Contributors

Matt Ward is a student in the MI/MSPH program in the Tropical Medicine department at Tulane. He has volunteered extensively in Uganda, the combination of his past experiences and his current academic level will make him a great Peace Corps Volunteer in Fall 2012.

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Caitlin Quade is a MPH graduate from Tulane in the International Development department! She is currently serving as a Health Extension volunteer in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Caitlin's experience has been filled with adventures throughout Ethiopia,

Joann Lee is an MPH student at Tulane in the International Health department. Joann is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer from Kenya, where she served as a health extension volunteer from 2007-2009.

Rachael Kramas is an MI/MSPH student in the Tropical Medicine department. Rachael recently received her placement in Guyana, South America, where she will serve as a Health Extension specialist!

Cover Photo provided by Nicole Yergler, who is currently serving in Peru as a Health Extension Volunteer. She is an MI/MPH candidate in the International Health and Development department. Pictured is a woman holding her animals in Peru.

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Reflections

As my time in the Tulane Peace Corps Programs office winds down, I find myself entering a period of reflection; reflection on how far I have seen the program come, and anticipation of how far I believe it will go. It seems as though every semester is a snapshot in time of the continual improvement of this program and I can say that it has been my absolute privilege to work in this office for the past year creating my snapshot. Upon becoming the program coordinator, I was simultaneously excited for the possibilities and unsure of my ability to measure up to the long line of excellent coordinators who preceded me. The very nature of being the Peace Corps Programs Coordinator means that you have only two semesters to accomplish as much as possible to maintain and improve the program, while simultaneously being a fulltime graduate student. Let me tell you, it is no small task.

Tulane’s decision to have their Peace Corps Programs run entirely by graduate students certainly has its pros and cons. For one, because we only work part-time, everything we need to accomplish must completed during a combined 40 hours/week between two fulltime students. We also experience a loss of continuity every semester as the newest coordinator works to adjust and improve the program. On the other hand, because we are students, we are also afforded the opportunity to be the friends and classmates of the MI’s and RPCVs with which we work. We laugh with them, share our Peace Corps stories with them, and together dream up new projects and goals the program can work toward. I have always felt that this is the biggest asset to having a student-run program; we work side-by-side with our MI/RPCVs to ensure the success of this program.

Perhaps similar to Peace Corps itself, it has been easier to dwell on the goals I had hoped to achieve and did not, rather than feel proud of the improvements I have seen while working here. For instance, we are now more connected than ever to our prospective, current, and former MI/RPCVs through various social media outlets, this publication The Internationalist, and our beautifully revamped website. We hold monthly service and social events, weekly language clubs (with the opportunity to utilize Rosetta Stone software to improve language skills), and have brand new Tulane/Peace Corps Programs t-shirts that look fantastic!! We have plans to paint a Tulane/Peace Corps mural in our building, revamp our monthly meetings into a formalized seminar, and assist DC headquarters in the creation of a safety toolkit to assist volunteers upon return from service. These are just a few of the projects that the next coordinator will be able to tackle while creating their own snapshot.

In closing, I can say that the past year in this office has been an intense rollercoaster of excitement, exhaustion, and pride. I feel so honored to have been a part of this program and to know all of the incredible Master’s International and Returned Peace Corps Volunteer students at Tulane and overseas. I have been continually amazed by the enthusiasm of our MI’s at Tulane, the tenacity of our MI’s overseas, and the wisdom of our RPCVs upon their return. It is an inspirational display of what the human spirit can accomplish if the desire exists. I wish nothing more than to carry with me this spirit of service and goodwill on whatever path I take next. Thanks for the memories y’all, wak gud.

Kelly Nowicki RPCV Jamaica 2007-2009
Here are the HIGHLIGHTS of what we have accomplished this year in the Peace Corps Programs office!

- 23 Masters International students started this year, and 13 left for their service overseas!

- We have new T-shirts! RPCV Barb Knittel created a design inspired from our home here in New Orleans and our commitment to the Peace Corps! These shirts are available for $10 in the office!

