new. But with the help from teachers and co-interns, I learned how to write each part correctly. This helped me plan my lessons better. I learned that being

a teacher is not easy. It needs a lot of patience, and sometimes even more patience because students are different. They have different attitudes and needs. Even though it was tiring, I enjoyed it because I learned so much. I saw that my skills improved. I'm not yet perfect, but I know I am growing.

I also liked that we were rotated to different grade levels. This helped me see the difference between teaching junior and senior high school. Each level is different, but both are good to experience.

I am very thankful for this chance. I will always remember what I learned in Escalante National High School. These lessons will help me when I become a real teacher. I'm also thankful to the program for the support, especially the financial help when I needed it. That will always be a special memory for me.

My off-campus journey was not easy, but it was worth it. I will never forget the things I learned and the people who helped me along the way most especially to this program.

As A Chapter Ends, A New Chapter Unfolds

Jessica Lei Tenido is graduating with a Bachelor's Degree of Industrial Engineering at Holy Angel University. She will graduate with a grade equivalent for a Magna Cum Laude and has said she owes it to the help provided by the scholarship.

Surreal - the one word that would describe my thoughts and feelings now that I am officially a grad-waiting student. Everything just feels surreal. Looking back, I never would have thought that I would be able to withstand the challenges that an engineering course entails as I was never a fan of math,

to be honest. Fortunately for me, it did not hold me back. I passed all the heavily number-based engineering subjects such as differential and integral calculus, calculus physics, thermodynamics, engineering mechanics, operations research, and more, in just one take and, to top that, with good grades. That experience was the start of me believing that I can finish my course, BS Industrial Engineering, on time and in the best way that I can. Difficult? Of course. There's nothing easy in maneuvering your life in your college days. The countless deadlines, the rising of stress levels, the exhaustion, the emotional and mental breakdowns, there is certainly no course that is ever easy for a student who dreams big—and I did.

Achieving my dreams of graduating and finishing a course would not be made possible without my own hard work, my parents, and of course, PCAFPD who funded my college education. I owe it to the scholarship opportunity given to me that I can finish my education with one less problem to worry about, financially speaking. It was a huge breath of relief for me and my family, that's for sure. Without PCAFPD and their scholarship grant, I might have had to worry about my school fees every year and could possibly be a cause of problems in our household. Fortunately, PCAFPD was kind to accommodate me and my college journey even as I transferred schools by my 3rd year.

Now, I can say that I have learned a lot and am equipped to enter the real world. I am now ready to end this chapter of my life and unfold a new one—the one where I stand on my own and contribute more to the community and my family. Studying for four years to become an Industrial Engineer, I am certain that I already have what it takes to make things better for every system and

process there is in different industries, as well as for the people. Just as what the IE course says, "We make things better." We strive for continuous improvement and that's what I'd apply to my career as I start to venture into the real world on my own.

Certainly, I would miss being a student. I can already feel all sorts of emotions: the longing, regrets, the joy, etc. And even as I am ready to unfold a new chapter of my life, I still fear for what's yet to come. But through prayers, I am somehow relieved of my worries as I know that God will be with me through my up's and down's and has planned a great future for me.

As I end my college journey, I am proud to say that I am the recipient of the prestigious Academic Excellence Award for my course in our university, and my grades are qualified for Magna Cum Laude. As a transferee student, I worked equally hard to achieve that Latin honor. I just wish that schools here could give the same eligibility for transfer students to be able to get that dream of theirs. It's just so unfortunate and painful that I am a transferee which is why the university can't give me the title I deserve, but to finish my course and graduate with a grade fit for a Magna Cum Laude is enough for me to acknowledge to myself that I did it and I can.



