



BRILLANTES CAMINANTES GUANAJUATO

Supporting the Future Through Education

Newsletter

May 2020

Brillantes Caminantes in the Time of COVID-19

The Students

Who would have thought that life could change so rapidly for our students? In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the state of Guanajuato closed all schools and universities in the middle of March, with the plan of resuming in vivo classes April 30, the end of the Easter vacation. As expected, that intention proved overly optimistic.

All universities are continuing with on-line classes only. We surveyed all our students, asking for information on academic matters and to make sure they're safe and healthy. The students report that they will get credit for the semester/trimester, and those who are due to graduate will graduate on time.

Like the rest of the population, they have had to adjust to the new situation—staying home all day, keeping up with their course work, maintaining contact with their professors, and handing in homework and projects through e-mail. They are facing these challenges with great courage and good humor.



Guanajuato empty during “Stay at Casa” order

Photo by: Manuela Thies Garcia

One student wrote, “The first days were very hard. I suffered from anxiety due to the enormous amount of work I have to complete from home.” She felt sad and depressed about the need to pause her thesis project that involves visiting companies to collect data. But now, with the support of her professor, she is using this time to work on the part of her thesis that does not require the data.

Although many students are experiencing sadness and anxiety because of their isolation from friends and the economic difficulties their families and the whole population are confronting, they are acting responsibly, careful not to expose themselves and their families to the virus.

We are happy to report that they all remain healthy.

The Organization

The Brillantes Caminantes board of directors started meeting weekly via Zoom at the beginning of April, in order to stay abreast of developments related to what schools/universities are doing about re-opening and how the closures have been affecting our students.

The board also had to decide how to proceed with the 33 students (a record number) applying for scholarships for the 2020-21 academic year. Before pandemic measures were put in place, the admissions committee had met to review the applications. Of the 33, nineteen were determined eligible for personal interviews—thirteen graduating from high school, and six who were in their first year of university.

Because of the restrictions on personal contact, the board decided to cancel both the personal (April 25) and home (month of June) interviews. All of the students graduating from high school are applying to different programs in the University of Guanajuato, which currently plans to administer entrance exams on June 17, with results to be available on July 4. Once we know which students have been admitted to their programs, we will conduct one-on-one video interviews with those students only. At this time, we doubt that it will be safe to conduct the home visits, so the admissions committee will determine who receives a scholarship based on the written application and individual interview only. If we are unable to fill our spots with new high school graduates, we will then consider the six students currently in university.

Monthly student and member meetings have been cancelled since April, and are unlikely to resume before August—if then. We are focused on staying safe while doing our best to provide continuity—both as it applies to our current students and to the future of new scholarship students.

Student Updates

Ariana Michell Ramos Rocha



During my professional training as a teacher of Spanish as a second language, I have learned a lot and I have grown professionally and personally. I am very thankful for the support of marvelous people who have helped me along the way. Six months ago, I traveled for the first time outside of Mexico when I attended an academic conference in Portugal. I was so motivated by that experience that I wanted to try again to travel abroad. I sent another research proposal to another conference, this time in Granada, Spain and it was accepted.

I have had some different experiences this last year, some marvelous ones and some not so marvelous, but from each I have learned a lot and they have helped me to grow. I hope that next year will be as enriching as last and I will continue to work hard in order to finish my studies successfully.

Consuelo Ivonne Aguayo Lona

As part of the activities required by my program, I was working from January 6 to January 24 in Fresnillo, Zacatecas, in the Fresnillo Mine. I completed various projects that, as a geologist, I need to understand for the mining industry. I learned about the mine's process. It was a very good experience since it was the first time that I actually entered a mine and I descended to a great depth. I returned full of new knowledge, experiences and friendships.



Erika Macedo Tovar

In the last weeks, my life has taken a 180 degree turn. In the last six months of last year I was having a serious emotional crisis, but now I feel completely renewed as I realize that I have succeeded in making an impact at the university where I study.

