

Brillantes Caminantes A.C.

2019 Annual Report

Board of directors update:

The following BC members were elected to board positions at the annual meeting in February 2019.

- AJ Buckingham, President, has been involved with BC since 2014, including serving as vice president from 2016-18. She is a clinical psychologist who lived and worked in Chicago before moving to Guanajuato in 2014. Her work history includes 14 years as a director in a large social service agency that served people who were homeless and refugees.
- David Spencer, Vice President, moved to Guanajuato from Salt Lake City in 2018. He is bilingual, having spent his youth in the Mormon Colonies in Chihuahua, as well as living and working in Barcelona for a number of years. He has a professional background that extends from office management to acting in both drama and musical theater.
- Anna Adams, Secretary, has lived in Guanajuato since 2007. She is a founding member of BC and previously served as president. She retired as a professor of Latin American history at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania, where she taught the colonial and modern history of Latin America, women's history, and Latin history and where she published her research on non-Catholic religious communities in Latin America.
- Jorge Castelazo, Treasurer, moved permanently to Guanajuato in 2015. He worked as a librarian in a large research library in Boston for many years, before switching to mainframe computers, where he specialized in systems operation, network, and data security. He is bilingual. His father was born in Guanajuato, his mother was born in Mexico City, and he was born in Los Angeles.
- Ingrid Barradas Bribiesca, Member-at-Large, moved from Germany to Guanajuato in 1986. Since then she has worked at the University of Guanajuato, teaching courses that range from intercultural communication and cultural tourism to research methodology and business and organizational communication. She currently coordinates the Internationalization of the Division of Economic and Administrative Sciences. Ingrid speaks German, Spanish and English and has been involved with BC since 2018.

In accordance with our bylaws, the following board members will be up for re-election at the annual meeting on February 3, 2020.

- Anna Adams, Secretary, served one year; must be re-elected, as the organization's bylaws stipulate that the secretary is elected in even-numbered years.
- Ingrid Barradas, Vocal, currently serves a one-year term as vocal.

Both are running unopposed.

Student update:

We accepted seven new students for the 2019-20 academic year. Three began their studies in August 2019, all at the Universidad de Guanajuato:

- Juan Manuel Nieto López is studying pharmacological biochemistry.
- Jennifer Rodríguez Vega is studying political science..
- Jorge Humberto Martínez González is enrolled in the mathematics program. .

The others had already started their university careers:

- Araceli Lona Garcia is in her second year at the University of Guanajuato in industrial relations.
- Natalia Itzel Acevedo Alvarez is studying to be a primary school teacher at Benemerita y Centenaria Escuela Normal Oficial de Guanajuato and is in her third year.

- Dulce María Molina Frías is in her third year at the Instituto Universitario del Centro de México, where she is studying social psychology.
- Ariadna Aimee Rodríguez López is in her third year at the University of Guanajuato in the field of culture and art. She is our first student to pursue a career in the humanities.

The number of students we support has more than doubled in the last five years—from 12 in 2014 to 26 for the 2019-20 academic year.

We congratulate our 2019 graduates:

- Sandra Cecilia García Gutiérrez received a law degree from the Universidad de León in May and is now working in the Ministerio Público.
- Maria Margarita Lozano graduated with a degree in educational psychology from the Instituto Universitario de Centro de México.
- Juan Daniel Correa finished his medical studies at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana and continues his post graduate internship with a BC scholarship.

Current and graduated students have received many awards and honors. Our 2019 newsletters (available on the [Brillantes Caminantes website](#)) highlight many of these.

Regretfully, in August we had to terminate a student scholarship due to poor grades, not meeting with his mentor, and not attending student meetings. This led to the development of a policy and related procedures that we can implement as soon as a student appears to be at risk for losing his or her scholarship. The policy was approved in a member meeting in October.

This past spring, when the Foro Inundacion suddenly closed its doors, we moved our student meetings to the Foro Cultural 81 on Positos, thanks to the generosity of Ed O'Connor and Sal Liriani. The meetings are held in the second-floor auditorium; our August meeting, when we welcomed new students (and many of their parents) concluded with refreshments on the rooftop garden overlooking the city.

