



MASTER'S INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

# HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS

*You are part of a larger community... serving in a larger world*



Peace Corps Day, St. Lucia, 2003, Master's International student Deb Wolf (right) and Volunteer Caroline Boucher with local school children

# HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS



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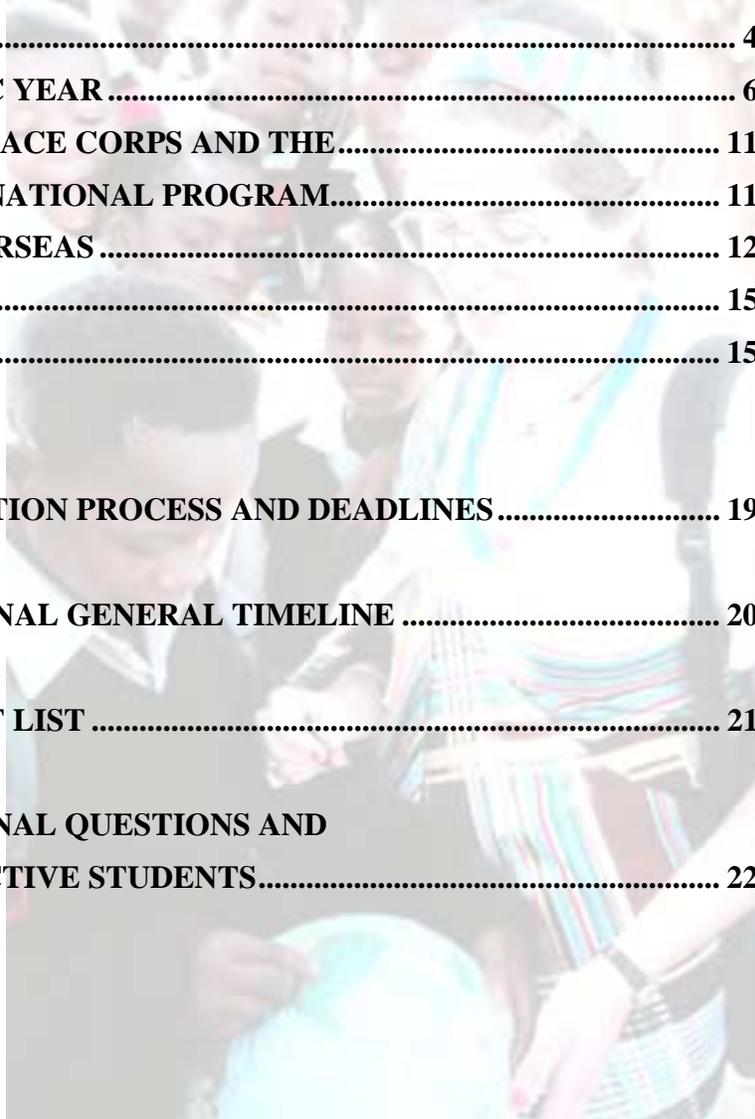
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Revised 2003

# MASTER'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

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## *Preface*

*Birendranagar, the bazaar town, seemed to appear in an instant as the sturdy but over worked Twin Otter soared over the last range before the Surkhet valley. White knuckles on the seat in front of me, I pressed my nose against the clouded glass to get a better view as we banked to land. The bazaar was surrounded by hundreds of rice paddies of different colors according to the maturity and variety of crop so as to look like a giant quilt tossed across the land. One road snaked south from the bazaar and disappeared into the hills forming the southern border of the Surkhet valley. As we came around, I could see that the main portion of Birendranagar was tucked up against the large, forested hills, which made up the northern border of the fertile valley.*

*Our first approach was thwarted by a few biesi (water buffalo) grazing on the runway. The beasts were as oblivious to the airport siren as the young shepherd lounging on the back of one of the lumbering animals. A second pass revealed a local official chastising the shepherd boy and chasing the herd on, allowing us to land on the third try. The little plane slapped the grass airstrip, and I swore I could hear my guitar twanging away as it was thrown about the cargo hold. The fearless co-pilot turned to face his captive audience and announced, in Nepali, "Birendranagar. Welcome. Have a nice stay." As we disembarked, I asked the pilot how often the plane came and went. He laughed and said kahilae kahi, sometimes. It was then that I knew I would be in Surkhet for a while.*

*William Dantona*

*Master's International alumnus of the School for International Training and former Peace Corps Volunteer in Nepal*

Welcome to the Peace Corps Master's International (MI) program! Stories like this are part of the Peace Corps experience. At some point during your service overseas you may have an experience as animated as this one. To many of your family and friends, you may appear to be a superhero as you recount your tales abroad through letters back home. However, you will know the truth—that though you are an average American making an extraordinary effort teaching skills in a developing community overseas, your adopted community itself is probably teaching you far more.

"Most things in life that are worthwhile require an enormous commitment of time and energy and I value my Peace Corps Master's International experience."

Margaret Shao  
MI alumna of  
Michigan Tech.,  
former Peace Corps  
Volunteer,  
Ghana, 1999-2001

This handbook will help prepare you for being a Volunteer in the Peace Corps Master's International program. It provides you with information about your time on-campus, preparing to go overseas, serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer, and returning home. You will find information regarding when and how to contact different offices at the Peace Corps, and when to expect to hear from us at different stages in the application process. Good luck with your academic studies, and we look forward to hearing from you soon!