Graduating scholar Jessica Lei Tenido

Seeds of Change: Where Learning Blooms and Friendships Blossom

Shaina Jean Nombrado is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Biotechnology at Visayas State University - Main Campus

This semester has been a whirlwind of experiences, both challenging and rewarding, that have shaped me in profound ways. From grappling with the realities of environmental degradation to forging deep and meaningful friendships, I've grown in ways I never thought possible. I've learned invaluable lessons about resilience, perseverance, and the power of human connection. I've discovered that even in the face of adversity, we can find strength in ourselves and in the support of others. I've also learned the importance of taking action, no matter how small, to make a positive impact on the world around us. One of the most impactful lessons came from a seemingly simple observation: the presence of algal blooms in the lake near the public market. What once appeared harmless now struck me as a stark symbol of environmental imbalance. My Environmental Science class unveiled the truth behind these blooms: human activities, such as agricultural runoff and poorly maintained sewage systems, were poisoning the lake. Witnessing this firsthand, the foul odor and the realization of the harm inflicted on the ecosystem ignited a fire within me. The sight of the polluted lake, once a source of beauty, now filled me with a sense of despair and a burning urge to act. I could no longer remain a passive observer. This realization sparked my participation in school clean-up drives and even inspired a creative solution: repurposing plastic waste into bottle decorations, a small yet meaningful step towards reducing plastic

pollution. However, this local issue mirrors larger environmental challenges facing the Philippines and the world, such as deforestation, climate change, and the ever-growing plastic waste crisis. Overcoming these environmental hurdles demands more than individual efforts. A collective dedication to sustainable living and the pursuit of innovative solutions is crucial.

College life, as expected, has been a whirlwind of challenges. Firstly, being away from family, then adapting to dormitory rules, and finally adjusting to a demanding academic schedule pushed me to grow in ways I never imagined. Loneliness occasionally crept in, but then I met the "DonMackers," my incredible group of friends. Our late-night conversations at Don Macchiatos, filled with laughter and shared anxieties, forged bonds that have become my lifeline. Consequently, celebrating the end of finals with a pool party and a beach outing was pure bliss, even though some friends couldn't join. Those moments, filled with laughter and the warmth of genuine connection, were truly unforgettable. They were a reminder of the power of friendship to bring joy and support into our lives.

Looking ahead, I envision a future where I can translate my passion for Biotechnology into tangible contributions to my community, ultimately fulfilling my dream of becoming a scientist. After completing my Bachelor's degree, I plan to gain practical experience through an internship at a reputable environmental research institution or a local non-profit organization. This hands-on experience will allow me to apply my theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges and develop valuable skills in areas such as environmental monitoring, data analysis, and project management. I dream of developing innovative solutions to

address specific environmental issues within my community, such as exploring the potential of phytoremediation to clean up contaminated sites or developing sustainable biofertilizers for local farmers. I envision establishing a community-based organization that will not only conduct environmental education and awareness campaigns but also provide practical support to local communities through workshops on organic farming, waste management, and water conservation. I believe that by collaborating with local scientists, government agencies, and community members, we can create a lasting impact on our environment and inspire others to become stewards of our planet. My journey as a scientist will be driven by a deep-seated desire to contribute to a healthier and more sustainable future for all.

The Beauty of Embracing Challenges and Celebrating Growth

Ghio Gatlabayan is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics at University of Philippines - Diliman.

As I reflect on my experience during the second semester of my third year in college, I can't help but smile at the whirlwind of events that shaped me both academically and personally. It was a semester filled with new friendships, unexpected journeys, and a deep dive into the world of mathematics that stretched my limits. Stepping into this new phase, I was ready to take on the challenges, and what an adventure it turned out to be!

In this semester, I embarked on one of the most demanding academic journeys of my college life. Complex analysis, abstract algebra, and my pre-thesis course, Math 190, were at the core of my struggle. Each subject demanded a level of focus and

perseverance I had never experienced before. There were days when the equations seemed unsolvable, when I stared at my notes hoping for a breakthrough, and when failure seemed inevitable. But it was in those very moments of frustration and struggle that I found my greatest lessons.

I learned to embrace failure as a natural part of growth. College is a place for experimentation, and with experimentation comes mistakes. But it's these mistakes, whether in problem sets, projects, or exams, that teach us the most. I realized that real learning happens not when we get everything right, but when we are faced with difficult problems that push us to think critically, to persevere, and to never give up. Every failure was an opportunity to improve, to grow, and to come back stronger.