- RPCVs all over Tulane have given oral interviews about their service throughout the year, these interviews will be used to make informational videos for future Tulane students, as well as create an oral history of the vast amounts of experiences our Tulane students have from their experiences.

- Our Masters International meetings are NEW AND IMPROVED! We now provide more interactive meetings. Taught by Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and faculty guest speakers, these meetings are meant to better prepare our volunteers for what their experience could be like overseas, as well as give them the tools they need before they depart!

- We have been working hard this semester to update our website, Facebook, and our new blog! Make sure you check out our website for calendar updates and new pictures!

Masters International Students and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers at the NOAIDS Task Force Walk 2011

Incoming MI class Fall 2011 with Dean Johnson (back right)

This semester has seemed out of place without Dave Westervelt, co-coordinator of Peace Corps Programs who has finished coursework and headed to Haiti to work on his practicum.

Dave played an instrumental part in our program by creating a database and creating more inclusion of RPCVs in activities.

Bon Voyage Dave, and Good Luck!
Service
Rebuild and NO/AIDS Task Force
by Megan Sauer

My first event with the Tulane Peace Corps Program was the “No AIDS Walk.” Not having lived in the area long I didn’t know what to expect and thought it would be small (not realizing that New Orleans does it big). So when I arrived at Audubon Park, I was surprised that I had a hard time finding the other Peace Corps members. I found them on the edge of what appeared to be a Zumba throng led by an enthusiastic woman deep into the crowd. I was also excited to learn that our group rose $568 for the event (thanks to the fundraising efforts of Kelly!).

Shortly after becoming oriented, the walk started. It wasn’t until we left the park that I realized another fact about New Orleans— they like to dress up! Needless to say, it was a festive walk. There were cheer/pep groups every quarter mile or so with water and motivation. My personal favorite additions were the kiddie pools filled with water for the dogs (NOLA loves its dogs).

After our stroll through the hot streets of New Orleans, the finish, a cheer squad welcomed us back to Audubon and we were given roses.

Rebuilding New Orleans was a couple of weeks later. This one was a smaller, more subdued crowd (I blame the early morning start time) but nonetheless enthusiastic and committed. At the beginning, we were given some history of the house. It was damaged by the winds during Katrina and the back portion of the house was dilapidated. The family had continued to live in the house, which quickly became more than they could handle. RNO had reconstructed that back portion. We were needed for the finishing touches, painting the interior and exterior. The second week would consist of laying down floor boards.

I ended up on the interior with three other girls painting one room. We received painting basics and then were off. I began with the ceiling, which quickly splattered my face. One of the women brought a music player which became the background music to conversation (which was really me interrogating the RPCV’s on their experiences). Before I knew it there was a lunch break—pizza provided by Penny! By the end of it all, I was tired but felt like I had accomplished something good and had gotten to know the New Orleans community, my community, a little better.
“Why are you in MI”? This question is frequently posed to Masters International (MI) students. While there is no single answer that could possibly cover all the reasons a student decides to embark on an MI adventure, I can tell you mine.

During high school I was afforded the opportunity to volunteer at the Bwindi Community Hospital, formerly the Bwindi Community Health Center, for two years. The hospital is located in the far South East corner of Uganda, adjacent Bwindi National Park and just miles from the Congolese border. It is situated in one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen—set in a valley, surrounded by rainforest swathed mountains, and about five hours from the nearest paved road. The Hospital was founded by Dr. Scott Kellermann, a Tulane alum, and his wife, Carol in 2003. They began providing health care to the Batwa pygmies who had been displaced from their homes when Bwindi National Park was created. The first time I volunteered, the hospital consisted of two buildings, a pit latrine, and a lean-to that was the kitchen. The only electricity came from a few solar panels and water was carried in from a nearby spring. Since then, it has grown into a 112-bed referral hospital that provides health care and health education to over 100,000 people in Uganda.

