



BALITAAN

Newsletter 82

Spring 2026

Mabilis, Mataas, Matibay – Magkasama

(Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together)

*by Justin Tabor, PCAFPD Board
President*

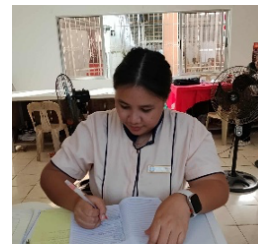
I've borrowed and translated the Olympic motto for this update because the 2025-2026 application year has shown PCAFPD operating at its best.

Our online application process continues to be a success with applicants. It allows intelligent and deserving students throughout the Philippines to access the scholarship program, though not without new logistical challenges. With assistance from the Ituloy Team, PCAFPD board members, and guest evaluators, we processed 1,400 complete applications down to 500 for full review, and then down to 25 selected scholars and 4 wait-listers. One benefit of such a rich pool of applicants is that we are able to choose incredibly inspiring scholars to support. I was paired with former president Paul Aleckson during final selection day, and narrowing our list from 15 finalists to 5 selected scholars was no simple feat. It is a huge joy to select a scholar for PCAFPD support, but it is also a reminder that the

demand for access to affordable education in the Philippines is strong.

Reflecting on the process, I am also proud of the PCAFPD board members who created the tools to make it happen. We are fortunate to have a seasoned board with the talent to build processes, web platforms, and assessment tools that form the foundation of the entire scholarship program. The support of the RPCVs who stepped up to score application packets helped make all of it feel like a true community effort.

I leave this latest selection season knowing that PCAFPD is operating faster, higher, stronger, and together in new and exciting ways. Your continued support, contributions, and energy are what make all of this possible. Maraming salamat!



Photos: Scholars Gabriel Salam (top right), Jan Michael Beliran (top right), and Icy Cate Pampolina (bottom).



"This diploma... is a testament to your transformative impact on my life, a life forever changed by your kindness and belief in me. From the bottom of my heart, thank you." - Risa Rubia, 2026 Graduating Scholar, BS in Civil Engineering

A Seat at the Table as Donors and Scholar Selectors

By Pamela and Eric Melby,
PCAFPD Donors

We were volunteers in Philippines 56 in Iloilo from 1973-75. Eric worked with the Provincial Development staff and Pamela worked in the University of Iloilo library and taught Library Science. As for many PCVs, our assignment was comprised of challenges and adventure.

After our Peace Corps service, we were pleased to discover the PCAFPD scholarship program founded in 1983 by the earliest Philippines RPCVs and staff. We have contributed for many years, first in small amounts, then increasing our donation as our circumstances permitted. We recognize that a university degree offers a life-changing advantage for Filipino students from low-income backgrounds. We know that the program is well-run and have been impressed by the recipient biographies published in the PCAFPD newsletters.

When we were asked this year if we were interested in helping, along with other RPCVs, with the scholar selection we readily agreed.

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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!

We were impressed by the work that went into developing the detailed process. We each reviewed sixteen applications, which took significant time, particularly evaluating the essays. All the applicants had compelling stories about why they wanted to go to university, the financial challenges they faced, and how they hoped to use their education to contribute to Filipino society. Selecting recipients was an incredibly challenging task; the sheer number of high-scoring applicants far exceeded the available awards. Given the clear demand, we decided to increase our annual contribution to help provide for additional scholarships. As word has spread about the scholarships, the volume of applicants has increased substantially, bringing many strong candidates. We feel that supporting the scholarship program is an excellent way to pay forward the benefits we received from our Peace Corps experience in the Philippines.

65 Years of Service: The Peace Corps Legacy at Home and in the Philippines

By Maureen Carroll, Board
Member at Large

On January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy spoke one of the most memorable and stirring inaugural quotes in history: “And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” Within six weeks of the address, Kennedy signed an executive

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order to establish the Peace Corps – an extraordinary opportunity for individual Americans to put his words into action. By the end of that year, the executive order had been supplanted by the actual legislation founding the Peace Corps agency, and 576 Volunteers were at work in eight countries around the world. The start-up was swift and daring, and despite many naysayers at the time, the concept turns out to have been quite sustainable. This year Peace Corps celebrates its 65th anniversary, having sent close to 250,000 Volunteers abroad to 144 countries thus far.

Peace Corps/Philippines shares the honor of celebrating a 65th anniversary. On October 12, 1961, 128 Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Manila. The first Philippines Volunteers were assigned to Negros and the Bicol Region. Within a year, five more groups arrived, culminating in close to 700 Volunteers spread throughout the country. Over the 65 years, the size of the program has varied but the Philippines remains the Peace Corps country that has had the highest number of Volunteers—close to 10,000 in total.