Accomplishments

The board inherited a vibrant and growing organization with a healthy financial surplus—the result of very conservative budgeting during our early years. As a result:

- This past May we voted to increase the annual scholarship to \$26,000 MXN for 2019-20.
- Additionally, we now pay the fees for up to three class registrations per year (in the past we funded two, even though some universities required three).
- Members also voted to pay the full cost of *titulacion*—a post-graduation requirement that can be quite costly and gives a student the final professional credential needed to get a good job.
- We added the cost of installing internet access in a student's home to the list of allowable expenses we will support.

Other student-related tasks have been reassigned, streamlined or improved:

- The vice president took on the task of screening and coordinating student requests for extra financial support related to health and academic needs.
- The practice of providing an individual mentor for each student (coordinated by BC member Cathy Lehman) is working well. Three mentors new to the association (Deb Lander, Rowena Cananay-Heck, and Donna Leffel) agreed to volunteer their time for the current academic year, as did BC member Celise Ingram.
- A monthly report form for mentors was put into place.
- We developed guidelines related to lateness and absence at monthly student meetings and incorporated them into the student contract.

- BC member Pam Naessig agreed to coordinate the monthly student meeting, ensuring that the space is reserved and refreshments organized in advance.
- All student requests for support for extra academic and health expenses are sent to the vice president to be approved and sent to the treasurer for payment
- A policy for student requests for money was implemented: it allows the VP to approve any request up to \$5000 mxn, as long as the mentor has also approved it and established a timeline for disbursing funds.
- The member-at-large now collects student grades and monitors attendance at the student meetings.
- The member-at-large is also responsible for developing programming for the student meetings.

Fundraising

BC had two successful fundraising events in 2019. Our spring fundraiser featured Ecos de Mina in a night of flamenco, tapas, and wine. “Un angelito muy diablo,” our sixth annual Christmas Pastorela, was written and directed by Juan Jose Prado, assisted by BC member Silvia Salas. The latter also included the auctioning of a vintage platter made in the workshop of Gorky Gonzalez and painted by the artist Carmen Parra. The platter was contributed by Leonor Parra, a generous friend of BC; Xochitl Tortolero contributed her spacious courtyard for both events.

Pledges and donations from members of the Guanajuato community and their families and friends continue to sustain Brillantes Caminantes and its mission, as reflected in the year-end financial report. We now receive donations through PayPal and Network for Good (which manages Facebook fundraisers). We thank Kay Curtis for inviting her friends and family to donate for her birthday through a post on Facebook.

Newsletter

Constance La Lena retired as editor of the newsletter after three years of service. BC members Paula Dunning and Agota Page volunteered to take it over, with Paula managing the editorial side and Agota in charge of the layout and emailing. We will now publish three times a year instead of four.

It was also decided to have separate English and Spanish newsletters. Using a new system, Agota will send an announcement of the newsletter that highlights what's inside, with separate links to the English and Spanish versions. Readers simply click on the version of their choice. Agota will be able to track how many people open the email and click on the newsletter.

Accounting

After four years as treasurer, Jeff Tashman stepped down and Jorge Castelazo took over the position. Because of recurring problems depositing the monthly scholarship into student bank accounts through Banbajio, one of Jorge’s first tasks was to find a new Mexican bank. BBVA Bancomer was selected and, after much unraveling of red tape, the transition to BBVA was accomplished, just in time for the opening of the school year in August.

In December, we decided to purchase QuickBooks Pro, accounting software that will integrate and consolidate all of our financial data and keep a history of our finances, while providing the treasurer with a higher degree of accuracy and speed. It will automatically reconcile our Mexican and US bank statements, quickly generate digital reports in multiple formats, and enable in-depth analysis of our revenues and expenses. The result will be greater efficiency and transparency. We’re grateful for the assistance of Guanajuato resident and accountant Carolyn Black, who is leading this transition.

Positioning Brillantes Caminantes for the future

With the expansion in the number of students and the related tasks necessary for their support, the board has seen the necessity of systematizing our way of doing things. Since the founding of BC, we've relied on the institutional memory of the founders, many of whom remain involved as members. Various roles—e.g., organizing the student applications, managing the food for a benefit, and creating accounting spreadsheets—were typically attached to individuals. Starting this past spring, we have focused on breaking down and documenting the tasks of running and sustaining Brillantes Caminantes and, when possible, distributing and attaching tasks to positions.

