

Master's International Student Handbook

Your Guide to the
Education Adventure
of a Lifetime



Volunteer Recruitment and Selection (VRS)
Master's International
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters
1111 20th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20526

Revised 2011



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⊖ Introduction ⊖

From Student to Volunteer and Back



Welcome to Peace Corps Master's International (MI)! As an MI student, you can look forward to unique personal and academic experiences while serving the global community. With your skills and personal commitment to promoting the Peace Corps' goals, you are someone who is going to make an extraordinary contribution to the lives of people in a developing community. While you will undoubtedly impact others during your service, your experience will probably have an even greater impact on you.

This handbook will help you to be a successful MI Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV). In these pages you will find information on preparing for your departure, your time overseas, your return home, and the completion of your degree. Good luck with your academic studies. We look forward to staying in touch with you!

"If you want great returns, you must make great investments. If you are about to enter a Master's International program, you should know that it will be years longer, more challenging, more frustrating, and more demanding than any other master's program; but the rewards will be broader and deeper than a traditional master's degree, and they will last a lifetime."

— Kate Cleary, MI student, Colorado State University

The Steps to an MI Degree

1) Apply to MI graduate schools.

(Tell each school that you plan to be an MI student.)

2) Once accepted to school, submit application to the Peace Corps.

3a) Start graduate school.

and 3b) Connect with your MI Coordinator.

4) Submit a copy of official graduate school acceptance letter stating that you are an MI student to the Peace Corps.

5a) Follow through with the entire Peace Corps application process.

and 5b) Fulfill pre-service graduate school requirements.

6) Attend staging in the United States.

7) Travel to host country.

8a) Attend pre-service training (PST) in host country.

and 8b) Inform host country staff that you are an MI student.

9a) Serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

and 9b) Work with graduate school to develop academic project.

10) Return to the United States after 27 months of service.

11) Complete any remaining requirements for master's degree.

12) Submit a copy of MI thesis or project to the Master's International program staff.

⊖ Section One ⊖

General Information



On Campus

What to Do When You Arrive on Campus

The time has come for you to embark on the first leg of your MI experience. You may be both excited and nervous about what lies ahead, but you can take pride in knowing that you have begun your classes in preparation for making a difference in the lives of others as a PCV.

You are likely occupied with academic work, and it may be difficult to focus your attention on your Peace Corps application. The Peace Corps aims to make our application process for MI students as smooth as possible. To ensure that you are on track for an early placement in a Volunteer assignment, work actively with your recruiter and the staff at Peace Corps headquarters. Keep the Peace Corps informed of your academic progress by sending updated transcripts and contact information to the Placement Office as well as by providing information on any new skills or experiences you have gained. This will help the Placement Office determine the most appropriate Peace Corps assignment.

Submitting Medical Information

Your medical forms should be submitted nine to twelve months before your estimated departure. For example, submit medical forms in September if you are planning to leave the following summer. If any portion of your medical information kit is missing, including forms, request them immediately by contacting the Office of Medical Services at headquarters at 800.424.8580, ext. 4047. Also, you should contact your doctor (including your optometrist or ophthalmologist if you wear contact lenses or glasses) and dentist as soon as possible to schedule any necessary appointments.

Working with Your MI Coordinator

Your university has chosen an MI Coordinator who is your on-campus program contact. The MI Coordinator assists MI participants by serving as a liaison with Peace Corps headquarters. MI Coordinators have many responsibilities, not only to currently enrolled students but also to applicants and to PCVs in the field. Many MI Coordinators are faculty members or administrators who balance their MI role with other job responsibilities.

You should meet your coordinator as early as possible during your first term on campus. As an MI participant, you should:

- ⊖ Inform your coordinator of your latest campus address, email address, and phone number.
- ⊖ Schedule regular meetings with your coordinator to discuss your academic plans.
- ⊖ Inform your coordinator if any changes or delays occur during the Peace Corps placement or medical processes.
- ⊖ Determine how you will maintain regular contact with your coordinator while overseas on assignment.

Working with Your Faculty Advisor

During your first term on campus, in addition to working with your MI Coordinator, you will also need to work closely with your faculty advisor. Your MI curriculum has been designed to meet the academic requirements of your degree and to provide you with the technical skills that will prepare you for your Peace Corps assignment.

Preparing for Your Master's Project

Throughout your time on campus, you may work with your MI Coordinator and faculty advisor to lay the groundwork for a proposed master's project if such a project is required by your school. This project may take the form of a professional paper, project paper, thesis, portfolio, or other professional work.

MI alumni who have successfully completed their projects have found ways during their service to integrate their Peace Corps responsibilities with their academic requirements. This takes creativity, persistence, and flexibility. You must fulfill any academic requirements in concert with, and complementary to, your Peace Corps assignment. Remember, you will be going overseas as a PCV, as well as a student.

If a final master's project is required, you will decide on it after you arrive at your post. Your country director (CD) must sign the CD letter (sample provided in the appendices) prior to the end of your overseas training. You then need to send or fax a signed copy of the letter to Peace Corps headquarters:

Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters
Volunteer Recruitment and Selection (VRS)
Master's International
1111 20th Street, NW, 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20526
Fax: 202.692.1727

Why should you be flexible when preparing your master's project? Because you probably will not know your specific site assignment until several weeks after you arrive in your country of service. Placement locations vary considerably within a country, and the type of master's project that is possible may depend in part upon the resources available at your site. As an MI student, you should be prepared to adapt your master's project to your specific site. Most MI participants discover that their project ideas change once they arrive overseas and start their Peace Corps assignments.

