



Fellows

THE PAUL D. COVERDELL FELLOWS PROGRAM

FALL 2011

OFFICE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Fellows, Community Partners Share Stories



Fellows alumna [Lynne Moquete](#) has founded a nonprofit that brokers volunteer opportunities in the Dominican Republic.

What do a manager at a luxury auto company, a community planner, and a high school teacher all have in common? In this case, all three of these individuals received their graduate degrees from a Coverdell Fellows Program—and you can read their [newly published stories](#), along with the stories of three other Fellows alumni, on the Peace Corps website.

“These stories all do a wonderful job of adding texture and detail to the Coverdell Fellows experience,”

says Ellen Alderton, Peace Corps marketing specialist for the program. “We hope that these vignettes will serve not only as useful marketing materials for schools, but also as resources for Fellows to better explain their experiences to friends, colleagues, and potential Fellows.”

The six featured Fellows have volunteered in places as far-flung as the [Ukraine](#) and [Antigua](#), and their gradu-

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Join the Conversation on Fellows Facebook

The Coverdell Fellows Program is delighted that one of our own, Joseph Alustiza, a Fellows alumnus who studied at [Illinois State University](#), has taken the initiative to develop a Facebook page for the entire Fellows community.

The page, [Connecting Peace Corps Fellows, Friends and Fans](#), is intended as a forum for coordinators, and for former, current, and future Fellows, as well as for internship [community partners](#).

“My hope is that the page will serve as an information-sharing forum,” said Alustiza. He added that, since Fel-

lows programs are located throughout the country, the page will allow Fellows “to connect with other peers and share successful stories from their graduate courses and/or work placements.” Finally, Alustiza sees the page as “one more way of helping Americans understand the people and cultures of other countries, via Facebook and beyond.”

“We are already seeing a lot of useful information finding its way to the new page,” says Ellen Alderton, Coverdell Fellows marketing specialist. “Visitors have shared on such topics as

preferred learning styles in the digital age, small businesses for low-income entrepreneurs, and social media activism.”

The page has attracted a range of postings on areas of interest to the broader Fellows community, including fundraising opportunities for coordinators and internship community partners, job search tips for Fellows, and the accomplishments and activities of Fellows alumni.

So far, the page has garnered almost 17,000 post views, and it is still in its infancy. Visitors have checked in from sites in [Albania](#),

[Bolivia](#), [Botswana](#), Canada, [Costa Rica](#), [Namibia](#), [Paraguay](#), and the [Ukraine](#)—as well as throughout the United States.

Coverdell Fellows hopes that this exciting new service will become a useful forum for you to share your own ideas, observations, questions, and answers. We invite you to join the conversation.



Fellows Coordinator Champions Change at the White House

To submit stories or ideas:

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University of Maryland-Baltimore County Coverdell Fellows Coordinator and Fellow alumnus Joby Taylor (RPCV/Gabon, 1991–1993) says that last spring he was “surprised to be invited to a roundtable meeting at the White House.” The meeting began on a light note, with an inside tour of the White House for Taylor and others in a group of RPCVs from around the country.

Designated by the White House as “Champions of Change,” this group met with Samantha Power, special assistant to the president for human rights, and Sonal Shah, national director of social innovation and civic participation, to explore different ideas concerning national service and civic engagement.

Taylor, who says he felt “humbled” by the experience, voiced to the group that it had always been President John F. Kennedy’s founding vision that “returning Peace Corps

Volunteers would make a huge impact on American society by ‘bringing the world home’ and becoming service- and civic-minded leaders in all kinds of professions.”



Coverdell Fellows Coordinator Joby Taylor (third from left) joins other RPCVs invited to meet with senior White House staff as part of the Champions of Change initiative.

The 11 other RPCV invitees also shared their ideas on how encouraging service can help “win the future” for this country. The White House has recorded these 12 leaders’ comments in a [video archive](#), which is posted on the Internet.

The RPCV powwow was part of a lengthy initiative which the White House is undertaking to listen to and showcase “ordinary Americans” from across the country who are doing “extraordinary things in their communities to out-innovate, out-educate, and out-build the rest of the world.” According to Valerie Jarrett, senior advisor to President Barack Obama, the Champions of Change project aims to highlight how Americans can “rise to the many challenges of the 21st Century.”

Champions of Change has invited groups to explore more than 20 different issues, including youth entrepreneurship, drug abuse, rural America, arts education, treatment of veterans, fatherhood, AIDS education, and immigration. The Coverdell Fellows program extends our heartfelt congratulations and appreciation to Taylor and the other RPCVs who championed civic engagement among this broad array of worthy causes.