For example, and as noted above, the vice president is now in charge of coordinating student requests for additional support and the member-at-large will manage the documentation of student grades. In the past, both of these tasks fell to the president to manage. We will recruit non-board volunteers to fill coordinator roles, which include coordination of mentors, student applications, laptop distribution, the newsletter, and more. Moving to an accounting software package is part of this initiative, as it will standardize our accounting practices.

Finally, we have started a policy and procedure manual that will document the tasks that make it possible for BC to solicit, screen, and interview students for scholarships; disburse monthly scholarships; coordinate mentors; communicate with our donors and other supporters and friends; produce fundraising events; and myriad other behind-the-scenes details. This will ensure smooth transitions for future officers and coordinators and better delineated responsibilities for board members and volunteers—all in service to our mission of providing Mexican students with scholarships and the support they need to become professionals and future leaders.

Treasurer's report

	2019 Budget	Actual 2019	Proposed 2020	
Revenues/ingresos				
Pledges/comprometidos	400,000	337,987	Provided on detailed spreadsheet	
Donations/donativos	270,000	148,614		
Fundraisers/evento de recaudar fondos	60,000	88,562		
Other/otro Amazon Smile	0	1,147		
TOTAL REVENUES/INGRESOS TOTALES	730,000	576,311	473,750	
Expenses/gastos				
Scholarships/becas	496,800	554,500	Provided on detailed spreadsheet	
Graduation expenses/gastos de graduación	15,000	22,956		
Additional support/apoyo adicional	150,000	37,680		
Computers/computadoras	50,000	60,425		
Student meetings/reuniones estudiantiles	18,000	5,199		
Reading program/programa de leer	12,400	5,665		
Fundraiser/eventos de recaudar fondos	15,000	13,138		
Bank fees/cobros del banco	5,000	8,622		
Accounting/contabilidad	6,000	4,200		
Legal services/servicios legales	5,000	5,000		
Other/otro	5,000	859		
TOTAL EXPENSES/GASTOS TOTALES	778,200	718,245		914,660
Revenues-expenses/ingresos-gastos	(48,200)	(141,933)	(579,510)	

Net assets	<u>Dec. 31, 2018</u> \$1,934,180 MXN \$101,960 USD	<u>Dec. 31, 2019</u> \$1,792,247 MXN \$94,478 USD	<u>Dec.31, 2020</u> \$1,349,931 MXN \$71,049 USD
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The table above shows the 2019 year-end financial report for Brillantes Caminantes. All figures are in pesos, calculated at an exchange rate of 18.97 to the dollar.

We did not meet our revenue goals.

- Overall, revenues from pledges and donations were down from the budgeted amounts of \$400,000 and \$270,000 respectively for the previous year.
- A significant number of pledges reached the five-year mark in 2018, with a decline in renewals.
- The income from fundraising events, however, exceeded the projected amount.

Total expenditures were slightly less than the budgeted amount of \$778,200 MXN:

- Scholarship expenditures were higher because the monthly stipend was increased, effective in August (from \$1500 MXN/month to \$2100 MXN/month);
- Additional Support expenditures were significantly below what was anticipated. As we're still new at providing this kind of support, we were very conservative with the proposed amount.
- 96% of expenses went to direct support of students (scholarships, titulacion, extra academic and health support, computers, books for reading program, and student meeting costs).

Overall, total annual expenditures exceeded total annual revenues. We anticipate deficit budgets for the next couple of years, as we are dedicated to reducing our surplus by increasing what we spend in pursuit of our mission. As a result, expenses will exceed annual revenue. At the same time, we will continue to focus on maintaining a strong donor base.

Our new accounting system will allow for more detailed reports going forward, which will enable us to develop more accurate projections. It will also trigger alerts when pledges are coming to an end, so that BC can follow up and pursue renewals. We will also be exploring more efficacious ways of making a donation (e.g., bank-to-bank Zelle transfers and an automated system for setting up recurring payments of any amount).

Submitted by: AJ Buckingham, President, as approved by the Board of Directors
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