Peace Corps/Philippines figures in another significant way in early Peace Corps history. The Towering Task is the pivotal founding document of Peace Corps. Written as a concept paper to shape the scope and timing of the new effort, The Towering Task argued against a slow and steady approach to start-up, which many were considering. Rather, it argued that a small program could fail as easily as a big one and a small program would make little difference in the world. To illustrate his points, the writer used the Philippines, proposing a program of 5,000 English teachers. Although the illustration was modified considerably in practice, it played a significant part in convincing Director Sargent Shriver and the other agency founders to launch the Peace Corps on a bold scale.



Photo: Arrival of the first PCVs to the Philippines, greeted by the Country Director.

Anniversaries are opportunities to pause and reflect on why we celebrate. The prior longtime association between the US and the Philippines notwithstanding, the Peace Corps brought a new type of positive American presence to the Philippines. Countless lives – both Filipino and American – have been changed for the good by this association. America has been enriched by the development of an internationally informed citizenry. May the Peace Corps and Peace Corps/Philippines continue for another 65 years. Mabuhay!

PCAFPD Remains Financially Strong

By Mike Ollinger, PCAFPD Treasurer

Thanks to your donations last year, PCAFPD will support 25 new scholars next year. That will keep the number of scholars we support at 76. At the beginning of the year, we worried that we might have to reduce the number of scholars we could support because donations in 2024 were well below average. In 2025, however, you made above average donations, allowing PCAFPD to maintain previous levels of scholar support.

Last year's revenues were about \$86,000; the average revenues over the past 4 years were \$76,000. The administrative costs were about \$7,500. Most of those costs are printing and posting costs, but we anticipate that administrative costs will rise next year because of new registration and filing fees in the Philippines.

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
- Dee Teodoro, Cotabato 1964-66
- Rick Zemlin, Davao del Sur 1981-83
- *Paul Aleckson, Romblon 2003-5
- *Terry Sthymmel, Sorsogon 1972-75

*Newest Legacy Circle additions - Salamat po!

From Scholars to Teachers: A Milestone Worth Celebrating

*Prepared by Stefanie Simpson,
Newsletter Editor*

We are delighted to share joyful news from two of our scholars, Johaine Bisaro Deporos and her brother, Walid Bisaro Deporos, both proud alumni of the Foundation.

In a recent message, Johaine wrote, "Today, I officially took my oath as a professional teacher. It was a deeply meaningful ceremony, made even more special because I shared this moment with my brother... who is also a proud former PCAFPD scholar." Both siblings successfully passed the December 2025 Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (LEPT), marking an important milestone in their journeys.

Johaine is now practicing her profession as a teacher at Saint Patrick Math-Sci School located in Davao City, where she describes the experience as "rewarding," allowing her to apply what she learned during her studies.



Photo: Former PCAFPD Scholars
Johaine and Walid Bisaro Deporos

Reflecting on their journey, she shared a message of gratitude that speaks directly to the heart of our mission: “Your unwavering support during our college years didn’t just provide us with an education; it gave us the foundation to reach our dreams. We truly wouldn’t be where we are today without your help.”

As they begin this new chapter, both Johaine and Walid carry forward the values of the Foundation into their classrooms—impacting the next generation of students and communities.

Their story is a powerful reminder that your support does more than fund education—it helps shape futures, families, and communities for years to come.

Scholar Essays

A Turning Point: Growing into the Work of an Economist

Rui Isaac Fernando is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Applied Economics, major in Financial Economics at De La Salle University

My first term of the 2025–2026 academic year felt like a true turning point in my journey at De La Salle University. People often say that the sophomore year—specifically this term—is the hardest part of my program. It wasn’t just about moving up a year; it was about shifting from introductory lessons to the real, difficult work of being an economist. With a course load of Intermediate Microeconomics (ECON231), Intermediate Macroeconomics (ECON241), and Economic Statistics (ECON221)—the gateway to the notoriously difficult Econometrics course—I knew I was in for a challenge. But I welcomed it, eager to finally produce work that goes beyond textbooks and tackles the real-world issues facing our country.

Beyond the technical skills, this term reminded me why I’m studying economics in the first place. In ECON231, we conducted a case study on why the Philippine agricultural industry is losing its productivity. We dug into the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) and how policies on paper often clash with the harsh reality farmers face on the ground. It was a heavy realization that the graphs we draw in class represent real livelihoods. It made me more determined to use what I’m learning to actually advocate for the agricultural sector and address these structural challenges.

My business courses gave me a nice balance to the heavy theory of economics and allowed me to apply things practically. In our Analytics course (DSILYTC), my group analyzed how global oil prices affect Cebu Pacific’s stocks. I’m incredibly proud to share that our paper was selected to be presented at a research conference in Japan this July!