Determining Academic and Communication Requirements



Invariably, 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 email access (see section entitled “Preparing to Go Overseas: Communication While Overseas”). You should work out a tentative, flexible communication schedule with your MI Coordinator and faculty advisor that can be adapted to either postal or email availability once you are actually in-country.

It is important to understand the specifics of your particular program and know what is expected of you. While you are preparing to go overseas, keep these questions in mind:

- ⊖ How will you communicate (e.g., email, fax, letters, telephone)?
- ⊖ How often are you expected to be in contact with your MI Coordinator and faculty advisor during your Peace Corps service?
- ⊖ Do you need to submit reports monthly, quarterly, or biannually?
- ⊖ When do your MI Coordinator and faculty advisor need to receive a signed consent form allowing you to conduct your academic project?
- ⊖ Is any other form of communication required?
- ⊖ What degree requirements will the completion of your project meet?
- ⊖ How will you share your work with counterparts and staff in your host country? In what language?
- ⊖ How and when will you submit your final work to your advisor?

Working with Peace Corps Offices

The Peace Corps is a federal agency with many offices—each with its own set of responsibilities. Please refer to “Meet the Key Players in Your MI Experience” in the appendices for a more detailed description of these various parties.

This manual has been drafted by the Peace Corps MI program staff. While our primary responsibility is to work with university MI Coordinators and monitor the national administration and management of the MI program, please do feel free to contact us for guidance, information, or status checks at any time. Refer to the contact list on the last page of this handbook for email addresses and telephone numbers of the various offices at the Peace Corps.



You should establish and maintain a complete application file containing photocopies of all documents you send to the Peace Corps. You may also wish to keep a record with dates and the names of your telephone contacts with Peace Corps staff.

What Happens to Your File

After you have been nominated by your recruiter, your file arrives at Peace Corps headquarters. The information takes two routes: your medical file is processed through the Office of Medical Services, and your application and legal documents are processed and assessed through the Placement Office. The Placement Office is the venue where several important screenings and assessments take place and assignment matches for qualified prospective Volunteers are finalized. Once these processes have been completed, you will receive a welcome email from the Placement Office.

If something happens that affects your availability date (i.e., you need to stay on campus for an extra semester), you should contact the Peace Corps Placement Office immediately. Not all assignments begin at regular intervals during the year, and an extra term on campus could mean a three-to nine-month wait for an invitation.



Remember that your file must be complete to be reviewed. It is ***your*** responsibility to provide all your references, legal documentation, and medical forms in a timely fashion.

A Note about Two-Year Programs

Participants in MI programs that require two years of course work prior to Peace Corps service should complete their references and legal documentation during their first year of study and medical forms nine to twelve months before expected departure for Peace Corps service. Dental forms should be completed six to nine months before expected departure.

Monthly contact is not necessary; however, when there is a change or update of information you will need to notify the Placement Office.

How Placement Decisions Are Made



One of the most pressing concerns for Peace Corps MI applicants is learning where they will serve. Once a candidate has his or her application assessed for skills, experience, and suitability for potential service, the Placement Office works to find the best available assignments for qualified and cleared applicants by matching a country's request for Volunteers with nominees' skills and personal qualifications. Medical accommodations as identified by the Office of Medical Services are taken into consideration during the placement process.

Your preferences will be considered, 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 Placement Office works to ensure a successful fit for each candidate's skills and experience with the programming needs in the country. Language skills are required for consideration of service in certain regions/countries. The Peace Corps cannot guarantee a placement in any specific country or region; the Peace Corps' priority is to place qualified Volunteers where their skills are most needed.

Once a candidate has cleared medical, legal, and placement assessments, the Placement Office will extend an invitation for a specific overseas program.

Foreign Language Requirements

The ability to learn a new language is an important ingredient for a successful Peace Corps experience. There is a great need for French and Spanish speakers, and the Peace Corps has specific requirements to ensure your language background is sufficient for specific service opportunities in Spanish- and French-speaking countries.

At the same time, it is important to be aware that language competency is not a guarantee that you will be placed in a country with a given language requirement. *Particularly as an MI student, you will be assigned to an area related to your master's degree, which will take precedent over your foreign language skills.*

Language requirements are subject to change at any time. For any questions on the latest requirements, please contact your recruiter prior to nomination or contact

the Placement Office after you are nominated. As of this printing, language requirements for Spanish and French are as follows:

In order to qualify for a Spanish-speaking program, you will need to complete one of the following criteria for service:

- ⊖ Completion of four years of high school Spanish coursework within the past eight years.
- ⊖ Completion of college-level Elementary II Spanish semester (Elementary III in quarter system) within the past six years, as noted in your transcripts.
- ⊖ A score of 50 or higher on the Spanish College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exam in the past six years.
- ⊖ A score of novice-high or intermediate-low on the official American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) within the past six years.
- ⊖ Native/fluent speaker of Spanish.

In addition to qualifying based on the information above, the Peace Corps requires you to be *actively learning* Spanish in order to be competitive for your program. This can be accomplished by any of the following:

- ⊖ Self-study
- ⊖ Private tutoring
- ⊖ Enrolling in an online or college Spanish course

The language requirements for French can be attained with the following:

- ⊖ Completion of four years of high school French coursework within the past eight years.
- ⊖ Completion of a minimum of two semesters/three quarters of French coursework within the past six years.
- ⊖ Completion of three years of high school French coursework within the past eight years, and
 - (1) A minimum of a five on the high school International Baccalaureate Assessment or, (2) a score of four on the Advanced Placement (AP) exam.
- ⊖ A score of 50 on the French College Level Examination (CLEP) or a score of novice-high on the official American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL OPI) within the past six years.
- ⊖ Native/fluent speaker of French.