You Can Increase Peace

Chances are if you’re a Fellow coordinator or an RPCV, you know someone who would be great for the Peace Corps. That can-do spirit... that innate sense of altruism... taste for adventure and wanderlust...

Now, the Peace Corps has launched a [new referral program](#) that makes it easy to reach out to the next generation of future Volunteers.

By visiting the Increase Peace page on the Peace Corps website, you can simply type in the email address of someone you think would appreciate being considered to volunteer and encourage him or her to apply to the Peace Corps.

Who knows? Maybe a special someone just needs a word of encouragement from you.



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Where Are They Now?

Kyle Turk RPCV/Mexico, 2004–2006, Botswana, 2010–present
MBA, Community Development, Western Illinois University, 2009

Great Scott! I'm doing it again! Sandwiched between the Kalahari Desert and the world's largest inland Delta, the Okavango, is my current Peace Corps assignment, Maun, [Botswana](#). It is summertime in Maun and the thermometer reads 105 degrees with humidity at 80 percent. Perfect conditions for a sauna-like one-hour walking commute. Despite the kilometers of burning sand in front of me, I strap on my sandals with a smile because I'm exactly where I want to be: back in the Peace Corps!

My name is Kyle Turk. I'm a recovering computer engineer turned economic community developer. My transformation is in large part due to my seven-year odyssey with the Peace Corps. In September 2004, compelled by a yearning for new challenges and for an altruistic conduit for my skills, I left a promising career in the computer sciences to become a Peace Corps Volunteer. I applied in late June and the Peace Corps contacted me three days later with an offer for a new Mexican program starting in three months. The catch was I had to say "yes" that day so they could rush the paperwork.

Being a member of the first group of Volunteers in [Mexico](#) was an honor. I was the youngest at 25 among a group of 10 Volunteers who averaged 47 in age. I was surrounded by professionals at the top of their respective fields of [engineering, technology, and business](#) who were sacrificing it all for two years of service. They were a constant source of inspiration.

I was placed in the information technology department of a national research laboratory with private sector ambitions.



Local women make beaded jewelry for the Pieces of Peace project during Kyle Turk's second tour with the Peace Corps in Botswana.

Obviously, this was not the typical Peace Corps program. I was rescued from my desk by secondary projects primarily in [English education](#). Through these, I got a taste of what it is like working in villages. From then on I was hooked on development. I firmly believed, as I still do today, I should be a community developer. Around the time of the revelation I was handed my Close-of-Service packet, which included a nifty booklet on Peace Corps Fellows Programs.

The [Western Illinois University](#) Peace Corps Fellows Program and I chose each other to spend the next 2½ years together. The program had everything I wanted. It included an MBA track, a community development post-baccalaureate certificate, and professional developers certification training. It consisted of a year of part-time [AmeriCorps](#) service during studies, followed by a year of full-time AmeriCorps service after studies.

Most important were the

people behind the scenes. The Fellows staff, Karen Mauldin Curtis, Karen Peitzmeire, and Carey Skees, believed in the program and were 100 percent dedicated to its participants. The program is under the umbrella of the capable [Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs](#), led by Dr. Chris Merrett. Also in the Institute is the founder of its Fellows program and of the [Midwest Community Development Institute](#), Dr. John Gruidl. Everyone's energy and passion for the program was infectious.

My full-time AmeriCorps assignment was spent as the executive director of the [Overall Economic Development Commission of Cass County](#), Illinois. I oversaw up to 11 different economic and community development projects at a time with a staff that doubled only when I looked in the mirror. The projects included business retention and attraction, historical preservation, tourism, geographic information sys-

“The decision of the Mexican families in Cass County to immigrate to the States—walking away from everything and everyone they know—is only made after severe hardship has left them with no other option.”

tems, and diversity awareness advocacy.

One result of my work with a pork processing plant was the growth of a large predominantly Mexican immigrant community. Not only was I learning the profession of community development, but my work gave me the chance to give back to people who gave me so much while in Mexico. We did some inspiring work in partnership with the local municipality, banks, clin-

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Fellows alumnus [Ryan Browning](#) went on to work for a foreign luxury automobile manufacturer after receiving his MBA from Duke.

ate degrees span disciplines from public health to environmental education, but certain strands embodying the Fellows esprit run through all of their stories.

[Kate Slavens](#), who is interning at a domestic violence center during her studies at [Indiana University–Bloomington](#), says her Fellows experience has allowed her to continue to pursue the areas of interest she developed as a Peace Corps Volunteer. “Not only am I studying a subject that I am passionate about, but because of my (Coverdell Fellows) position, I am able to work in an internship that gives me a chance to give back to the community,” she says.