Outside of academics, I’ve stepped up in my extracurriculars as well. I’m currently serving as the Assistant Vice President for the Economics Organization. Organizing our first General Assembly was stressful, but seeing the community come together brought so much joy to a tiring term. I’m also training as a Magistrate for the University Student Government Judiciary. It’s a new world for me, but delving into legal processes and meeting others who are passionate about justice has given me a fresh perspective on what service looks like.

Looking back on the past few months, I’ve realized that Economics isn’t just a subject to me anymore—it’s everything. I’m learning to connect these complex studies to the struggles of the ordinary Filipino, and I realize now that this education gives me a voice to speak for those who might not be heard. It has reaffirmed my purpose: I’m not just here to get a degree; I’m preparing myself to serve.

I honestly couldn't have survived this demanding semester without my support system. I want to say a heartfelt thank you to the Peace Corps Alumni Foundation for Philippine Development (PCAFPD) and its generous donors. The financial assistance you provide lets me breathe a little easier despite the rising costs of university life. Because of your help, I can focus entirely on my studies, my leadership roles, and my goal of becoming an economist who contributes to nation-building. You are investing in my future, and I promise to do my best to make sure that investment pays off for our country.

Finally, no more next semester

Cristine Joy Benitez graduated with her BS degree in Accountancy from Tarlac State University

Four and a half years, eleven semesters, and forty-five months of my academic journey have finally come to an end. It was not easy, but it was absolutely worth it.

Let me begin this essay by sharing how I managed to survive what was arguably the hardest semester for us accountancy students. Our final semester was like an in-house review, in which we took every board exam subject and studied/reviewed all of the topics that would be included in the CPALE. The most fitting word to describe that semester is overwhelming.

During the first few weeks, my classmates and I struggled to figure out how to study effectively because everything was so fast-paced. Topics that once took an entire semester to complete during our first to third year were compressed into just one week. It was overwhelming and undeniably challenging. The experience pushed us to our limits. Day by day, however, we gradually found our rhythm and eventually discovered study methods that worked best for each of us.

Despite the pressure, stress, and self-doubt, this semester became one of my favorites. It was during this time that I realized how capable I truly am; how I was able to accomplish things I once believed were beyond me. Of course, this was not through my own strength alone. It was all because of God. He sustained me throughout my college journey, guiding and carrying me through every challenge.

Over the span of my college life, I was a working student. There were times when I had to go straight to school after a work shift with no sleep at all. There was even a time when I missed a midterm exam because I overslept due to extreme exhaustion from working at a call center. Even with all of these challenges, here I am, set to graduate this January 28. It was truly a whirlwind of experiences, but one that I will always treasure.



Photo:
Graduated scholar
Cristine Joy Benitez

From the bottom of my heart, I extend my sincerest gratitude to PCAFPD. You have no idea how thankful I am for the opportunity you gave me. This scholarship was not merely financial assistance; it was a gateway to a better life.

My family has always struggled financially; we live below the poverty line. Because of this, I have always dreamed of succeeding, not just for myself, but for my family—so we could live with financial stability, peace, and joy. That dream felt shattered when I was not selected for the CHED scholarship. But God had other plans. He led me to your 6

esteemed organization, guided me to your Facebook post, and used PCAFPD as an instrument to help me continue my education. For that, I will be forever grateful. Please know that your initiative truly changes lives. As the eldest among five siblings, I carry the responsibility of guiding them toward the right path. Now that I have graduated, my family holds a stronger chance at a more comfortable and hopeful future.

Thank you so much.

Clarity

Rica May Simbulan is pursuing a BS in Computer Science at Universidad de Dagupan

This semester was demanding in a steady and practical way. While examinations remained part of academic evaluation, the most meaningful learning occurred through responsibility and sustained work. Deadlines, coordination, and accountability to others shaped how I managed tasks and decisions throughout the term.

I served as Head of Documentation for Hiyas ng Universidad de Dagupan. The role involved handling documentation before, during, and after the event. This role showed how consistency and accuracy affect collective outcomes and how trust is built through reliable performance. I also assisted during the pageant proper, working near the panel of judges. This allowed me to observe decision-making under time pressure and public scrutiny.

During the final stage of finishing the system and preparing for my thesis defense, I went through a deep personal loss. Within two months, I lost two of my closest friends. This is a kind of pain I would never wish on anyone. It happened at the same time my academic work was at its heaviest, when I was expected to keep going even though

everything felt overwhelming. Until now, I still find myself asking “why”. The pain is too much in the absence of clarity.

Finishing the system and getting ready for the defense became about endurance rather than progress. I continued to meet my responsibilities while carrying the loss with me. Even now, moving forward is difficult. Grief does not follow timelines, and healing does not come with clear steps.

As I near the end of my studies, I have learned that life can be painful and hopeful at the same time. I may not understand the reason behind these losses yet, but I choose to keep living, learning, and building. I trust that clarity will come when it is meant to, and until then, I will hold on and continue forward.