## *Arriving on Campus*

The time has come for you to embark on the first leg of your Master's International experience. With a mixture of excitement and nervousness, you have begun your classes in preparation to make a difference in the lives of others as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

### **MI Campus Coordinator's Role**

Your university has chosen an MI campus coordinator who is your on-campus contact. The MI campus coordinator serves as an aid to MI participants in the Peace Corps application process by contacting Peace Corps headquarters when necessary. Coordinators have many responsibilities not only to currently enrolled students, but also to applicants and to Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) in the field. MI campus coordinators are designated by the university, so the coordinators' level of involvement varies from school to school. Many coordinators are faculty members or administrators, and must balance their coordinator role with their other job responsibilities.



Ecuador, 1998

## **Your Responsibilities to Your MI Campus Coordinator**

By this time, you should have already met your coordinator. As an MI participant you should:

- Be sure that your coordinator is informed of your latest campus address, e-mail address, and phone number
- Schedule regular meetings with your coordinator to discuss your academic plans
- Ensure that your Peace Corps application has been submitted and is up-to-date
- Inform the coordinator of any changes/delays that may occur during the placement and medical process
- Keep in regular touch with your coordinator while overseas on assignment

## **What Should Be Done When You Arrive on Campus**

*Your Peace Corps reference form should have been turned in by the time you arrive on campus; medical forms should be turned in 9-12 months before the end of your last term on campus.*

You will soon be swamped with academic work, and it will become difficult to focus on your Peace Corps application. Don't fall into this trap! The Peace Corps aims to invite MI participants to an assignment by the start of your last term (the second semester for some programs) on campus, so that you may begin exploring more about the country and culture where you will be serving. To be sure that you are on track for an early placement in a Volunteer assignment, work actively with staff at Peace Corps headquarters. Keep the Peace Corps Placement staff informed of your academic progress by sending updated transcripts and making the Peace Corps MI coordinator aware of any new skills or experiences you have gained. This will help the Placement staff match you to an appropriate Peace Corps assignment.

***You must also respond in a timely manner to the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services if any additional medical information is requested.*** The purpose of medical screening is to ensure that the Peace Corps can provide for each applicant's individual medical needs in his/her country of service. ***If your application is missing medical, legal, or reference information, this will delay your placement.*** If you have any questions about what you can do to facilitate the application process, call the Peace Corps MI program staff at Peace Corps headquarters.

## *During the Academic Year*

### **Working With Your Faculty Advisor and Campus Coordinator**

During your first term on campus, you will need to work closely with both your faculty advisor and your MI campus coordinator. Your MI curriculum has been designed to meet the academic requirements of your degree and provide you with the technical skills that will better prepare you for your Peace Corps assignment. Some flexibility, in the form of electives, has been included in many programs to allow you more in-depth knowledge in areas of particular interest to you.

### **Preparing for Your Master's Project**

During your time on campus you may work with your MI campus coordinator and faculty advisor to lay the groundwork for a proposed master's project. This project may take the form of a professional paper, project paper, thesis, portfolio, or other form of professional work; and will be, in many instances, the culmination of both your Peace Corps experience and your graduate studies.

"Peace Corps provided me with real world, hands-on experience that can't be taught in a book or classroom. As an MI student participating in the program I was able to take what I'd learned in the classroom and apply it to my everyday life and work."

Anthony La Colla  
MI alumnus of Florida State University,  
former Peace Corps Volunteer, Bolivia,  
2000-2002



Mongolia, 1998

## Determine What Your Academic and Communication Requirements Will Be:

- What kind of communication are you expected to have with your MI campus coordinator and faculty advisor during your Peace Corps service?
- Do you need to submit quarterly/biannual reports?
- Is any other form of communication required?
- What degree requirements will be met by the completion of your project?
- How will you share your work with counterparts and staff in your host country? In their language?
- Determine when and how you will be submitting your work.

"I (had) no computer— or electricity for that matter. It was difficult keeping in touch with my School of International Training advisor."

William Dantona  
MI alumnus of the  
School of  
International  
Training, former  
Peace Corps  
Volunteer, Nepal,  
1995-1997