Remember to:

- Confirm your date of availability.
- Submit a copy of your latest transcripts.
- Confirm the status of your medical application.
- Submit your new address, email, and phone number.

Preparing to Go Overseas

Your Invitation Email

Once the Placement Office has assessed and qualified your application and identified a programming match between a country's request and your skills, you will receive your invitation to serve. The invitation email includes a Volunteer Assignment Description to help you decide whether or not to accept the invitation, plus information about the country to guide you in preparing for departure.

Upon accepting your invitation to serve, you will be asked to send an updated, detailed résumé and a one-to-two-page Aspiration Statement to the email address provided in your information email. You should send this information within two weeks of accepting your invitation.



Because Peace Corps staff at your country post do not receive a copy of your application, it is important to use your Aspiration Statement to describe your personal and professional goals and objectives for serving in the Peace Corps.

In your Aspiration Statement be sure to state that you are an MI student and emphasize your current skills and technical expertise, other special strengths (e.g., group facilitation skills, HIV/AIDS training, nongovernmental organization development, gender issues, youth development), and the courses you have completed in graduate school. This information is helpful as posts identify a site placement for you.

“Vanuatu is a beautiful country and seeing it from above is indescribable. After we landed, we were greeted by Peace Corps staff and current Volunteers. They gave us green coconuts and welcoming gifts.”

**— Billy DeLancey,
MI student, George
Washington University**

Once you accept the invitation to serve as a Volunteer, you will be sent more information and a description of your pre-service training. This information will also include instructions for your mandatory pre-departure orientation (staging) with the date and location in the United States, along with a list of recommended items to pack, and a bibliography of useful country-specific reading materials. The Peace Corps travel office, Sato Travel, will make arrangements for your travel to your staging site.

Communication While Overseas

Volunteers communicate with family and friends by regular international mail or—where available—by email. Your mailing address during your training period will be included in the information you receive. Please provide the address to your academic advisor and the MI Coordinator.

You will also receive information concerning communication in your country of service. Prior to departure, it may be useful to research affordable phone cards and international calling plans that include your country of service. This will make those first phone calls much easier. Also, many Volunteers who have access to email have found that setting up a website is a convenient way to share experiences and communicate with friends, classmates, and family.

While many Volunteers find communication to the United States virtually as easy as at home, this is not the case for everyone. Access to, and usage costs of computers, email, 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.

Many Volunteers bring their own laptops. However, personal ownership of computers does not exempt Volunteers, who represent both the Peace Corps and the United States in their host communities, from conformance to agency policies governing computer use.

“My advisor is very present in my service in the sense that we often communicate via email and exchange news, information, and ideas. It means a lot to me to know that I am not forgotten and that people care that my MI experience is academically fulfilling.”

**— Sky Lantz-Wagner,
MI student, Monterrey
Institute of International
Studies**

Web Policy

The following is an excerpt from the Peace Corps Manual, section 543: Use of IT Systems by Volunteers, Trainees, and returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs):

Volunteers who create their own websites, or post information to websites that have been created and maintained by others, should be reminded that, unless password protected, any information posted on the Internet can be accessed by the general public, even if that is not intended. Volunteers are responsible for discussing the content in advance with the country director to ensure that the material is suitable and complies with this general guidance as well as with any country-specific guidance.

The thoughtful and accurate insights that you convey in your communications with others can contribute substantially to the Peace Corps' Third Goal—bringing to the U.S. a better understanding of other countries. However, given the broad access to Volunteer-posted material on the Web, both in your country of service and elsewhere, you should remain culturally sensitive regarding the material you post to any website. People in host countries and members of the U.S. public may make inferences about the Peace Corps or the Volunteer's country of service based on the material a Volunteer posts to a website. Volunteer-posted material on the Web should not embarrass or reflect poorly on the Peace Corps or the countries where Volunteers serve.



As a safety precaution, do not include information on your website about your precise living location or those of other Volunteers, or information about the location of events to be attended by a large number of Volunteers.

Information Collection and Exchange (ICE)

ICE is a resource for how-to manuals, training guides, curricula, lesson plans, and case studies published by the Peace Corps and other sources. The ICE Catalog contains titles and descriptions of both print and digital publications. All Volunteers also receive a CD-ROM, *Sharing Promising Practices: ICE Digital Documents* (ICE No. RE014K), with over 160 digital ICE documents. This can be a valuable resource as you begin to develop your master's project.

Deferring Your Student Loans

You may have student loans from your undergraduate studies or new loans to cover the costs of graduate school. Because your Peace Corps service will take you out of the United States for an extended period, 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 lender how you will defer your loans while you are in the Peace Corps. When deciding how to manage your student loans, consider whether:

- ⊖ You will be continuously enrolled as a full-time student.
- ⊖ Your lender will allow you to defer payments during Peace Corps service.
- ⊖ You can defer your loans based on “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.



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. All matters related to student loan deferment, loan repayment, and/or partial cancellation of Perkins loans are the Volunteer’s sole responsibility.

The Peace Corps does not grant loan deferments and/or partial Perkins loan cancellations. The Peace Corps will provide you with a Peace Corps Certification of your status as a Volunteer at the staging event (pre-departure orientation) that your lender(s) will most likely require from you in order to defer your loan(s).

