



# So you want to join the... Peace Corps?

One of a series of fact sheets introducing you to the wide variety of career options open to you as a Liberal Arts student.

## THE PERFECT JOB FOR THE PEOPLE WHO WANT FOREIGN SERVICE EXPERIENCE

### WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE PEACE CORPS:

- To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
- To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
- To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

### WHAT CAN THE PEACE CORPS PROVIDE YOU?

Serving in the Peace Corps is a great opportunity to develop real-world skills. The Peace Corps serves in a variety of nations around the world, in a number of different job arenas. English instruction, business development, and health education are a few of the disciplines which the Peace Corps recruits. It is a two year commitment that will help you develop job and language skills. If you are interested in a career with the foreign service or international development, the Peace Corps will give you the valuable experience of working in a foreign land and making contacts with future employers.

Peace Corps has established partnerships with colleges and universities that offer academic credit and financial incentives to volunteers during or after Peace Corps service. Master's International allows volunteers to incorporate Peace Corps service into a master's degree program at more than 50 colleges and universities. In addition, the Peace Corps Fellows/USA program offers returned volunteers scholarships or reduced tuition at more than 40 participating schools.

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The Peace Corps promotes itself as the toughest job you will ever love. The Peace Corps prepares volunteers with ten weeks of intensive language and skills training in their host country, before they are placed at their home sites to serve their two-year stays. Living conditions vary according to country. Volunteers may experience bouts of loneliness while adjusting to living conditions in a foreign land. The Peace Corps encourages developing friendships with host country nationals, and most volunteers say that this is the most rewarding aspect of their service. Depending on your area of work, the Peace Corps gives you the freedom to develop your own projects. In the end, the quality of a volunteer's service depends largely on the commitment he or she personally invests.

### WHAT TO CONSIDER

Before making a two year commitment with the Peace Corps, potential volunteers should consider their motives for joining. Determining a long term goal for serving – whether it's to learn a particular language, or develop a career skill – will make any potential challenges easier to manage. In short, sign up for the Peace Corps with the intention of achieving a beneficial skill out of the experience.

Applicants can choose what country or region of the world you would like to serve. A volunteer's experience can differ depending on many variables – cross cultural differences, and also interaction with the host country Peace Corps administration. When deciding upon a country to serve, do your homework. Most countries served by the Peace Corps have internet access, and many volunteers maintain internet blog sites.

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## THE PERFECT JOB FOR THE PEOPLE WHO WANT FOREIGN SERVICE EXPERIENCE (CONTINUED)

Contact any volunteers serving in the country of your interest, and inquire about two areas: what is Peace Corps service like in their host country; and what is their opinion of the local Peace Corps administration in their host country.

### QUALITIES AND SKILLS NEEDED TO SUCCEED IN THE PEACE CORPS

Although serving in the Peace Corps can be a rewarding experience, it can also be challenging. Serving in a foreign country and working with foreign nationals may require patience. There may be times you will be placed in awkward social situations. As a volunteer you will need to be able to handle the perseverance of learning a new language. Being able to accept situations such as being invited to dance in public, or making awkward social mistakes is important. Flexibility in working in cultures that do not share the western work ethic is also vital. The Western ethic of time deadlines and punctuality are not observed as strictly in other cultures as it is in America.

### STORIES FROM PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

You can visit the official site at [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov). Peace Corps also provides a book of volunteers' experiences entitled *The Great Adventure*. A helpful book that answers many questions is *So You Want to Join the Peace Corps...*, by Dillon Banerjee (Ten Speed Press, 2001)

There are many personal accounts of volunteers' experiences: *River Town*, by Peter Hessler (Harper Press, 2001); *The Village of Waiting*, by George Packer (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983); and *Taxi to Tashkent*, by Tom Fleming (IUniverse, 2007).

### WHAT A VOLUNTEER IN NAMBIA WRITES OF HER EXPERIENCE:

"After my bucket bath I head to school. Though it's incredibly hot during the summers, I enjoy my half-hour walk. The children walk beside me, laughing and screaming, "Wa lala po, Meme Julia!" I negotiate herds of goats, cattle, sometimes deep mud and large oscines (shallow pools of water), depending on the season.

My school is small, with three stick sheds and two concrete classrooms. Forming close relationships with my teachers not only allows me to be a more effective teacher trainer, but it opens a door to the community and culture: I go to their family weddings, funerals, and the baptisms of their children."

### WHO VOLUNTEERS?

- 60% female, 40% male
- 94% single, 6% married
- 94% have at least an undergraduate degree
- 17% are people of color
- 27 years old is the average age
- 11% have graduate studies or degrees

## QUALITIES & SKILLS NEEDED TO SUCCEED IN THE PEACE CORPS

- Take Initiative
- Team Player
- Multi-tasker
- Interpersonal skills
- Self-Disciplined
- Planning & Organizing
- Self-Starter
- Problem Solver

### ACTION STEPS

**1) Consider** the reasons why you want to serve in the Peace Corps, and what kind of skills you can develop from your experience. If it is a language skill or a career skill, find out how these can benefit you in a future career after the Peace Corps. With these in mind, find out the countries and the programs that Peace Corps provides that can give you this experience.

**2) Contact** Peace Corps volunteers that are serving, or have served, in the country or region that you choose. Ask them questions about the culture and society. Also, ask them their opinions of the Peace Corps administration in that country.

**3) Call** the local Peace Corps recruiter and schedule an interview. The recruiter will mail you an application form. The form is lengthy, and the processing procedures will take months. Start lining up references, dental and medical examinations, and official college transcripts.