[Carole McCauley](#), who received her master of science in environmental education from the [Florida Institute of Technology](#) feels her Fellows degree has placed her at the forefront of working on the world’s most pressing problems. She says, “There are a lot of disciplines that feel like they’re the root of

it all, but the environment affects our livelihood, our health, and our ability to construct cities.”

Along with these personal narratives, the Peace Corps has posted four stories about [Coverdell Fellows community partners](#) on its website. Featured are the [Maya Heritage Community Project](#) founded at [Kennesaw State University](#); Indiana University partner [Positive Link](#), an initiative providing HIV/AIDS services; the [University of Pennsylvania’s](#) trend-setting [LGBT Center](#); and [The Urban Conservancy](#), which relies upon Peace Corps Fellows from the [University of New Orleans](#).

In these vignettes, as well, certain trends emerge. To a person, Fellows supervisors find that RPCVs bring a special blend of skills and character to their internships. Alan LeBaron of the Maya Heritage Project notes, “Our Fellows have to think on their feet. We are dealing with people, many of whom aren’t well-integrated into U.S. society.”

He adds that Peace Corps Fellows also exhibit “a sense of humanity and justice.”

Dana Eness, executive director of The Urban Conservancy, observes, “Not only people who have completed the Peace Corps, but also people who plan to go into the Peace Corps have a really clear sense of mission. They have a strong moral compass, and their heart is in what they do.”

But don’t take our word for it. Read and enjoy these compelling stories yourself. From the heartlands of Illinois to the mid-Atlantic Piedmont, Peace Corps Fellows and Fellows alumni are making a difference.

“There are a lot of disciplines that feel like they’re the root of it all, but the environment affects our livelihood, our health, and our ability to construct cities.”

Your School May Be Eligible for Carnegie Classifications

Many Fellows schools have already heard of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and its classifications of institutions of higher education. The foundation develops lists of schools it describes as “time-specific snapshots of institutional attributes and behavior.” In turn, organizations such as U.S. News & World Report turn to Carnegie Foundation data in developing their own school rankings.

Attributes that the Carnegie Foundation studies in compiling its lists include undergraduate and graduate instructional programming, enrollment profiles, and school sizes and settings.

While all of the above data is collected and compiled by the Carnegie Foundation itself, one remaining foundation list relies upon voluntary participation by schools themselves. This last category? Community engagement.

As a Fellows program, chances are you belong to a school with a strong culture of community engagement. If you haven’t already done so, take a moment to familiarize yourself with the Carnegie Foundation community engagement classification. There is also still ample time to submit your school for consideration. [Join the foundation’s mailing list](#) for further updates about this important recognition.

Peace Corps Response and Fellows Work Well Together

For many who have completed their Peace Corps service, the next logical step is [Peace Corps Response \(PCR\)](#). PCR pairs seasoned RPCVs with high-need targeted international assignments in a breadth of areas from HIV/AIDS assistance to post-conflict reconstruction projects to addressing critical needs in the areas of education and technology.

For others, the next logical step is to pursue a graduate degree with Coverdell Fellows. Then, there's that interesting crop of RPCVs who participate in both programs.

Charles Norton is a Coverdell Fellow at [the University of Arizona](#) who is currently pursuing a doctorate in linguistic anthropology. Before starting his Fellows program, Norton submitted a resume to Peace Corps Response and mentioned what types of projects interested him.

"I heard back from Peace Corps Response on January 13, 2010, one day after the earthquake in Haiti," Norton says, adding, "I was watching the images with my mouth wide open in amazement and wishing there was something I could do to help."

For Norton, the opportunity to serve in Haiti melded perfectly with his graduate studies in Arizona. "I was being funded by the Fellows program at that point and they were very flexible in working with me. They told me I could take time off whenever I wanted, but that I couldn't miss more than a month of classes."

As it turned out, Norton took time off at the end of the semester and was able to

continue volunteering for PCR in Haiti the following summer. "I worked with [USAID](#) at the [U.S. Embassy in Port au Prince](#).



Temporary shelters in Haiti visited by Fellow Charles Norton during his Peace Corps Response service.

I went to different camps where people who had lost their homes were living. I used my French and Creole and reported back to my team on how to engage the displaced population," he explains.

If on-the-ground interviews with targeted populations sounds a lot like anthropology, you can probably predict how Norton moved forward with his PCR service and Fellows

studies. Upon his return to the University of Arizona, he used the data he had collected in Haiti for his academic work.

Of combining PCR with Coverdell Fellows, he says, "both opportunities complemented each other well for me. Each can further the other's goals and there's a lot of room for overlap."

