

Alumni Saint Spotlight



Ellie Malfaro (CC 2011) received her bachelor's degree in biology from Villanova University, where she cheered for the Nova basketball and football programs and had the opportunity to study abroad in Ireland. Her career trajectory thus far has been focused on public health service. After college, she participated in the AmeriCorps program "National Health Corps, Philadelphia," where she provided more than 1,700 hours of direct community service in the Strawberry Mansion Health Center in North Philadelphia. There, as a patient advocate, Ellie worked on HIV-prevention efforts and medication access for uninsured patients. After, she went on to serve for 32-months in the Peace Corps as a Community Health Promoter in rural Peru. During Ellie's Peace Corps service, she educated teens about sexual and reproductive health, facilitated the creation of women-empowering community savings banks, and helped build 15 latrines for families with no plumbing. She also educated mothers about health and hygiene in the home, adequate breastfeeding and nutrition techniques, and prevention of disease. During her time in Peru, Ellie became fluent in Spanish, a skill which she used in her next role as a bilingual Disease Intervention Specialist at the Division of Disease Control in Philadelphia. During her year at the Dept. of Public Health, Ellie worked primarily in STD control, then turned her efforts towards Covid-19 contact-tracing and testing measures. Realizing how immense the need was for bilingual health providers, Ellie decided to pursue a nursing degree with intentions of serving vulnerable communities on a direct-care level. She is currently at the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus, studying nursing in a bilingual program and performing research with the university's chapter of the International Nursing Network for HIV/AIDS Research. This coming summer, Ellie will be working and training in the operating room at the world-renowned Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota as a student nurse extern. She plans to graduate with her bachelor's degree in nursing in May 2022. Dedicating herself to serving others, extensively traveling, and her diverse work and educational experiences have thus far allowed her to have an incredibly fulfilling life post high school!

How do you feel your education from Central Catholic helped get you where you are today?

Many of my characteristics and personal values I owe to my time at Central. Mrs. Hartline taught me about the importance of social justice, instilling within me an innate calling to give back to others. Mr. Murphy taught us to think outside the box, allowing me to imagine myself living outside the scope of the United States. Miss Jones and Mrs. U helped me fall in love with science, impelling me to pursue a degree in biology which has served as the backbone of my healthcare career. Mr. Dobry and Mrs. Smith helped me with professionalism and character development, and Mr.

Ditsky, during my years playing lacrosse at Holy Name, helped me understand the importance of pushing oneself to reach your full potential. Mrs. Perez was always there for me, as a mentor, confidant, and as my best friend's mom! My years of cheerleading, with Mrs. Gincley as coach, school theater with Mr. Scollick as director, and time spent in student government with Mr. Davis' guidance, especially as Central's last school president, allowed me to grow confident in myself and my leadership abilities. Finally, Kairos gifted me with the skill of thinking deeply and empathetically about the experiences of others. I served as the Rector of our senior Kairos retreat where I had the chance to share my story, an experience that really impacted me and stays with me today.



What advice would you give to current Berks Catholic students?

Consider a year off after high school to do service! There are AmeriCorps programs that pay you to travel and work all over the US and they will give you grant money for college! It will make you more mature, help you to focus on what you want to study, and make you a more competitive applicant for schools. There are many schools that will match your AmeriCorps grant money, but most importantly it will make you a more compassionate person. As you get older, study or live abroad at some point! These types of experiences will open your mind about how the rest of the world lives and make you a more empathetic, culturally competent person. Finally, please don't take out massive student debt!! Just don't do it!! You'll thank yourself later. Besides those tidbits... Have faith in your abilities and your aspirations. It is so easy to compare ourselves to others, but pick your path, stay true, and do you. It is a lot more meaningful, (and fun), to take the scenic route and the path less traveled. You have plenty of years to work and settle down, but so few years to explore and grow. See the world while you're young, enjoy the little things, and put good energy into the world as gratitude.

Tell us a little bit about yourself and what you like to do in your spare time.

Besides health equity and cultural exchange, I'm obsessed with Villanova basketball. I have two adopted street cats, one from Peru (Poto) and one from Puerto Rico (Momo). I spend most of my free time on the beach and scheming how to get out and travel. I'm dating my high school sweetheart, a Holy Name graduate. I recently received the Philadelphia Mayor's Distinguished National Service Alumni Award, which was a huge honor. I am always open to lending a helping hand or a word of encouragement, so if you have any questions about AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, nursing, studying abroad, etc., please don't hesitate to reach out! (eemalfaro@gmail.com).

