



Monteverde Friends School/Escuela de los Amigos

May 2021

www.mfschool.org

Just When We Thought the Pandemic Was Almost Over ...

A sampling of headlines from the

**Tico Times newspaper,
May 12-17, 2021**

**[EDUCATION MINISTRY TO SUSPEND
SCHOOL UNTIL JULY](#)**

**[COSTA RICA'S DEADLIEST DAY: 32
NEW DEATHS RELATED TO COVID
19](#)**

**[COSTA RICA SURPASSES
1 MILLION VACCINE DOSES
ADMINISTERED](#)**

For most of the pandemic, Costa Rica has done better than most countries. The national government acted quickly early on to impose stay-at-home orders, limit driving to certain days based on the last digit of license plates, closed schools or make them virtual, and limit business hours. There were high levels of cooperation with these orders. Even as these restrictions were relaxed some over time, infection rates remained relatively low.

By late March and early April, the country of 5 million people was seeing fewer than 500 cases per day. Vaccines were being distributed by the national health system beginning with the elderly and moving down in age groups. We thought we were out of the woods.

For reasons not well understood -- loosened restrictions? COVID variants? -- a new spike began in mid-April. By May, new cases per day skyrocketed to higher levels than at any other time in the past year, reaching more than 3,000 per day in a recent week. Hospitals are at capacity. As we write this, the national Ministry of Education has closed all public schools -- both in-person and virtual -- in the middle of their school year.

To our knowledge, there has not been a single transmission of COVID within our in-person classes. More and more, though, families have called to notify us that they have to quarantine due to a possible exposure. Then the grade that the family's student is in (or at times the whole school, if the family has multiple children in the school) would have to go virtual and teacher schedules would have to be reshuffled. As this became a near-daily event, it became unmanageable. And so the whole school had to go to all virtual classes for our last two weeks -- just when graduating students want to be together before they part!

But somehow, with a huge amount of help from our supporters, we have made it through this year. We will make it through the summer and begin a new school year in August. We don't know what that new year will look like -- in-person? Hybrid? Virtual? One campus or two? -- but this year has taught us that we will, with your help, be able to step up to the challenge.

[Plant trees. Support MFS. Build Resilience.](#)

Last year donors, families and the [Monteverde Institute](#) united to plant over 15,000 trees in the Monteverde region. Local families got outside, learned about reforestation, and their pay was applied to their child's MFS tuition. The Institute got the help it needed to get trees planted. The school generated much needed income.

[Click Here](#) to help make it happen again this year!



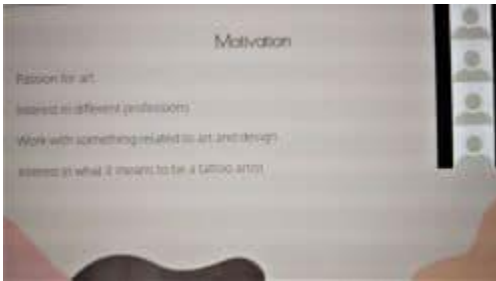
Our Graduates' Plans: A Key Measure for Our School

What better measure is there for the effectiveness of our school than what our graduates are able to do after they graduate? Most Costa Ricans complete school after the 11th grade, but those hoping to go to an international college go on to 12th grade. Here are profiles of our graduating 12th graders and their plans for the future. So that you can see each of them in action, we've included links to their presentations of their senior projects.

Two themes have emerged in talking with those seniors -- that it is much easier to get accepted at an international college than it is to get the extensive scholarships needed to attend those schools; and with encouragement from MFS to choose their own paths, our students are definitely finding different directions to pursue. Here are their stories.

María Paula Vargas Vega

Click below to see MP in action presenting her project on the art and business of tattooing



So many things have come together for María Paula (or MP as she is known) -- her love of building physical things like projects for school. Being drawn to both art and to math and science, her admitted perfectionism, the semester she spent as an exchange student, living with a host family in Denver, CO, her academic excellence and a Career Fair she attended at MFS about a year ago.

She was thinking that she wanted to be an engineer, and had a good talk with an engineer at the Career Fair. But then she met an architect at the next table -- she was fascinated. She spent close to an hour talking with that architect, and she knew what career she wanted. As MP puts it, "I was mesmerized."

And now, she has taken a huge step in realizing her dream: she has been accepted to the University of Colorado's School of Architecture and Planning! But one major snag arose: something had gone wrong with the Internet submission of her scholarship application to help cover the very high tuition for out-of-state students.

Then another thing came together. Heather Ridge, a teacher from Boulder, CO, a member of the Boulder Friends Meeting and familiar with CU happened to visit and tour the MFS campus the same week of MP's acceptance. We introduced her to MP and they have worked together on a plan for how MP can become a student at CU.

With Heather's invaluable help, they've worked out a plan where MP will take a gap year, move to Denver, and live with the host family she stayed with previously while she establishes in-state residency to qualify for much lower tuition. During the year, she will attend a community college to earn some credits that she can transfer and work to cover her expenses, while also applying for a variety of scholarship opportunities.