I have been named president of a group called AVILIV (agents of change for a life free of violence). Our collective gives workshops to students on the theme of violence against women with the objective of changing attitudes of young people and trying to eliminate prejudices based on gender. Our principal goal is to create respect and to see each other not as men or women, but as human beings. On the 4th and 11th of February, we had our first workshops of the year when we visited the SABES prepa school in Leon.



I was also successful in a competition offered by the municipality of Leon to do volunteer work in a foreign country this summer.

I also participate in a group called CouMx which works on environmental education by raising consciousness about our habits of consumption through workshops and producing recycled notebooks.

Currently I am working on a proposal for my university group to attend a conference in Guadalajara in August. Last semester I managed to get funding for my group to go to a conference in Querétaro.

Ariadna Aimee Rodriguez Lopez



One of my goals since beginning my studies was to graduate in the allotted four years of my program. I was somewhat worried that I would not be able to complete my professional service in that time period, but thanks to the recommendation of a friend and of a graduate from my program, I was able to contact the director of the Centro Cultural México Plaza in León. There I presented a project that I had conceived last year dealing with Mexican cultural immersion for foreigners, specifically Japanese, in the municipality of Leon. My project was accepted, and currently I am working on planning activities to complete the first part, which requires demographic research and a market study. I am hoping to begin this research during the second semester of this academic year. I am very happy to be able to gain experience working on my own project.

Natalia Acevedo

During the month of January, on the 20th and 21st, thanks to the support provided by Brillantes Caminantes and my parents, I had the opportunity to attend an academic exchange in the city of Puebla, where we shared experiences with the students of the Benemérito Instituto Normal de Puebla (BINE). While there, I learned how their degree and practicum process is carried out. On the second day of the program, we attended a primary school in the state, where I was impressed by the practice teaching, because the structure of their planning and their work in the classroom is very different from my experience. The children are more autonomous and independent, something that we don't see in the primary school children of this city, since they are more accustomed to being under the care of the teacher.



It enriched me culturally and socially to have the opportunity to know another state, and also geographically as I had the opportunity to appreciate its various volcanoes, which made a great impression on me.

Leticia Caudillo



Leti, a fifth-year veterinary student at UG, is spending her final semester at a veterinary hospital in Leon to gain practical small animal (pets) veterinary experience and to strengthen her diagnostic and surgical skills. She found this clinic herself and made all the arrangements to intern there.

During her first weeks she had already inserted cannulas for IV solutions and medications, administered injections for vaccines and medications, and collected needle biopsies of suspected tumors, as well as blood, urine, and fecal specimens for laboratory tests. During the semester she has been given a lot of responsibility for the care of animal inpatients in the hospital. She has also gained experience in canine ophthalmology.

BC's Reading Circle



Each year at the January student meeting, Brillantes Caminantes hosts a Three Kings Day party where we eat the traditional rosca and distribute presents to the students. Four years ago, we decided to give each student a book and thus began our reading circle. At the beginning of each monthly meeting, a student gives a book report and offers to exchange his/her book with another student. Our hope to instill the pleasure of reading seems to have been realized and it has been a great pleasure to listen to the enthusiastic monthly reports and to witness the eager exchanges of books.

The books are contemporary and classics.

Students have read and enjoyed Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*; *Madam Bovary*; *Eat, Pray, Love*; *Don Quixote*; *The Three Musketeers*; *100 Years of Solitude*; *Like Water for Chocolate*; the *Count of Monte Cristo*; and many, many more.

The Stay-at-Home Spring Gala was a fabulous success!



We would like to think we were being incredibly prescient when we planned this event for the last two weeks of March, but it was just dumb luck on our part! Participants stayed home in droves, supporting Brillantes Caminantes while maintaining social distance and proper hygiene. With the addition of the PayPal option, people north of the border were able to add their support, too. As a result, the event yielded more than \$3000 USD (approximately \$70,000 MXN)—the equivalent of a year's scholarship for two students.