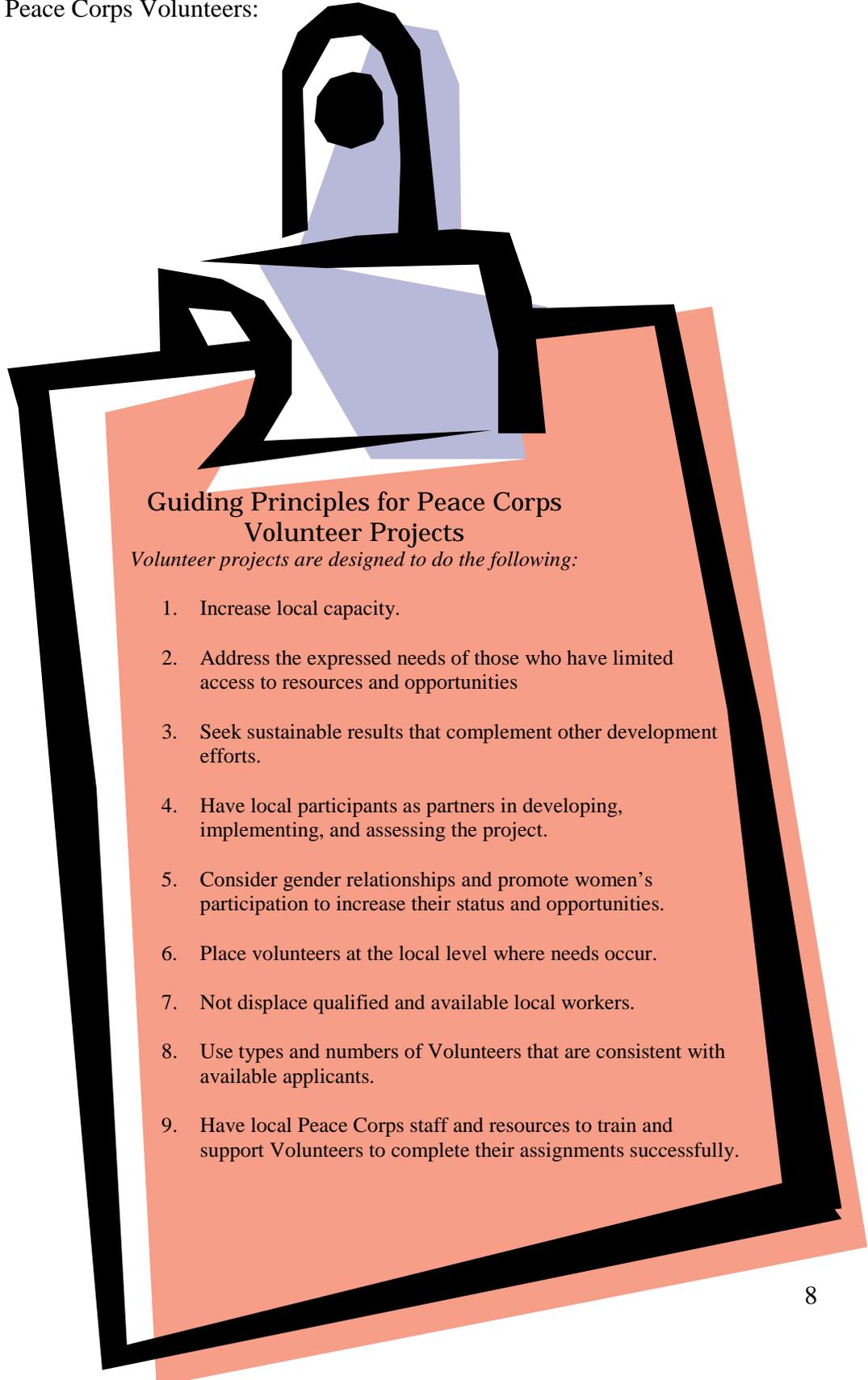
***Be sure you understand the specifics of your program and know what is expected of you***

Keep in mind that communication will be affected by your site placement. While you will have access to the local postal system, you should not count on having regular e-mail access.

(See section entitled "*Preparing to Go Overseas—Communication While Overseas.*") You should work out a tentative, flexible communication schedule with your MI campus coordinator and faculty advisor, one that can be adapted to either postal or e-mail conditions once you are actually in country.

Remember, you will be going overseas as a Peace Corps Volunteer, and ***your Peace Corps assignment will be your primary responsibility***. MI alumni who have successfully completed their projects have found ways to integrate their Peace Corps responsibilities with their academic requirements. In all cases, it has taken ***creativity, persistence, and flexibility***. The majority of MI participants discover that their project ideas change once they arrive in country and start their Peace Corps assignments. Any academic requirements must be fulfilled in concert with, and complementary to, your Peace Corps assignment.

When considering the integration of your master's project and your Peace Corps assignment, you should be aware of the following project guidelines for Peace Corps Volunteers:



### Guiding Principles for Peace Corps Volunteer Projects

*Volunteer projects are designed to do the following:*

1. Increase local capacity.
2. Address the expressed needs of those who have limited access to resources and opportunities
3. Seek sustainable results that complement other development efforts.
4. Have local participants as partners in developing, implementing, and assessing the project.
5. Consider gender relationships and promote women's participation to increase their status and opportunities.
6. Place volunteers at the local level where needs occur.
7. Not displace qualified and available local workers.
8. Use types and numbers of Volunteers that are consistent with available applicants.
9. Have local Peace Corps staff and resources to train and support Volunteers to complete their assignments successfully.

10. Have host agencies and communities as partners who can support the project and the Volunteers.

## Two MI Project Examples:

### Community Development

*Jen Samnick is an MI student serving as a small-business-development Volunteer in Togo, West Africa. She has completed one year of graduate studies at the Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington. Upon completion of her Peace Corps service and degree requirements, she will receive a Masters in Public Administration.*

*Jen's degree project will be a multi-part case study or series of short case studies, with teaching notes that address the concerns of an American working on community organization and non-governmental organization (NGO) management in a developing country. She plans to focus on management principles that are widespread in the United States, yet are not applicable in Togo due to cultural and infrastructure issues. The project will draw from her personal experiences implementing her Peace Corps assignment, as well as experiences of her fellow Peace Corps Volunteers in their projects. Jen chose the case study degree project based on her graduate studies, Peace Corps assignment, and information she received from returned Peace Corps MI students at the University of Washington. In communicating with her advisor, Jen uses mail and e-mail, but has begun using a fax machine to allow her advisor an opportunity to provide written feedback directly on her work.*

