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## Gabriela Melgar

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Gabriela (Gabi) Melgar works at Griggs International Academy as the director of Student Services, overseeing the enrollment, financial and academic resources available to students. She also teaches high school Spanish I & II and Algebra I for Griggs. Gabi interacts with students from all over the world as she troubleshoots issues and has found that making a difference in student lives is rewarding work.

In one particular phone conversation, Gabi was reminded about the practical ministry and support that Griggs offers. A woman had learned about Griggs from a random lady at the grocery store and wanted to learn more. As Gabi responded to the questions, the woman started to cry. The Griggs program was a huge answer to prayer—it would provide an excellent Adventist education without the obstacles of finances or proximity to a brick-and-mortar school. Gabi was blessed to share the news.

Gabriela is from Bolivia. When she lived there, neither of her parents was Adventist, so it was her *abuelita* (grandma) who introduced her to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *Abuelita* would pick her up for church, mid-week prayer meeting, *Conquistadores* (Pathfinders) and other special church events. Since her parents hadn't dedicated her as a baby, her *abuelita* arranged to have her dedicated in church when she was about 9 years old.

When Gabi was about 10, her father wanted her to learn English, so he sent her to live with his sister in the United States. At 11, Gabi moved to Berrien Springs with her aunt and uncle, Charo and Dan Widner. She went to Village Adventist Elementary School for sixth grade and to Ruth Murdoch Elementary School (an Andrews University school) for seventh and eighth grade. However, her dad brought her back home to Bolivia for high school because academy tuition was beyond their means.

After finishing high school, Gabi went to a public university in Bolivia but felt it wasn't a good fit. She talked with her dad about going to the United States to pursue a college degree. While he wasn't very eager to send her back, he still supported her decision by giving her some cash to get her started. Gabi got on a plane and headed to Berrien Springs.

Even though Gabi really wanted to attend Andrews, she lacked the financial resources so went to a community college for her associate's degree. As an international student, Gabi had a visa that allowed her to stay in the States an additional year to work locally. She found a job with nearby health service providers as an interpreter serving the migrant worker population. During that year Gabi became very close to a coworker.

At the end of the work year, the coworker asked Gabi if she had been able to save enough money to go to Andrews University. Gabi shared that she had been able to save \$6,000 but she would need \$16,000 to enroll. As an international student, Gabi needed to pay the tuition in advance or find a sponsor. The coworker was not an Adventist but was a Christian who saw a need God could help her fill. She left the room for a moment and came back to the room with a check of \$10,000 for Gabi. As Gabi accepted the gift, her eyes filled with tears—she would now be able to attend Andrews University.

Gabi felt like God really wanted her to go to Andrews, yet the degree she sensed God calling her to would mean four years of tuition. As an international student, she wasn't eligible for the loans that are available to some students. If God wanted her to get a math degree with a secondary education certificate, He would need to provide a way. Gabi knows that He did.

When Gabi graduated, she only owed \$4,000 because of the support and generosity of many people. They knew that an Andrews University education was good for Gabi and that Gabi was good for Andrews University. And Gabi has seen evidence of God's leading in her life every step along the way. When I asked Gabi about her future she said, "It really depends on what God wants."

If you get a chance, ask Gabi about the rest of her story. You can find her around campus, at Griggs Hall or at my favorite place to run into her—when she is teaching Zumba at LifeRx in downtown Berrien Springs.



Gabriela (Gabi) Melga