Your lender(s) may also require student loan deferment form(s) for their deferment process. The number of deferment forms you will need depends upon the number and types of loans you have, and upon whether your lender(s) require renewal for deferment each year. Contact your lender(s) to obtain loan deferment forms. You should bring these forms with you to your Peace Corps staging event. One copy of your deferment form(s) will be certified at your Peace Corps staging event for you to send to your lender(s). Subsequent deferment forms will be certified by Peace Corps staff in your country of assignment, and then it is your responsibility to send them to your lender(s). Deferments will probably need renewal every year, and renewal will be your responsibility.

Whoever will be handling your affairs stateside (such as your parents) should know that you will be getting a deferral, and should monitor your mail for any loan materials that may be delivered while you are overseas. *You and/or your power of attorney should always follow up with your lender(s) to determine the status of your request to make sure that the information was received and processed.* You can also send loan deferment forms for certification or request a Peace Corps certification by contacting the address below, or you can contact the volunteer certification specialist at certifications@peacecorps.gov, by fax at 202.692.1422 or by phone at 202.692.1784.

Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters
Volunteer and PSC Financial Services
Volunteer Financial Operations
Attn: Certifying Officer
1111 20th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20526

For more information about federally guaranteed student loans, call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 800.433.3243, or search online via studentaid.ed.gov.

For important information regarding student loan deferment and partial Perkins loan cancellation, please visit the link below for an explanation on the Peace Corps website: peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.whyvol.finben.instructions.

For more information about federally guaranteed student loans, call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 800.433.3243, or search online via studentaid.ed.gov.

Filing Taxes

The Peace Corps Office of Volunteer and PSC Financial Services distributes W-2 forms every January directly to PCVs overseas. You will need to fill out a Privacy Act Waiver which is provided in the invitation email, and bring it to staging. Your individual situation and the amount of income earned for that tax year determines whether or not you must file taxes.

Arriving In-Country




Pre-Service Training

The knowledge and skills you have gained since beginning the MI program will be factors in determining your Peace Corps assignment. Nevertheless, there is still more to learn. You will complete an in-depth pre-service training (PST) program upon arriving in your country of service to prepare you more specifically for your assignment and life there. Your graduate education has been good preparation for your assignment, but PST enhances

what you have already learned and includes language, technical, health, safety and security, and cross-cultural components. After successfully completing the PST program, which lasts 8 to 12 weeks, you are sworn in as a PCV.

Upon Arrival at Post

The Peace Corps MI program staff notifies the country Peace Corps staff before you arrive that you are an MI participant. It is up to you to discuss your MI academic objectives with



your country staff supervisor early in your training. Some overseas staff have had experience working with MI candidates while others have not. Take the initiative in meeting with your staff supervisor 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 to function in the culture, and your ability to adapt to your new environment. Country staff makes specific assignments based upon the needs of the site and your perceived skills and interests.

You must receive a signed approval letter from the country director for any academic work you will conduct. It is up to you to adapt your overseas academic requirements to the specifics of your Peace Corps assignment and the conditions of your site.

We encourage you to keep in touch with your faculty advisor(s), the MI Coordinator, and MI program staff. We value your feedback and welcome hearing about your experiences while you serve as a PCV.

Returning Home

Before You Leave Your Post

Several weeks before your Peace Corps service ends, you will participate in a close of service (COS) conference with your Volunteer group to discuss the procedures to be completed in the final weeks of service, and to prepare for life after the Peace Corps. As an MI participant, you will also need to plan the next steps to fulfill your academic requirements and receive your degree. Your community will have played a significant part in the development of your project and it is important to thank all who have been a part of its success. Indicate what you did, why it was important, and the effect that it had. 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 for collaborative work in the future.

Issues to Consider

- ⊖ Have you compiled all the information you need for your academic work?
- ⊖ 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? What language will you use?

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 Coordinator of your travel plans?

Readjustment Allowance

Returning Volunteers receive a readjustment allowance from the Peace Corps of \$275 per month for each month of service, totaling \$7,425 for a full tour of 27 months.

Completing Your Academic Requirements

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



Peace Corps MI program staff also benefit from your work. *Please email a copy of your project or thesis to the MI program at Peace Corps headquarters*, with a short abstract. Student projects help build the Peace Corps knowledge base and serve as an educational resource for current and future MI students. They may also be included—with your permission—in an anthology of MI work to be shared with university faculty. Information can be sent to mastersinternational@peacecorps.gov.

When You Receive Your Degree

As a good business practice, be sure to thank your community as well as your faculty advisor. Your valuable experience and insights are a great resource for future MI participants, your faculty, your department, and the Peace Corps. Be sure to keep in touch with your campus contacts, the Peace Corps MI program staff, and your local Peace Corps recruiting office. We often call upon RPCVs to help us in promotional activities, to review MI-related materials or publications, or to assist with other Peace Corps activities. Your feedback helps us continually to improve this important program.

⊖ Section Two ⊖

Frequently Asked Questions



What will I do as a PCV?


Insofar as it is possible, MI students are placed in projects relevant to their course of study. The many projects implemented by MI students have included:

- ⊖ A public health project in Madagascar that introduced improved nutrition and hygiene practices to school children and their mothers.
- ⊖ An agricultural project in Nepal that introduced more efficient crop production, pest management, seed production, and storage techniques for increasing both food production and income.
- ⊖ A forestry project in Paraguay that promoted 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 that helped entrepreneurs gain practical business skills, including inventory management, accounting practices, marketing, and accessing credit.
- ⊖ A project in Kyrgyzstan that taught English to secondary students and introduced new teaching methods to local English teachers, improving their English skills in the process.