*Jen feels that having completed the majority of her coursework before her Peace Corps service allows her to approach project development with a broader frame of reference.*



## Environmental Assessment

*Brian Hicks is an MI student currently serving in Cameroon with the agro-forestry program. As a graduate student at the School of Agriculture and Environmental Science at the University of Georgia, Brian completed one year of studies before embarking on his journey with the Peace Corps. Graduate studies prepared him for the challenge of developing and integrating his Peace Corps assignment and his master's thesis.*

*After an initial site survey, Brian evaluated the local conditions and needs of the community where he serves before deciding on his MI project. With this information he was able to choose a feasible project that would easily integrate his graduate thesis, his Peace Corps assignment, and the needs of the community.*

*Brian developed a theory that there are environmental and historical influences occurring with existing planting schedules. His research revealed that 11 out of 12 families using planting schedules maintained soil quality by using soil-enriching trees. His study of soil-enriching trees has led to the implementation of an acacia tree-planting project to improve soil quality. This project will encourage crop rotation and will act as an additional source of income for the families.*

*As a third year Volunteer, Brian has been able to use his experience working with acacia trees to assist local NGOs. Brian states that he is "absolutely glad" he chose the MI program. At the close of his Peace Corps service he will have completed one year of graduate studies, three years of international field experience, and written his master's thesis without worrying about travel and research costs.*

"I believe that in five to 10 years (this project) will significantly affect the communities' standard of living"

Brian Hicks  
MI Student at  
University of  
Georgia, Peace  
Corps Volunteer,  
Cameroon  
2000-2003



Ecuador, 1998

## ***Working With the Peace Corps and the MI program***

As you proceed through the Peace Corps application process, you will want to communicate by e-mail with the Peace Corps MI program coordinator in the office of Domestic Programs. Please refer to the contact list and timeline in the back of this handbook. Contact the Peace Corps MI program coordinator when you arrive on campus for your first term of study.

### **During the Academic Year Contact Peace Corps Placement to:**

- Confirm your date of availability
- Submit a copy of your transcripts
- Confirm the status of your medical kit
- Submit your new address, e-mail, and phone number

The Peace Corps MI program coordinator's primary responsibility is to interact with the MI campus coordinators and monitor the administration and management of the MI program. You should feel free to contact the Peace Corps MI program coordinator for guidance, information, or status checks at any time. The Peace Corps MI program coordinator interacts with the Placement staff on a daily basis and can help you with many of your questions.

### **What Happens to My File?**



When your file arrives at the Peace Corps, it will take two routes: your medical file is processed through the Office of Medical Services (OMS), and your application and legal documents are processed separately through the Placement Office. MI applicant files are prioritized through both offices; however, you must remember that ***your file must be complete in order to be reviewed. It is up to you to complete your references, legal documentation, and medical forms in a timely fashion.*** If something happens that affects your availability date, e.g., you need to stay on campus for an extra semester, you should contact the Peace Corps MI program coordinator immediately. Not all assignments begin at regular intervals during the year, and an extra semester on campus could mean a three-to-nine month wait for an assignment.

*A note about two-year programs:*

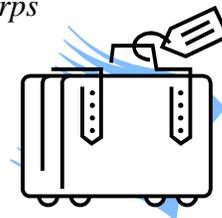
Participants in MI programs that require two years of coursework prior to Peace Corps service should complete their references and legal documentation during their first year of study.

***Medical forms should be completed 9 to 12 months before you leave for Peace Corps service. It will be your responsibility to stay in contact with the Peace Corps MI staff throughout the process to confirm that you are still pursuing the MI program. Failure to stay in contact may result in the Placement Office disregarding your application materials.***

## **How Are Placement Decisions Made?**

One of the most pressing concerns for Peace Corps applicants is knowing where they will be serving. Placement staff works to find the best available assignments for cleared applicants. Placement staff matches a country's request for Volunteers with your skills and personal qualifications. Medical limitations are taken into consideration during the placement process. Your preferences will be strongly considered in this process, but ***a high degree of flexibility on your part is needed.*** Countries do not have programs in all areas and request Volunteers at different times of the year. The final match is designed to ensure a successful fit for both you and the specific assignment in the country. After you have cleared the medical, legal, and placement departments, Placement staff will extend to you an invitation for a specific program overseas. *See Peace Corps Application Process and Deadlines.*

## ***Preparing to Go Overseas***



## Packing for your Service

Six to eight weeks prior to departure you will receive a Country Information Packet providing more specific information about your project and country of assignment. The Country Information Packet is compiled by the Peace Corps staff in the country where you will serve, and includes



You will receive a Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook with an invitation packet that will provide you more information regarding Peace Corps policies and procedures.

practical advice and suggestions on what to pack.

## Communication While Overseas

Volunteers communicate with family and friends via regular international mail. As a Master's International Volunteer, you may want to remind your academic advisor that international mail can take a lot longer than domestic mail and it is not 100 percent reliable. Your mailing address while you are a Volunteer will be included in the Country Information Packet. ***Give this address to your academic advisor and the MI campus coordinator. Make sure to send them an updated address after you have completed training and moved to your new site.***

Should there be phone access, researching affordable phone cards and international calling plans that include your country of service before going overseas will make those first phone calls much easier. Also, many Volunteers who have access to e-mail have found that setting up a website is a very convenient way to share experiences and communicate with friends, classmates, and family. Your Country Information Packet should include information concerning communication in your country of service.