Student Strike: A life-changing experience



We asked Jennifer Rodriguez Vega, a BC student who was active in the student strike at the University of Guanajuato last December, to share some thoughts about that experience.

The UG student strike which began on December 4th, without a doubt, has been one of the events that most marked my life. I study within the most politically active division in the University of Guanajuato, so I lived the whole process intensely. Despite the fact that it seemed at first that all the students were in opposition to the professors, academics and administrators, it was surprising the support we received from many teachers and academics. That made me realize that, in effect, unity is strength.

The process of recognizing the reality within the institution was difficult; that is, society did not want to admit that the university really was not providing a safe environment for students, and that it also denigrated them. This process was also difficult for me, especially on an emotional

level. It is really hard to assimilate, in such a short time, all the cases of harassment and abuse within the university, including gender-based violence, which was such a part of daily life that it had become normalized. Because of this, the strength and impact of feminist contingents in the state have grown considerably, as reflected in the march that took place on March 8 in the city. Although that was not a student movement, students comprised a large portion of it.

Another point is the importance of organization and unity. Since the demonstrations, the students have become so united that we already form a small society within the university, where we all—including academics—ensure the safety of each other. This is where the political inclinations of the left stand out—not so much socialist, but progressive, so that each student is sure that full recognition of their rights will be demanded and that, always, they will have sufficient resources to take full advantage of university life.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that such was the impact that this event had on our lives that now all of us are more conscious of our rights in our daily lives, both with our schoolmates and with external friends and family. Personally, I have decided to dedicate my life to the fight for the fulfillment of the rights of women and students in vulnerable situations. I intend to specialize in feminist political theory in order to apply effective change in Mexican society regarding gender awareness within schools and homes. I am sure that the generation that participated in the strike of December 4, 2019, will generate a change in the society of Guanajuato and Mexico.

Jennifer Rodriguez Vega

Donations Via PayPal



BC is now able to accept support via PayPal. You can send a one-time donation, or you can set up a recurring monthly payment. Simply go to the Donations page of the Brillantes Caminantes website (<https://www.brillantescaminantes.org/donaciones-donations>), and press the PayPal button that will link you to the PayPal system. (If you don't already have a PayPal account, go to <http://www.paypal.com> and follow the directions for establishing one.) its easy!

Student Goodbyes

During their years of study, Brillantes Caminantes students form a special bond with their fellow students, their mentors, and members of the BC community. Their “good-bye” comments are a testimony to the strength of that bond and the success of the organization in supporting young people who will make a valuable contribution to their country and their communities.

Daniel says goodbye



I was born on February 10th, 1997 and I have always lived in a part of Guanajuato called La Trinidad. Ever since grade school, I have had objectives clearly in mind, as I saw my siblings limited in their studies for lack of resources. It was then that I decided that one of my objectives was to find the tools necessary to finish my studies successfully.

Initially, like all youngsters, I selected first one career, then another and another, until I selected Law. I was very nervous at the beginning, but, step by step, I discovered that this was my passion. My interest in the law increased as I progressed in my studies.

During my studies, I worked to pay for many of my costs, until, one day, there in front of me, was a Brillantes Caminantes poster. This is when BC entered my life and inspired me to put out more energy, and, above all, to not give up. The organization supported me economically, but it was also a very important pillar, offering friendship, love, and time. This is something which cannot be repaid, but can be appreciated.

My decision to study was not an obligation, but a choice, and I am very happy with it. Brillantes is one more family that I now have, and I give it very sincere thanks for assisting me on this path and in this stage of my life.

Thanks to Jorge Castelazo for listening to me, encouraging me, giving me his time. It is something which I cannot repay. And thank you to Brillantes Caminantes for having faith in me and giving me this opportunity.

At this point, I have concluded my university studies, but I look ahead. I will continue to work where I am at the moment. Later, I will seek the opportunity to work in a government position, and continue on to a graduate degree or specialty.