Photo: Scholar Rica May Simbulan with pageant contestant (left) and peers (right).

Grateful for the Grind

John Paul Balines is pursuing a BS in Tourism Management at the University of The Philippines

If I had to pick just one word to describe my life over the last few months, it would definitely be hustle. As I get closer to graduation, the reality of the real world has started hitting me pretty hard. The pressure is officially on because I realized pretty early in the semester that just passing my classes was not going to cut it anymore. I did not want to simply walk away with a degree. I wanted to make sure that when I step out of this university, I have the skills and the 7

credentials to actually succeed out there. So, I decided to make my life a little crazy and loaded up my plate way more than usual. On top of my regular heavy hitters like Accounting and Law, I decided it was a great idea to enroll in a bunch of professional certification courses. If you have ever tried to memorize legal codes while simultaneously balancing complex accounting sheets, you know exactly how much that drains your brain. It is honestly like trying to speak two different languages at the same time, and shifting between those gears every single day was a huge challenge.

I also joined a new organization because I really felt like I needed to grow my social and leadership skills too. My days basically turned into a nonstop marathon where I was moving from heavy lectures straight into organization meetings, and then immediately heading out for community visits for my electives. Those community visits were actually a weird mix of emotions for me. On the one hand, they were actually the highlight of my semester and were so incredibly fulfilling, but physically exhausting. What made things even trickier was that I often felt like I was tackling this whole semester all alone. You know how group projects can be. My groupmates were not always responsive, and my professors were super hard to reach, so I ended up having to teach myself a lot of the material. It was pretty lonely at times, and there were definitely moments where I felt like I was drowning in the workload with no one around whom I could turn to. But in those moments where I was stressing out, I kept thinking about my scholarship. I am going to be honest, without this support, I do not think I could have pushed through. Financial stress is such a heavy weight to carry, and having that lifted off my shoulders was a total game changer because it allowed me

to pour all my energy into studying and growing instead of worrying about my daily expenses for education.

The wildest part of all of this is that despite everything, I actually still managed to get good grades. I have to admit that this time around, I was not exactly expecting really straight unos for the semester. Given how heavy the workload was and how much I was juggling between the certifications and the organization work, I had kind of lowered my expectations just a little bit to keep myself sane. I honestly thought I was just going to scrape by, but I ended up achieving way more than I did expect. Seeing those high marks after such a draining few months is definitely a huge thing to be thankful for, and it proves that the hard work really did pay off.



And the scholarship was basically my safety net. Every time I felt like giving up, I remembered that I had this amazing support system rooting for me, and it gave me the second wind I needed to keep going. Looking back now, I realized this semester taught me that I am a lot tougher than I thought. I have learned how to manage my time the hard way, how to be a self-starter, and how to keep my eyes on the prize even when things get overwhelming. I am so incredibly grateful for the help you have given me, and I am ready to take on this next semester with the same heart and the same hustle.

Words of gratitude from some of our graduating scholars:



PCAFPD is more than a sponsor of education; it is an inspiration. PCAFPD played a crucial role in my college journey, turning moments of uncertainty into opportunities for success and growth. I will always hold deep gratitude for PCAFPD, for they did not just fund my education, but they also helped shape my future. - Jeniefer Marcelo, BS Secondary Education in Mathematics

None of this would have been possible without the support of the Peace Corps Alumni Foundation for Philippine Development (PCAFPD). Their scholarship gave me the opportunity to pursue my education with less financial burden, allowing me to focus on my goals and give my best in everything I do. Their belief in my potential became one of my driving forces throughout this journey. For that, I will always be deeply grateful and forever thankful. - Jerico James Viteno, BS Computer Engineering



I want to express my deepest gratitude to The Peace Corps Alumni Foundation for Philippine Development, for supporting me financially so I can pursue college in a course that I want. The ITULOY Team that provided guidance and unwavering support to my scholarship needs. - Jhonn Raphael Ramilo, BS Mechanical Engineering

2025 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 2025. Salamat po!

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Many thanks to those listed below who made gifts to PCAFPD between Oct 2025 and April 2026. IHO and IMO are gifts In Honor Of or In Memory Of the person or group indicated.

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¹⁴ IMO your friends in Group 134

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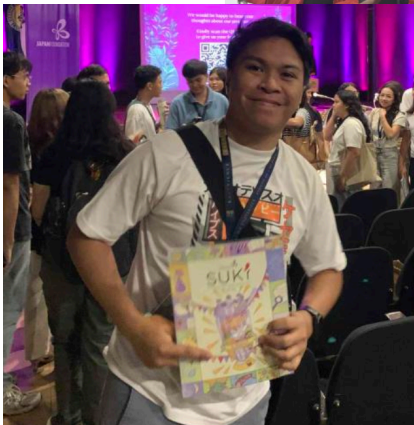
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