While many Volunteers find communication to the United States virtually as easy as at home, do not assume you will have the same technological capability. Access and costs to use computers, e-mail, or the Internet vary considerably among countries and even within the same country. Peace Corps staff is generally supportive of an MI Volunteer's need to communicate with academic advisors, but it may not always be possible to use a computer at the local Peace Corps office.

## Deferring Your Student Loans

You may have student loans from your undergraduate studies and have taken out new loans to cover the costs of graduate school. Because your Peace Corps service will take you overseas for an extended period, you should ***make arrangements to settle personal and financial affairs before reporting for service. Failure to do so may result in a delay or withdrawal of your invitation.*** It is important that you discuss with your academic advisor how you will defer your loans while you are in the Peace Corps.

- Will you be continuously enrolled as a full-time student?
- Does your lender allow you to defer during Peace Corps service?
- Will you try to defer your loans by “Economic Hardship” status?

Speak with your academic advisor about what your student status will be while you are a Volunteer, and then talk to your student loan lenders. In all cases, we strongly recommend that you ***keep copies of all paperwork and give power of attorney to a relative or friend*** to handle your loan deferments during your Peace Corps service.

Although ***the Peace Corps does not grant loan deferments***, it will provide you with certification of your status as a Volunteer at the Staging event, your pre-departure orientation. If you need the Peace Corps to certify that you are a Volunteer, keep in mind that ***each deferment form is valid only for one year. It is also important to remember that deferment is granted only for each complete year of service.*** To cover your 27 months of Peace Corps service, you will need to obtain from your lender(s) three to six deferment forms for each loan. The number of deferment forms you will need is based on the deferment period of six months to a year. Bring these forms with you to your Peace Corps Staging event, or pre-departure orientation. One copy of your deferment form will be certified at your Peace Corps Staging event for you to send to your lender(s). You will take the additional copies to your country of assignment to be certified by Peace Corps staff and then sent to your lender(s) at the end of each year of service. The person to whom you have granted power of attorney may also send loan deferment forms to the Peace Corps Certifying Officer:

For more information about federally guaranteed student loans, call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at:

1-800-4-FED-AID

Peace Corps  
Certifying Officer  
Volunteer and Staff Payroll Services

Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters  
1111 20<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20526



## *Arriving Overseas*

### **Pre-Service Training**

Your Peace Corps assignment will take into consideration the knowledge and skills you have learned since beginning the Master's International program. But, there is still more to learn. You will complete an in-depth, pre-service training program upon arriving in your country of service to prepare you more specifically for your assignment and life in your host country. Your graduate education has been good preparation for the assignment you are to do, but pre-service training enhances what you have already learned with specific language, technical, medical care, safety, and cultural orientation. After successfully completing the pre-service training program, which lasts eight to 12 weeks, you are sworn in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

### **Your Site Placement**

The Peace Corps MI program coordinator will inform your Associate Peace Corps Director (APCD) and Country Director (CD) before you arrive that you are a Master's International participant. The APCD will be your program director, and it is up to you to discuss your additional MI academic objectives with him or her early in your training. Some APCDs will have had experience working with MI candidates, but some have not. Be proactive about meeting with your APCD to discuss the nature of your particular MI program. As you go through training, you will be evaluated on the skills you bring with you, your ability to acquire the host-country language and function in the culture, and your ability to adapt to your new environment. Staff will then make specific site assignments based upon the needs of the site and your perceived skills and interests.

***Remember: It is up to you to adapt your overseas academic requirements to the specifics of your Peace Corps assignment, the conditions of your site, and to have approval from the CD for any academic work you will conduct.***

"Be patient, take it slowly, remember that every emotion seems five times stronger on the PCV roller coaster, and that what goes down must come up!"

Deb Wolf  
MI student at  
University of  
Washington, Peace  
Corps Volunteer,  
Saint  
Lucia, 2002-present

## *Returning Home*

## Before You Leave

Several weeks before your Peace Corps service ends, you will participate in a Close of Service (COS) conference with your training class to discuss the procedures to be completed in the final weeks of service as well as how to prepare for life after the Peace Corps. As an MI participant, you will also need to plan the next steps necessary to fulfill your academic requirements and receive your degree.

## Issues You Should Consider:

- Have you compiled all the information you need for your academic research?
- Do you need to set up a graduate review committee?
- Have you determined how you will share your work with counterparts and staff in your host country? In their language?

## If you plan to travel before returning to the United States:

- Will travel plans affect your academic standing?
- Will travel plans affect your student loan deferments?
- If necessary, have you informed your MI campus coordinator of your travel plans?

## Completing Your Academic Requirements

Once you are back in the United States, you need to contact your MI campus coordinator and faculty advisor to confirm when and how you will be submitting your work. This can vary greatly from program to program. Some require participants to return to campus for another term to complete their degree; others require you to submit your portfolio, thesis, or professional project. ***Be sure you understand the specifics of your program and know what is expected of you.***

The Peace Corps MI program coordinator is also interested in your work. Please

"Participants should send back multiple copies of their work through a variety of methods. You don't want all of your work to be lost because you sent only one set of information home and somehow it was lost between Libreville and Houghton."