What are the benefits of being an MI student?

The foremost benefit of the MI program is that you will gain both a master's degree and two years of international experience upon completing the program. Together, they comprise superb credentials for your career path. In addition to receiving excellent training and practical experience, MI students receive numerous benefits from the Peace Corps, including:

- ⊖ Transportation to and from the country of service.
- ⊖ Living and housing expenses.
- ⊖ Language, cross-cultural, and technical training.
- ⊖ Full medical and dental coverage.
- ⊖ Vacation time and allowance.

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- ⊖ Deferment or cancellation of certain government education loans.
 - ⊖ A readjustment allowance of \$7,425 given at completion of 27 months of service.
 - ⊖ Career counseling and support.
 - ⊖ Noncompetitive eligibility for federal government jobs for one year after completing a full term of overseas service, or following completion of full-time student status.
 - ⊖ All participating MI schools offer academic credit for Peace Corps service. In addition, several schools provide scholarships or tuition waivers for these credits. MI students at some universities can also compete for research or teaching assistantships. These benefits are unique to each school.

What determines the degree programs offered through MI?

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

When will I receive my Peace Corps assignment?

While you are completing your coursework, your Peace Corps application will be kept with the Placement Office 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. (The Placement Office works to ensure a successful fit for your skills and experience and the programming needs in the country).

As you begin your academic studies, you are encouraged to provide the Placement Office with your contact information and to verify the completion of your Peace Corps application. The Placement Office will note any updates in your file—including romantic interests, legal status, any new work or volunteer experience, transcripts, availability date, and anything else that might affect your application status. Placements can be made only where Volunteers with specific skills have been requested. The more flexible you are about your assignment, the more satisfied you will be with your overall experience as an MI student.



During this time period, it is important to respond to messages from the Peace Corps in a timely fashion. Failure to do so could result in your application for consideration of service being withdrawn.

Can I decline my invitation?

Yes, but you should be aware that second invitations are rarely offered, unless there are extenuating circumstances and Peace Corps' programmatic capabilities permit. Please send the Placement Office a statement regarding your reasons for declining the invitation and the

office will take this into consideration when determining whether or not a second invitation will be offered. Again, because the time and effort taken to extend a first invitation is quite intensive, second invitations are rarely issued.

Will my placement be handled differently if I am recently married or soon to be married?

Please note that any change in marital status will require that you re-apply. The Peace Corps accepts married couples, but the application and placement process can take longer. Both people must qualify, and the Placement Office will have to determine a site assignment where you can both serve together. Couples must be legally married as defined by federal law and have been married for 12 months before their scheduled departure date.

Where might I serve in the Peace Corps?

The Peace Corps will extend an invitation to you approximately two weeks to five months before the date you indicate you are available for Peace Corps training. The invitation will specify both a country of service and an assignment area. There are many factors involved in making a placement, including the selection criteria set by the countries, your language skills, and possible medical issues. While you are encouraged to express your preferences regarding geographic region and the reasons for those preferences, it is not always possible for the Peace Corps to accommodate those preferences.

“Research in the lab is very straightforward: problem, literature review, hypothesis, experiments, results, discussion... Projects are not always so neat and tidy in the Peace Corps.”


— Caleb Fader, MI student, Michigan Technological University

How does placement for MI students differ from placement for regular Volunteers?

The main difference is that Peace Corps attempts to place MI students in *assignments that closely match their academic programs of study*. For instance, agriculture majors might be assigned to work in farm management, English majors might find themselves training university faculty, and forestry majors might work in the area of natural resources with local forestry agencies.

How long will I serve in the Peace Corps?

PCVs serve for 27 months. This includes up to three months of technical, cross-cultural, safety and security, and language training that takes place in the country of service prior to



beginning work on your project. PCVs typically say that it takes at least one year simply to get adjusted, learn the language, and establish the necessary credibility in the host community. We encourage you to be patient with this process and with yourself—the results are worth the wait!

Do the assignments differ between typical Volunteers and MI Volunteers?

No. MI Volunteers often work side-by-side with other Volunteers. MI Volunteers are expected to be both PCVs and students.

As an MI student, will I be treated differently from other PCVs?

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

“My job currently is to reopen a recently closed recycling plant, and figure out a way to make a city-wide recycling project sustainable.”

**— Isamari Mandujano,
MI student, University of
Illinois–Chicago**

Can I get a Ph.D. through MI?

MI does not provide the opportunity to earn a doctoral degree, but our sister program, the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program, does. For more information, visit peacecorps.gov/fellows.

How is the MI process different from entering graduate school and the 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 degree-related professional international experience with the highly regarded Peace Corps.

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 in connection with your service. All costs associated with your Peace Corps experience are covered by the Peace Corps, including transportation, medical care, and living expenses. In addition, the Peace Corps provides a readjustment allowance of \$7,425,

which is paid at the end of your service. Most schools provide students with an opportunity for research or teaching assistantships, scholarships, or tuition waivers to offset 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 and your MI Coordinator to determine how the early termination of your Peace Corps service will affect the completion of your master's degree.

Are there career counseling or placement services available for MI students?

The Peace Corps provides career information and job listings for RPCVs. Visit the Peace Corps website at peacecorps.gov/rpcv.



⊖ Conclusion ⊖

The Adventure Is Just Beginning



Thank you for being a part of the Peace Corps and the MI program. You are making an invaluable contribution to your community and to the world. Your efforts are commendable and we hope you will have an amazing experience—one that is academically, professionally, and personally enriching. We wish you the best of luck in your studies and in your time overseas and we look forward to hearing about your experiences as an MI student and as a PCV.