Another proud milestone was the successful organization of the 50th Golden Iteration of the Annual Nationwide Search for Math Wizard. Leading this event, which has long been a cornerstone of the organization's outreach and contribution to mathematics education in the country, was both an honor and a huge responsibility. The search for the next Math Wizard not only tested the mathematical abilities of students from across the nation but also demonstrated the boundless potential of young minds when nurtured with the right opportunities. Witnessing the contestants rise to the challenges we presented and excel in ways that exceeded expectations was a humbling experience. It reminded me of the importance of creating platforms for students to shine and grow in their mathematical journey.

Another invaluable lesson I learned was the importance of community, like what other people say "Piliin mo ang kasama mo". This semester, I found myself surrounded by

incredible people who shared the same passion for mathematics and learning. My involvement in the UP Mathematics Club has been one of the highlights of my college life. Being elected as the president of the organization for the academic year 2024-2025 is an honor I never imagined. This organization has become my safe space, where like-minded individuals push each other to new heights, share ideas, and motivate one another. It is in this community that I found my true sense of belonging, and I am grateful for the support and encouragement of every member.

None of these experiences would have been possible without the support of the Peace Corps Alumni Foundation for Philippine Development (PCAFPD). The opportunities, the friendships, the lessons, and the growth I've experienced in my studies have all been made possible because of this scholarship. Your unwavering belief in my potential, your generous support, and your commitment to my academic journey have transformed my college experience in ways I could never have imagined.

As I continue to forge ahead, I carry with me the lessons learned this semester—embracing failure, finding strength in community, and always moving forward. I am excited about what lies ahead and will continue striving for excellence in both my academics and leadership.

Thank you, PCAFPD, for believing in me and for making this journey possible.



Scholar Ghio Gatlabayan

2024 Lakan/Lakambini Honor Roll

Lakan (m) and Lakambini (f) are used in the Philippines to refer to those who have achieved the highest rank in an endeavor. We are using the terms here to express our profound gratitude to our major contributors. Those listed below gave \$500 or more in the calendar year 2024. Salamat po!

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Our Scholars say it best.... Salamat Po from a selection of our 2025 Graduates



"I'm truly grateful to the PCAFPD family, especially the board members and sponsors, for giving me the chance to be where I am today. Your support didn't just help me with my education; it gave me hope and confidence when I needed it most. Because of your kindness and belief in me, I was able to chase my dream of becoming a teacher." - Joyce Kimberly Amorgiente, B.S. in Education

"My deepest thanks and gratitude to the PCAFPD for their help and support in making this possible; without their financial assistance, I would not be able to continue my studies in the midst of a pandemic and my family's financial hardships." - Michael Raymundo, B.S. in Accountancy



"I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the PCAFPD reaching out to someone like me who is struggling financially but still wants to pursue their dreams and complete their degree. I appreciate all your help, both technological and financial. Being a member of this incredible family for four years is such an honor. It is my desire and prayer that this foundation will expand and assist many young people in realizing their life goals." - Michelle Decatoria, B.S. in Secondary Education, Cum Laude

"PCAFPD was with me every step of the way. I am forever grateful to the Foundation; to Mr. Roland De Jesus, Mr. Fernando Eco, Ate Hannah, and Ate Rachel, and every donor whose kindness and generosity led me to this path." - Elaine Desoloc, B.S. in Accountancy



"I am incredibly grateful for the support I received from the Peace Corps Alumni Foundation for Philippine Development, which played a crucial role in my journey. Their financial assistance made it possible for me to pursue my passion for teaching and make a meaningful difference in the lives of the students I encountered." - April Joy Villacorte, B.A. Secondary Education & Communication Arts

"The support I've received from PCAFPD has been invaluable. Like a warm, cozy jacket, PCAFPD has provided me with the support and resources needed to navigate the challenges of my academic and volunteer journey. As I approach the end of my psychology degree, I look forward to "relaying this jacket" to another deserving individual, continuing the legacy of helping hands that has been so crucial to my own success." - Mohammad S. Montila, B.S. in Psychology



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