Blair Orr  
MI Coordinator  
Michigan Technological University

submit a copy of your project or thesis to the MI program coordinator at Peace Corps headquarters. Student projects help build the Peace Corps library and serve for internal promotional purposes to inform Peace Corps staff of the contributions provided by MI participants.

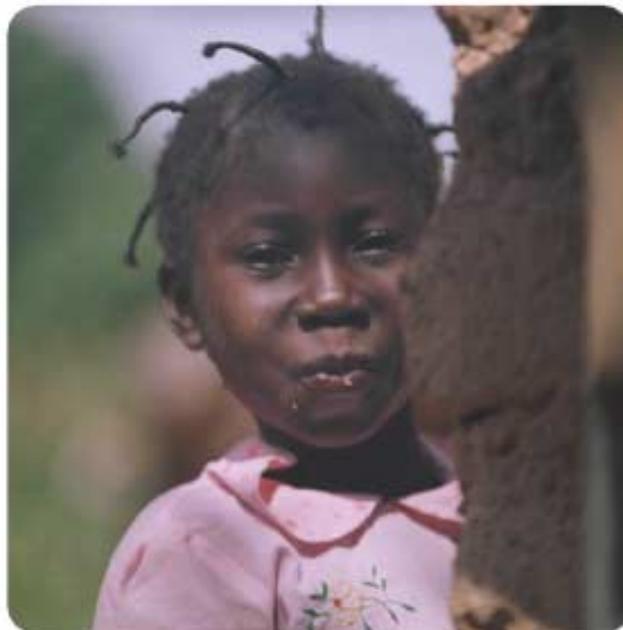
## When You Receive Your Degree

Remember to notify the Peace Corps MI program coordinator when you receive your degree. We maintain a database of MI alumni and need your help to make sure our information is accurate and complete. We are always in need of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) willing to act as contacts to talk with new MI participants and with people interested in the program.



Your valuable experience and insights are a great resource for future MI participants, for your faculty, for your department, and for the Peace Corps. Be sure to keep in touch with your campus contacts, the Peace Corps MI program coordinator, and your local Peace Corps Recruiting office. Often, we call upon RPCVs to help us in promotional activities; to review MI related materials or publications, or assist with Peace Corps activities. Your feedback helps us to refine and improve this important program.

As a good business practice, communicate a "thank you" to your community as well as your graduate school advisor. Your community has played such a large part in the development of your project that it is important to make sure you thank all who have been a part of its success. Indicate what you did and why it was important and the effect that it had. Also, leave copies of your work with all who have requested it and all who would find it useful. Your area of study may prove to be a good foundation of collaborative work that may benefit those in the future.



Burkina Faso, 2003

## Appendix A

# *Peace Corps Application Process and Deadlines*

	<i>What You Do</i>	<i>When You Will Complete Steps</i>	<i>What Peace Corps Does</i>	<i>When Peace Corps Will Complete Steps</i>
<b>Recruitment</b>	Fill out Application	Determined by you		
			Interview	As soon as application is received
	Turn in reference letter, transcripts, skill addenda, fingerprints, etc.	Immediately		
			Nominate applicant to program	As soon as forms and letter of acceptance to an MI program are received
			Review Health Status Report, send medical kit	Once any issues that arise in Health Status Report are resolved
<b>Placement</b>	Complete medical exams and turn in kit	9 months to a year before you leave		
			Placement screening	As soon as medical kit is received
	Turn in any extra documents requested, e.g., skill addenda, legal documents, transcripts, resumes	ASAP after placement screening	Medical review and qualification	Time varies, please contact Placement staff to check status
			Placement suitability review and qualification	One week after medical qualification
			Legal review and qualification	If necessary, one week after medical qualification
			Invitation to an assignment	Two weeks after medical qualification
	Accept or decline invitation. If accepting, complete passport/visa applications, aspiration statement, and updated resume	Within 10 days		
			Send aspiration statements and résumés to post	
			Send staging kit to applicant before departure	One month before departure
	Complete necessary documents in staging kit, set up air arrangements with the Peace Corps travel office	ASAP		
Meet training class for two day staging in the U.S.				
DEPART FOR YOUR NEW HOME!				

## Appendix B

# *Master's International General Timeline*

<b>Timing</b>	<b>Steps to Complete</b>
Upon Arriving on Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contact your MI campus coordinator</li><li>• Confirm that all references and medical forms have been submitted to Peace Corps</li><li>• Check in with the Peace Corps MI program coordinator</li></ul>
During the Academic Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss and organize your MI project with the MI campus coordinator and your academic advisor</li><li>• <b>Communicate regularly with the Peace Corps MI program coordinator</b></li></ul>
9 Months to a Year Prior to Departure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complete medical exams and turn in kit</li></ul>
3 to 6 Months Prior to Departure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Receive invitation to serve overseas from Placement staff</li><li>• Receive the Invitation Packet and Volunteer Assignment Description (VAD)</li><li>• Call the Placement staff within 10 days to accept or decline your invitation</li><li>• Give copies of your VAD to your MI campus coordinator and academic advisor</li></ul>
6 to 8 Weeks Prior to Departure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Receive the Country Information Packet</li><li>• Review the country information</li><li>• Give your in-country address to your MI campus coordinator</li><li>• Adjust your proposed academic project plan with your academic advisor based on your country assignment and information in the VAD</li></ul>
3 to 5 Weeks Prior to Departure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Receive Staging event reporting instructions</li><li>• Complete Staging event registration forms</li><li>• Check with student loan lenders on deferment eligibility, complete forms, and bring forms with you to the Staging event for certification</li></ul>
2 Weeks Prior to Departure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Receive tickets to your Staging city</li></ul>
Other Steps to consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Arrange for an absentee ballot</li><li>• Finalize personal financial matters (e.g., arrange for someone to have power of attorney)</li><li>• Arrange to maintain state residence</li></ul>