Juan Daniel García Torres

Abi says goodbye

Goodbyes are so difficult. I would rather just say "see you later". I will be eternally grateful to all of you, the family of Brillantes Caminantes. You taught me to be a solid person, a self-assured person, a professional in my field.

Many people say that economics is not important, but of course, it's important. It's very important. Thanks to your economic, emotional, and academic support, I was able to finish my university studies. There were times when I was about to collapse because I didn't have enough money to continue with my studies and you supported me. I was about to give in, and you took me by the hand and walked with me step by step.

The Brillantes Caminantes family was there in my best and worst times, you supported my professional projects and gave me the opportunity to continue growing. You never judged me and were unconditionally by my side. As I said before, saying goodbye is very sad, but I will be there for you as you were there for me.

Thank you for everything. My way of thanking you for your support will be to be an excellent mental health professional, proud of what I do, and always remembering you. You, Brillantes Caminantes were my greatest support. With you I found friends, companions, colleagues and most of all, a united family. Thank you for everything. I wish you the best.

Andrea Abigail Rochas Báez.



Luzma says goodbye



First I want to extend my sincerest thanks to all of members of Brillantes Caminantes for being part of my personal and professional development. I feel so proud of belonging to such a great organization and to be one of so many scholarship recipients. Thank you BC for the unconditional support that was never denied me—support for dental visits, the gift of a laptop computer, and support for my graduation expenses.

I learned something new at each monthly meeting. I love you, BC and you can always count on me for any nursing attention you might need. I will always be there for you. If you want me to come to talk to students about health issues I would be happy to do so.

Here are some of the accomplishments that I achieved thanks to BC:

- I visited Texas to learn about working methods at the Universities of Houston and San Antonio. I went to Ashland, Oregon as an exchange student and worked at the ASANTE Hospital, the Welles Center Clinic and various other institutions.
- I took paramedic courses with the Red Cross.
- I passed my EGEL Ceneval exam, which is the requirement I will need to earn my nursing title.

Luz Maria Gonzales

Donate directly to BC from a traditional IRA and save on your U.S. taxes

If you're a retiree over age 70½, you must start taking [required minimum distributions](#) (RMDs) from your traditional IRA every year. If you make what's called a qualified charitable distribution, you can donate all or a portion of your RMD, up to \$100,000 a year, directly to charity and not have to pay taxes on it. Thus, a taxpayer in the 22 percent bracket who donates a \$5,000 RMD to charity saves \$1,100 in federal income taxes. Go to <https://www.aarp.org/money/taxes/info-2019/charitable-gifts-new-tax-law.html> for further information.

Did you know?

- We never commit to new students until we know that we will have the required funding to support them for the duration of their academic careers.
- You can pledge to be a long-term donor, helping us ensure that we have a continuous and reliable source of funds.
- Full sponsorship of a student costs \$6000 USD or \$1,200 USD for five years; half sponsorship costs \$3000 USD, or \$600 USD for five years
- Donations of any amount and duration are, of course, welcome—no matter how old you are!

More information on donating and making an ongoing pledge at <https://www.brillantescaminantes.org/donaciones-donations>

Our Board of Directors

A.J. Buckingham, President * David Spencer, Vice President * Anna Adams, Secretary Jorge Castelazo, Treasurer * Ingrid Barradas Bribiesca, Coordinator of Student Affairs

The Brillantes Caminantes board of directors and members' meetings are cancelled for the foreseeable future.

Thanks!

- To the many students who contributed to this issue of the Newsletter.
- To writers: Anna Adams, AJ Buckingham, and David Spencer.
- To translator: Anna Adams

Editor: Paula Dunning

Design: Agota Page

We hope you enjoyed reading this issue of our newsletter, but if you don't want to receive it in the future, e-mail brillantescaminantes@gmail.com with **Unsubscribe** in the subject line.