If you send us stories and photos, with your permission we would like to share them with others. In this way, while supporting the MI program with your accounts, you can simultaneously support the Third Goal of the agency—to help Americans learn about other peoples and places.

Know that we are impressed with the difference you're about to begin making overseas and the cross-cultural relationships you'll be forging. We hope that during your service you'll remain inspired and healthy, and that you'll stay in touch. Please feel free to contact us, the MI program staff, if you have any questions, comments, or updates at mastersinternational@peacecorps.gov.

Θ Appendices Θ



- A. The Peace Corps Application Process
- B. Countdown to Your MI Degree
- C. Meet the Key Players in Your MI Experience
- D. Learning the Lingo:
Common Peace Corps Terms
- E. Country Director's Letter
- F. Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers

“As I look back over the nine years since graduating, what I learned in those first few years as an MI candidate have greatly influenced the route I have taken. I’ve learned two new languages, gotten to experience several countries in Africa, seen my own country through new eyes, and I can say with conviction that it’s been a great ride so far!”

— Kristie McComb,
MI student, Rollins
School of Public Health,
Emory University

Appendix A: The Peace Corps Application Process

	What You Do	What the Peace Corps Does
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill out Peace Corps application 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Submit a copy of your official graduate school acceptance letter stating that you are an MI student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts interview
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn in reference letters, transcripts, skill addenda, fingerprints, etc. 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominates you to program • Reviews health status report • Sends medical kit
Clearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete medical exams • Turn in medical kit 9 to 12 months prior to estimated departure 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical review and qualification • Legal review and qualification
Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn in any extra documents requested (e.g., legal documents, transcripts, résumé) approximately six months prior to estimated departure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement suitability review and qualification
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation to an assignment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept or decline invitation within 7 calendar days of receipt • If accepting, complete passport/visa applications, Aspiration Statement, and updated resume 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sends Aspiration Statement and résumés to post
Staging		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sends your staging email one month before departure
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete necessary documents in staging email • Set up air arrangements with the Peace Corps travel office • Meet training class for one-day staging in the U.S. • DEPART FOR YOUR NEW HOME! 	



Medical clearance expires two years after your physical, and dental clearance expires one year after clearance. It is therefore often best to submit your medical kit about 9 to 12 months before your estimated departure. However, if you have complex medical issues, you may want to send the kit in sooner. Make sure all reports are included and all questions are answered. *Incomplete medical kits are a major factor in applicants not being cleared in time for their assignments.*

Appendix B: Countdown to Your MI Degree

18 Months Prior to Peace Corps Service

- Submit applications to graduate schools.

14 Months Prior to Peace Corps Service

- Submit application to the Peace Corps.

12 to 14 Months Prior to Peace Corps Service

- Enroll for first year of graduate school.
- Submit your graduate school acceptance letter to the Peace Corps.
- Interview with a Peace Corps recruiter.
- Submit transcripts, references, skill addenda, fingerprint cards, etc. to the Peace Corps.
- Receive nomination for service and forms to use for medical exams.

3 to 12 Months Prior to Peace Corps Service

- The Peace Corps conducts medical and legal review and qualification.
- The Peace Corps conducts a placement suitability review and qualification.

3 to 6 Months Prior to Peace Corps Service

- Receive the Peace Corps' invitation to serve.
- Respond to the Peace Corps' invitation within seven calendar days.
- Complete passport/visa applications and aspiration statement.

1 to 3 Months Prior to Peace Corps Service

- Complete first year of graduate school.
- Receive a staging email from the Peace Corps.
- Complete necessary documents in the Peace Corps staging email.
- Make airline reservations with the Peace Corps' travel office.

1 Day Prior to Peace Corps Service

- Meet your fellow Volunteers for a one-day staging/orientation in the United States.

First 10 to 12 Weeks of Peace Corps Service

- Tell your host country staff you are an MI student.
- Complete your pre-service training (PST).

First Year of Peace Corps Service

- Concentrate on developing your Peace Corps project.
- Remain in touch with your faculty advisor.

Second Year of Peace Corps Service

- Continue your Peace Corps project.
- Develop your academic project.

After Peace Corps Service

- Return to graduate school and complete your final thesis/project.
- Submit a copy of your final thesis/project to the MI program staff.



Every MI student's experience will be different, but this is an approximate timeline for completing your degree...

Appendix C: Meet the Key Players in Your MI Experience

You



You are the person who will make your MI degree happen. Familiarize yourself with the charts and processes described in this manual. Keep the 12 steps toward your MI degree progressing smoothly by: using a checklist, writing key deadlines in your calendar, keeping copies of all Peace Corps paperwork, and keeping notes of all your communications with Peace Corps staff.

The University Players

MI Coordinator – The MI Coordinator is the official university point person who liaises between your university and the Peace Corps. Touch base with your MI Coordinator as soon as possible. S/he may be able to help in many ways such as: providing you with important information from Peace Corps headquarters, putting you in touch with the Peace Corps community on your campus, informing you about academic requirements for your MI program, or helping you to inform your faculty advisor about the Peace Corps aspects of your graduate program.

Faculty/academic advisor – Your faculty advisor plays the special role of mentoring you in your academic work as you progress toward your MI degree. Ideally, your faculty advisor should help you to combine your academic work with your Peace Corps service and should stay in touch with you while you are overseas.