## Appendix C



### *Peace Corps Contact List*

Call Peace Corps Toll free at 1.800.424.8580

[www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov)

#### **Master's International Program**

MI staff

ext. 1812 or 202.692.1812  
ext. 1896 or 202.692.1896

#### **The Placement Office**

MI contact

ext. 1852 or 202.692.1852

Legal Questions

ext. 1845 or 202.692.1846

#### **Medical and Dental Clearance**

Questions concerning medical issues

The Office of Medical Services

ext. 1500 or 202.692.1500

#### **Loan Deferment Questions**

Office of Financial Operations

ext. 1784 or 202.692.1784

#### **Passports/Visas/Travel Arrangements**

SATO Travel Office, Washington, D.C.

ext. 1170 or 202.692.1170

#### **Staging Questions**

Staging Office

ext. 1865 or 202.692.1865

#### **Regional Recruiting Offices**

Your call will be directed to your  
local recruiting office

1.800.424.8580

##### **Atlanta 404.562.3456**

(FL, GA, TN, MS, AL, SC, PR)

##### **Boston 617.565.5555**

(MA, VT, NH, RI, ME)

##### **Chicago 312.353.4990**

(IL, IN, MO, MI, OH, KY)

##### **Dallas 214.253.5400**

(TX, OK, LA, NM, AR)

##### **Denver 303.844.7020**

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##### **Los Angeles 310.356.1100**

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##### **Minneapolis 612.348.1480**

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##### **Seattle 206.553.5490**

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##### **Washington, D.C./Rosslyn**

**703.235.9191**

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# *Master's International Program: Questions and Answers for Prospective Students*



## **What Is the Master's International Program?**

Many U.S. colleges and universities have graduate programs that are particularly relevant to the work assignments that Peace Corps Volunteers perform overseas. In cooperation with the Peace Corps, over 40 institutions now offer an opportunity to simultaneously earn your advanced degree and gain international experience. As a Master's International student, you can earn your master's degree by completing approximately one year of intensive on-campus study, then serve for two years in the Peace Corps in an assignment related to your course of study. These programs are designed to help you to develop skills that are in high demand among countries requesting Peace Corps Volunteers.

Prior to beginning your Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps will provide three months of intensive technical, language, and cross-cultural training. This training, combined with two years of work in your assignment, will provide you with unparalleled practical experience. Upon completion of the program, MI graduates possess both excellent academic credentials and international field experience—an attractive combination for prospective employers.

## **What Will I Do as a Peace Corps Volunteer?**

MI students are placed in projects relevant to their course of study. Some of the many projects in which MI students have worked include:

- A public health project in Madagascar to introduce improved nutrition and hygiene practices to schoolchildren and their mothers.
- An agricultural project in Nepal introducing more efficient crop production, pest management, seed production, and storage techniques in order to increase both food production and income.
- A forestry project in Paraguay to promote the integration of forestry with current agricultural practices, working with farmers to help increase farm income and conserve local natural resources.
- A business project in Kenya to assist entrepreneurs in gaining practical business skills, including inventory management, accounting practices, marketing, and accessing credit.
- A project in Kyrgyzstan to teach English to secondary students and to introduce new teaching methods to local English teachers—improving their English skills in the process.

## **What Are the Benefits of Being a Master's International Student?**

In addition to receiving excellent training and practical experience, Master's International students receive a number of benefits from the Peace Corps, including:

- Transportation to and from the country of service
- Living and housing expenses
- Full medical and dental care
- Vacation time and allowance
- Cancellation or deferment of certain government-backed educational loans
- Just over \$6,000 readjustment allowance earned upon completion of 27 months of service (can be used to defray tuition costs)
- Career counseling and support
- Non-competitive eligibility for Federal government jobs upon completion of full term of service for one year

All participating Master's International schools offer academic credit for Peace Corps service. In addition, several schools provide scholarships or tuition waivers for these credits. Depending on availability at specific universities, Master's International students may also compete for research or teaching assistantships. These benefits are unique to each school.

## **How Do I Apply to the Master's International Program?**

Master's International students must apply and be accepted to both the Peace Corps and at least one of the participating Master's International schools. The Peace Corps application will be evaluated on the agency's selection criteria for Volunteers, including medical and legal clearances. The application to the school will be evaluated based on the school's own admission requirements.

To be eligible for Peace Corps service, you must be a U.S. citizen, in good general health, and at least 18 years of age. There is no upper age limit. Married couples without dependent children may be accepted, but both spouses must qualify for a Volunteer assignment at the same overseas post.