We look forward to an amazing architecture career for MP!

Eleanor Ann Gabrielson

Taking a different path, Ellie sees both high school and college as opportunities to explore different careers rather than focusing on just one. She took advantage of MFS's policy of allowing 12th graders to design their own curriculum for their final year, typically to include an internship.

Click below for Ellie's presentation:

Ellie used part of her year to explore working directly with rescue animals at the [Natuwa Wildlife Sanctuary](#). She loved the hands-on experience with animals like macaws and sloths. Never had she imagined, though, how much time caretakers spend cutting up fruit and cleaning out animal enclosures!



After living in the beauty of Monteverde nature since 8th

grade, Ellie is clear that she wants a career in something environmental. Right now, marine biology comes to the top of the list, but for Ellie, that is just one of the areas she wants to explore. The question was, what college would best lend itself to that sort of exploration?

Ellie had never even heard of the College of the Atlantic (COA) until her MFS English Literature teacher Daniel Tyx, who is helping students apply to college, ran across a mention of the school. As Ellie says, "The College of the Atlantic started at the bottom of my wish list, but the more I looked at it, the more I liked it -- and it became my first choice."

COA introduces itself saying, "At COA you hold in your own hands the freedom, and responsibility, of [building your educational path](#). Each student designs his or her own course of study in [human ecology](#)—an exploration of the relationships between humans and their natural, cultural, and built environments."

What a perfect fit! And then, to Ellie's credit for her accomplishments, and to make her attendance possible, COA not only accepted her, they awarded her a full, 4-year scholarship. She'll be attending and adjusting to a "big" school -- at 350 students, about 3 times as large as MFS -- and college studies, but she and her family are more than delighted. As Ellie heads for school in Maine (coincidentally not far from where she grew up), she looks forward to finding a loving and supportive community like what she found at MFS.

Anthony Mauricio Porras Anchía

Click below for Thony's Project Presentation

Two of Thony's cousins have inspired him to consider two different career opportunities. At first glance they would seem to lead in opposite directions -- one cousin is a bartender and the other is a computer engineer.



Since Thony's interest in bartending leans toward the mixology elements, there actually may be something in common: What are the parts you have to mix, whether to make a satisfying drink, or what are the computer or program parts you put together to address a particular need? Each has the attraction of experimentation with parts that can be mixed together to see what they create -- whether disaster or breakthrough!

As Thony considers these two different paths, he is still exploring college and training opportunities, whether in the US, or here, in Costa Rica. Each of the two paths offers different programs to pursue. For bartending, it could be as little as a few weeks of bartending school, then off to work -- a much needed skill given Monteverde's many hotels and restaurants for international tourists -- or it could mean a hospitality major in college. Computer engineering could involve more limited training in a particular area, or more advanced undergraduate or graduate training at a university.

Fortunately, Thony also has a passion that may help if he needs a scholarship: playing soccer. He has played on soccer teams for 10 years, including some prize-winning teams. As Thony puts it, "I love how I feel when I touch a

soccer ball. It is a feeling of all the stress going out of me."

Along the same lines, what Thony says he will carry with him from his 15 years at MFS -- pre-kindergarten through 12th grade -- is how he learned to sit in silence in the MFS Mid-week Meeting for Worship, in the manner of Quakers. It took a long time, until 10th grade, to be willing to sit still, to settle into the silence, to let go of to-do lists, studies, and hassles and settle into reflection. He likes that MFS gives students that space and that practice, and hopes to carry that into his adulthood.

Melanie Fabiana García Quesada

Like Thony, Melanie has two distinct areas of interest: artistic design and psychology. Her senior project exemplified her interest in the arts. She and two other students prepared a mosaic that is now installed in downtown Santa Elena (see our story in last month's [newsletter](#)). But she has already seen psychology in action in her community and in schools, and how much it can help people -- and she would love to be able to offer such help. She envisions a career as perhaps a school counselor.

Melanie dreamt of attending a college in the United States. She was even accepted to [Suffolk University](#) in Boston, MA. Sadly, she has not been able to put

together enough financial support and scholarships to attend. Instead, she is now studying for needed entrance exams for Costa Rican universities. Thankfully, she has about eight months to take the exams, submit applications, select a college and start attending. Schools here run on a February through November schedule. She is looking forward to starting college in 2022!

As her senior year at MFS comes to a close, she reflects on her time at MFS. She transferred from a nearby private school to MFS in the 8th grade, at the same time that Ellie entered. While she was nervous starting at a whole new school at that age, she was ever so grateful to find a welcoming community. She now counts friendships at the top of her list of things she will remember about MFS. She is also grateful for the confidence she has gained from her years at MFS.

We look forward to Melanie's success in a Costa Rican university, and to the help she will offer if she follows her dreams to work in psychology.

Click below to learn all about the mosaic project



The Monteverde economy and our school families continue to suffer. We still need your support to keep the school not just in operation but able to deliver the high quality, values-driven education MFS is well known for.

Through partner organizations we are able to accept tax-deductible donations from Canada, the US, and Costa Rica.

We hope you'll click below to find your best option to help us.