The Peace Corps Players

Peace Corps recruiter – Your recruiter, based out of your regional office, is the first Peace Corps representative you will encounter. Your recruiter will review your Peace Corps application, interview you, and nominate you for service in the Peace Corps if s/he finds that you are a good fit for the agency.

My Toolkit – This key player is an online tool that allows you to track your progress through the complex Peace Corps application process.

Medical Services Office – Once you have been nominated, you will be sent the paperwork you need for your medical and dental checks; the medical services staff at Peace Corps headquarters will be in touch with you if they have any questions or if they need further informa-

tion. You can also contact the medical services staff directly if you have questions about the status of your medical clearance.

Placement Office – Once you have received medical clearance, you will begin an ongoing relationship with the Placement Office at Peace Corps headquarters. Staff from this office will assess your entire application, talk to you over the telephone, and, ultimately, determine your type of assignment, the country you will be working in, and your departure date.

Master's International (or MI) program staff – Master's International is a special office within the Peace Corps Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection. The staff of this office—the MI program staff—provides general oversight for Master's International, serving as the primary liaison between Peace Corps headquarters and participating MI schools, and promoting the program nationally. MI staff also serves as a resource to you, the student, throughout your MI experience, and remains available to answer your questions.

Country Director – Besides making sure that operations are running smoothly in your host country, this overseas staff person must also formally grant approval for you to move forward with your academic project while you are serving as a Volunteer.

Other overseas staff – Each post has as many as 10 to 20 staff members including your staff supervisor, a medical officer, a director of programming and training, and a program manager—all of whom will support you throughout your overseas service.

Host country nationals (HCNs) – Host country nationals are the citizens and residents of your country of service. You will live and work with HCNs on a daily basis, and you will be a guest in their country. Among these hosts, you will have an official HCN counterpart and numerous project counterparts who will help you in undertaking your Peace Corps project.

“It seems that a great many RPCVs return from service with the feeling that they gained much more from the experience than they were able to give.”

**— Bina Contreras,
MI student, SIT
Graduate Institute**

Appendix D: Learning the Lingo: Common Peace Corps Terms



AF – Africa. One of the three geographic regions where the Peace Corps sends Volunteers, and also the name of the Peace Corps department responsible for overseeing programming in this region.

APCD – Associate Peace Corps Director. This Peace Corps professional works in your host country and assists the country director, overseeing many of the day-to-day operations of the country office.

Assignment – This term can refer to the program area you are working in (as in, “I am assigned to environment”) and it can also refer to the program area you are working in together with your location

(as in, “environment, Burkina Faso”).

CD – Country Director. (See below.)

COS – Close of service. The day your Peace Corps service officially ends.

Country Director – The head of operations in a host country.

Country of service – Not to be confused with “COS,” this is the country where you live and undertake your Peace Corps service.

DOS – Description of service. This is a legal document you will receive at the end of your service verifying that you were a Peace Corps Volunteer.

EMA – Europe, Middle East, and Asia. One of the three geographic regions where the Peace Corps sends Volunteers, and also the name of the Peace Corps department responsible for overseeing programming in this region.

EOD – Enter on duty. The act of formally beginning Peace Corps service.

HCN – Host country national. A citizen and resident of the country where you undertake your Peace Corps service.

Host country – Your country of service.

Host country staff – The professionals who work for the Peace Corps in your country of service. This team may be as large as 20 or more people, is headed by the country director, and includes training, programming and medical staff.

HSR – Health status review. A description of medical readiness for Peace Corps Service.

IAP – Inter-America and the Pacific. One of the three geographic regions where the Peace Corps sends Volunteers, and also the name of the Peace Corps department responsible for overseeing programming in this region.

Invitation – An official offer from the Peace Corps to serve in a particular assignment and country. You receive your invitation after you have been nominated and received medical clearance.

Master's project – The academic project that draws upon your Peace Corps experience and is part of your graduate studies.

MI Coordinator – Your graduate school’s official liaison with the Peace Corps.

NOM – See “nomination” below.

Nomination – Also referred to as “NOM.” An official submission from your recruiter to Peace Corps headquarters stating that you are a strong candidate for Peace Corps service. You must secure a nomination before continuing with the Peace Corps application process, and your nomination may or may not lead to an invitation to serve.

OMS – The Peace Corps office of medical services at headquarters.

PCV – Peace Corps Volunteer. In Peace Corps terminology, this refers only to people who are currently serving. Before your service you are an “applicant,” and upon completing your service you become an “RPCV” (see below).

Peace Corps project – The work you will conduct in your host country for the Peace Corps. You will develop a project in your program area with the help of host country staff and, often, you may be involved in more than one project.

Placement – The Peace Corps’ process of determining both your suitability to serve and, if you are selected as a Volunteer, where and in what capacity you will serve. Agency staff will match your skills, language competency, disability status, and availability date with an appropriate Peace Corps assignment.

Pre-service training – (See PST.)

Program areas – (Sometimes referred to as “programs” or “project sectors.”) These are the professional fields or sectors in which Peace Corps Volunteers conduct their work, namely: agriculture, business and information and communication technology, education, environment, food security, health, HIV/AIDS, and youth and community development.

Project sectors – Also known as “program areas.” See above.

PST – Pre-service training. The first 10 to 12 weeks of your service abroad when you are prepared for your assignment with language and cultural awareness training, health and safety training, and information related to your program area.

Recruiter – A Peace Corps employee, typically not based out of headquarters, who oversees your initial steps in applying to the Peace Corps.

RPCV – Returned Peace Corps Volunteer. Your life-long status once you have satisfactorily completed your Peace Corps service.