Indeed, Norton's experience is not exclusive. Michael Garcia, a Fellows alumnus from [Carnegie Mellon University](#) who is now a recruiter for PCR says, "I appreciate

the great technical skills and experience Fellows bring to their Peace Corps Response assignments."

Another Fellow, Mary Couri, is currently deeply involved in classes and fieldwork for her social work degree at the [University of Maryland, Baltimore](#). She, too, fit in PCR during the summer and notes, "It was perfect because it was a social work-related placement."

Couri worked at the Ministry of Health and Labor in the Republic of Georgia and helped to create standards for elderly care. Completing one year of Fellows before PCR helped prepare her for the experience and she applied such techniques as SWOT analysis, which she had learned in school, to her assignment in Georgia.

She echoes Norton concerning the benefits of combining PCR with Fellows: "I incorporated Response into my grad school curriculum... I was able to correspond with my professors while I was overseas, and now that I'm back at school I am giving presentations on what I accomplished."

Who knows? Maybe there is a PCR opportunity that is right for you. PCR is recruiting for positions in nearly 30 countries. Newer [positions currently being filled](#) include Volunteers for: a maternal and neonatal health project in Zambia, an anti-malaria initiative in Uganda, an anti-bullying campaign in Jamaica, science and math teachers in Liberia, and education specialists in Burkina Faso.

"I was watching the images with my mouth wide open in amazement and wishing there was something I could do to help."



Kyle Turk (right) at a ribbon cutting for a local company he assisted during his Fellowship with Western Illinois University.

ics, the hospital, the library, the newspaper, extension services, and schools. We were opening access to products and services to all people no matter their citizenship status or spoken language.

How did this experience influence me to join the Peace Corps again? I have crossed the country of Mexico three times, once on bicycle. I know intimately many of the natal villages of the immigrants. I have lived with families similar to theirs, shared meals with them, and fished from their streams. The decision of the Mexican families in Cass County to immigrate to the States—walking away from everything and everyone they know—is only made after severe hardship has left them with no other option.

I want to work with people before they reach a tipping-point decision to leave their country. When exploring my options with existing nongovernmental organizations and bilateral/multilateral organizations, I found that none of them provided me with as many opportunities to attain my personal goals as did the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps'

three-month intensive on-site training and its policy of having Volunteers work as members of the village for two years with full support and high-quality medical care is truly unique.

I am currently working on income-generation projects with indigenous groups, HIV support groups, and women's empowerment groups in the cultural arts. We are using e-commerce to reach more affluent foreign markets. These efforts accomplish the three goals of Peace Corps and fulfill my personal expectations. I'm in the village, working with the people I affect, utilizing my entire skill set, and making a direct and visible positive difference in what is now my community. You can help with my Third Goal and learn more about our projects at <http://piecesofpeace.com>.

Ok...checking the thermometer... 105 degrees again... relative humidity 80 percent... sounds like another day in Peace Corps Paradise. See you online.

Watch Us Grow!

The Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program has invited nine new schools into the fold since the beginning of the year, bringing the total number of university partners up to 64. The program now proudly extends to 30 states and the District of Columbia.

"In this climate where students need fellowships and good graduate school options, it's wonderful to see our program expanding," says Eileen Conoboy, director of Returned Volunteer Services at the Peace Corps. "We are delighted to welcome these nine new schools to the Coverdell Fellows Program and we look forward to a win-win situation: the dividends that the new partnerships will offer RPCVs, and the strengths and talents that RPCVs will bring to each new program."

The Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University went so far as to pilot a Peace Corps Fellows program before submitting its formal proposal to participate. According to Dr. Richard Levinson, executive associate dean of academic affairs at the Rollins School, "We've witnessed great outcomes from our first (pilot) group of Fellows. RPCVs add a unique perspective to leadership and service, enhance our academic programs and students' field experiences, and reinforce a culture of service that is integral to public health."

The nine schools, which were vetted through a competitive application process, extend from the mid-Atlantic region to Alaska and offer degrees in a wide range of disciplines:

[Antioch University New England](#), psychology, education, environmental studies, and organization and management

[Bard College](#), environmental policy and climate science and policy

[Brandeis University](#), sustainable international development, coexistence and conflict, nonprofit management, and public policy

[Emory University](#), public health

[St. Catherine University](#), organizational leadership and business development

[University of Alaska Fairbanks](#), rural development, natural resources management, and natural resources management and geography

[University of La Verne](#), juris doctor

[University of Minnesota](#), public policy, urban and regional planning, development practice, science, technology and environmental policy, and public affairs

[Villanova University](#), nursing

We invite you to [visit our website](#) to learn more about our new programs.