We recommend that your Peace Corps application and the application for admission to the MI school be submitted simultaneously, using the admission deadline of the school as your guide. This allows enough time for the necessary medical, legal, and other clearances from the Peace Corps to be completed before committing yourself to the academic portion of the program. Once these processes have been completed, you will receive preliminary clearance for Peace Corps service contingent on the successful completion of your academic course requirements.

We ask that you submit a brief letter of intent with your application to the Peace Corps recruiter that states the following:

- The Master's International school(s) to which you are applying (if you are applying to more than one school, please indicate which school is your first choice)
- The degree program you will pursue
- When you expect to begin classes
- When you expect to be ready to start the Peace Corps portion of your program
- Once you receive a letter of acceptance from the MI University of your choice, please provide the Recruitment Office a copy of the letter, so you can be nominated to Placement.

## **When Will I Receive My Peace Corps Assignment?**

While you are completing your coursework, your Peace Corps application will be kept active with the Peace Corps' Volunteer Recruitment and Selection Placement Unit in Washington, D.C., which is responsible for assessing and placing applicants in specific projects. Peace Corps' host countries submit requests for Volunteers at least six months prior to the scheduled starting date of training. At this time, Placement staff will select a project that most closely matches your technical and language skills.

As you begin your academic studies, you are encouraged to contact the Placement staff to advise them of your academic progress and to verify the completion of your Peace Corps application. The Placement staff will note any interests you may have or project focus. It is important to understand, however, that *placements can be made only where a Volunteer with your skills has been requested*. The more flexible you are about your assignment, the more satisfied you will be with your overall experience as a Master's International student.

## **How Does Peace Corps Determine the Degree Programs Offered Through the MI Program?**

Degrees are offered in areas of study where the Peace Corps has sufficient need for Volunteers and has received host country requests.

## **May I Apply to More Than One MI School?**

Yes. We encourage you to apply to as many MI schools as you wish. Upon receipt of acceptance from an MI institution you must provide your Peace Corps recruiter with a copy of the acceptance letter, which then allows the recruiter to nominate you to Placement.

## **Where Might I Serve in the Peace Corps?**

The Peace Corps will extend an invitation to you to serve in a specific country and project approximately four to six months before the date you indicate you are available to start your Peace Corps training. There are many factors involved in making a placement, including the selection criteria set by the countries, your language skills, and possible medical accommodation issues. You are encouraged to express preferences you may have regarding your job assignment and the reasons for the preferences on your application, but *please keep in mind that it is not always possible to place you in a specific country or project preference.*

## **How Long Do I Serve in the Peace Corps?**

Peace Corps Volunteers serve for two years. There is an additional three months of technical, cross-cultural, and language training, which takes place in your country of service prior to your beginning work on your project. Two years may seem like a long time, but MI graduates will tell you that it takes at least one year simply to get adjusted, learn the language, and establish the necessary credibility in your community. We encourage you to be patient with this process and yourself—the results are worth the wait.

## **As a Master's International Student, Will I Be Treated Differently From Other Peace Corps Volunteers?**

You will have the same responsibilities that are required of other Peace Corps Volunteers. You will want to explain your status as an MI student to the Peace Corps staff in your country and discuss with them ways in which you can approach a study project in a sensitive and culturally appropriate manner. The Peace Corps MI program coordinator can also support you in preparing for this aspect of your Peace Corps service.

## **I Already Have a Master's Degree. Can I Get a Ph.D. Through the Master's International Program?**

The MI program does not currently provide an opportunity to earn a doctoral degree.

## **How Is This Different From Entering Graduate School and Peace Corps Separately?**

As an MI student, you earn academic credit for your Peace Corps service. In some cases, the school will waive the cost of these credits. You will have the benefit of your faculty advisor's technical expertise and support as you identify and address areas of need overseas. In addition, you will return to the United States with two years of professional, international experience incorporated into your graduate degree.

## **Does the Peace Corps Provide Financial Support to MI Students?**

*The Peace Corps does not provide scholarships to MI students.* However, some student loans can be deferred or cancelled, and all costs associated with your Peace Corps experience are covered by the Peace Corps, including transport, medical care, and living expenses. In addition, the Peace Corps provides a \$6,075 readjustment allowance, which is paid to you at the end of your assignment. Most schools provide students with an opportunity for research or teaching assistantships, scholarships, or tuition waivers for the cost of credits earned while in the Peace Corps.

## **What Happens If I Don't Complete My Peace Corps Service?**

You will need to contact the university at which you are enrolled and your MI Coordinator to determine how the early termination of your Peace Corps service will affect the completion of your master degree.

## **How Do I Start the Application Process?**

You will first want to identify which MI school(s) and which program(s) interest you the most. We encourage you to make a preliminary call to the school(s) to discuss your interest and qualifications. The next step is to obtain a Peace Corps application and an application to the MI school(s). You can fill out a Peace Corps application on line at [www.peacecorp.gov](http://www.peacecorp.gov).

For more information about enrolling in a Master's International program or to receive a Peace Corps application, please contact your local recruiter at 1.800.424.8580, option "1." You may also contact:



Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters  
Master's International Program  
1111 20<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20526

202.692.1812, or 1.800.424.8580, option "2"  
email: <mailto:mastersinternational@peacecorps.gov>  
[www.peacecorps.gov/gradschool/masters](http://www.peacecorps.gov/gradschool/masters)