RRO – Regional Recruitment Office: One of the various offices across the United States, not including Peace Corps headquarters, where Peace Corps recruits new Volunteers.

Staging – Training and orientation held in the United States directly before your departure to your host country.

Volunteer – (See PCV.)

VRS – Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection. The office within the Peace Corps responsible for recruiting, selecting and placing Volunteers. Master’s International is a department within VRS.

Appendix E: Country Director's Letter

The following is sent to the Country Director for each MI student:

Dear Country Director:

Current Memoranda of Cooperation (MOC) signed with national universities participating in the Peace Corps Master's International (MI) program require that MI Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) receive approval from post staff to conduct an academic project while serving. Academic projects may range from studies directly related to the student's primary Peace Corps assignment, to topics developed from secondary projects, or even research conducted during a student's own personal time. MI PCVs understand that responsibilities of Peace Corps service come first and that they might have to adapt their overseas academic requirements to the specifics of their Peace Corps assignment.

We encourage you and your staff to become familiar with the MI PCV's area of study by meeting with the Volunteer and discussing the nature and objectives of his or her graduate assignment. By opening the avenues of communication between the MI PCV and your staff, we hope to minimize any misunderstandings that may arise and encourage the mutual sharing of information that may be of benefit to the post, the host country, and the MI PCV.

Research projects that involve human subjects must be screened through a university's Institutional Review Board and follow federal human subject research guidelines to ensure that the safety and privacy of host country nationals are protected. Universities also monitor the research project for academic quality and appropriateness.

The Peace Corps staff's responsibility is to ensure that a MI PCV's project does not interfere with his or her assignment responsibilities and that safety, medical, and security concerns are not compromised.

For our records, the MI program would appreciate your signature at the bottom of this letter, acknowledging your approval for the MI PCV to conduct his or her academic project. Please keep a copy of this letter for your records, make a copy for the MI program, and return the signed original letter and a copy to the MI PCV.

Should you have any questions regarding the Peace Corps MI program, please feel free to contact mastersinternational@peacecorps.gov. Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Program Manager
Master's International

By signing below, I give my permission for _____ to work on his/her MI academic project in the country of _____. This project must not interfere with his/her primary responsibilities as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Signature of Approval: _____ Date: _____

Please return a signed copy to: Office of Recruitment, Master's International
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters,
1111 20th Street N.W., Washington, DC 20526

Or fax to: 202.692.1727

Or email as a PDF to: mastersinternational@peacecorps.gov

Appendix F: Core Expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers



The mission of the Peace Corps is to promote world peace and friendship by:

- ⊖ Helping people of interested countries to meet their need for trained men and women.
- ⊖ Helping promote better understanding of Americans on the part of peoples served.
- ⊖ Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps Mission, as a trainee and Volunteer,

you are expected to:

- ⊖ Prepare your personal and professional life to make a commitment to serve abroad for a full term of 27 months.
- ⊖ Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work; and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed.
- ⊖ Serve where the Peace Corps asks you to go, under conditions of hardship, if necessary, and with the flexibility needed for effective service.
- ⊖ Recognize that your successful and sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture.
- ⊖ Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, seven days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance.
- ⊖ Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, mutual learning, and respect.
- ⊖ Work within the rules and regulations of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where you serve.
- ⊖ Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others.
- ⊖ Recognize that you will be perceived, in your host country and community, as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America.
- ⊖ Represent responsibly the people, cultures, values, and traditions of your host country and community to people in the United States both during and following your service.

☪ Peace Corps Contact List ☪



Call *Peace Corps* toll free at 800.424.8580,
peacecorps.gov

Master's International Staff: Ext. 1812 or
202.692.1812, Fax 202.692.1727

Placement Office: Ext. 1840 or 202.692.1840,
Fax 202.692.1897

Legal Questions: Ext. 1845 or 202.692.1845,
Fax 202.692.1898

Office of Medical Services: Ext. 1500 or 800.424.8580, Option 2, Ext. 4049,
Fax 202.692.1501

Loan Deferment Questions: Ext. 1784 or 202.692.1784

Passports/Visas/Travel Arrangements: Ext. 1170 or 202.692.1170 (Sato Travel)

Staging Office: Ext. 1865 or 202.692.1865

Regional Recruiting Offices: 800.424.8580, Ext. 1

(Your call will be directed to your local recruiting office.) To call direct, use the phone numbers below:

Atlanta:

(AL, FL, GA, MS, SC, TN, PR, Virgin Islands) 404.562.3456, Email: atlinfo@peacecorps.gov

Boston:

(MA, ME, NH, RI, VT) 617.565.5555, Email: boston@peacecorps.gov

Chicago:

(IL, IN, KY, MI, MO, OH, IA, MN, ND SD, WI) 312.353.4990, Email: chicago@peacecorps.gov

Dallas:

(AR, LA, NM, OK, TX, CO, KS, NE, UT, WY) 214.253.5400, Email: dallas@peacecorps.gov

Los Angeles:

(AZ, Southern CA) 310.356.1100, Email: lainfo@peacecorps.gov

New York:

(CT, NJ, NY, PA) 212.352.5440, Email: nyinfo@peacecorps.gov

San Francisco:

(HI, Northern CA, NV) 510.452.8444, Email: sfinfo@peacecorps.gov

Seattle:

(AK, ID, MT, OR, WA) 206.553.5490, Email: seattle@peacecorps.gov

Washington, DC:

(DC, DE, MD, NC, VA, WV) 202.692.1040

Email: dcinfo@peacecorps.gov