While there, my duties ranged from changing dress-ings to painting murals on the walls of the ward. I was even allowed to give a little girl stitches and aid a surgical resection of an abdominal abscess. It was these experiences that galvanized my desire to work in medicine and fostered my commitment to service. Since then, I had always played with the idea of doing the Peace Corps, but was not certain it was something I was going to do until I learned about Tulane’s MI program. My experiences in Africa have taught me that to make the biggest positive impact in people’s lives you have to get to know them, live beside them, and build relationships with them. The MI program allows you to do just that. It allows you to take the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom and put them to prac-tical, real-world use. For me, it seemed like the best way to maximize my time here at Tulane, as well as the Peace Corps; simply put, the opportunity was too good to pass up.

Matt is also the author of the Tulane MI program’s blog. Check it out at http://pcptulane.blogspot.com/
On March 7th, 2010 a jubilant group of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) and Tulane Master’s International (MI) students took a break from watching from Mardi Gras madness to be a part of it. Organized by the Louisiana Peace Corps Association (LPCA), the krewe had an unforgettable experience walking with the Krewe of Orpheus on Lundi Gras night.

The krewe comprised of 7 Tulane MIs (including two returned MIs), 10 Tulane RPCVs, and 32 RPCVs from the LPCA. The celebrants converged at Tchoupitoulas and Napoleon on this slightly chilly evening decked in outfits, representing dozens of countries of service. Onlookers saw patterned headdresses bobbing, and giant national flags donned like super-hero capes. Amidst marching bands with their big sounds and choreographed dancers wearing shiny leotards, the LPCA/MI krewe appeared a happy, messy tribe. Disregarding any thought to uniformity, the group high-stepped it from Napoleon Ave. to St. Charles, making its way down the long stretch to Canal St., and ending downtown at the Convention Center.

Throughout the seven mile parade route, enthusiastic onlookers screamed for beads, which, of course we gladly obliged, thanks to enterprising RPCVs and MIs who came prepared with a grocery cart full of loot. It was also touching and somewhat surprising to hear shouts of appreciation for our Peace Corps service. Perhaps this was best captured when the group approached an intersection and was greeted with Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believin’” blasting into the night sky....

Rolling with Orpheus was a chance to be part of Mardi Gras history, and to share with New Orleans the camaraderie and spirit of Peace Corps. It was an unforgettable experience that I’m sure we would all love to repeat. Same time next year, everyone?
Bicycle Bonanza!
The DO’S and DON’TS of riding around NOLA

Featuring: Matt Ward, Kelly Nowicki, Krystal Segar, and Will Saitta

DO!

- Wear proper biking attire: helmet and closed-toe shoes!
- Stop at Crosswalks
- Obey the Traffic Signs
- Look both ways

DON’T!

- Ride against traffic without a helmet!
- Drive in front of the streetcar!
- Forget to lock your bike!
- Chase the thief!

LOCK YOUR BIKE!
Use a U-bar or chain, and keep bike indoors when possible!

Follow these tips, and you can have a safe and enjoyable biking experience everywhere you go in New Orleans!
Spanning Oceans
Keeping in Touch with Technology

In the past, sharing ideas for projects and relaying experiences with people abroad was an arduous process. Getting messages from brain to pen to paper was not as taxing as trekking to the posting house hours from one’s home. From there, it was up to the gods and the person at the post to complete their end of the bargain. Today, being in the millennial generation of volunteers often means turning to technology to bridge the gaps in geography. Despite the fact that today’s social networks have all but obviated letters, postcards, and the like, the intentions behind those mediums remain. If there is one thing we learned at Tulane, it was that the relationships we made, both professional and personal, were significant, and losing them would mean losing a part of ourselves and a cache of valuable resources that was readily accessible while living stateside.

Below is just one of the many vignettes about how Tulane’s Volunteers have come from all over the country to study and are now using their skills and networks to not only flourish in their posts abroad, but also to maintain their friendships made.

Every semester the Master’s International picnic at Audubon Park allows Volunteer hopefuls the opportunity to engage in a unique network of individuals. Soon-to-be and veteran world travelers get together and share experiences from the dreadful Peace Corps application process to life changing moments abroad. For many MIs, myself included, this is where we get an idea of what is to come. I met a lot of interesting RPCVs at the picnic: volunteers who taught English in conflict-ridden countries in the Middle East, some who started community banks in the Pacific Ocean, and others who taught sex education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Each conversation added a spark to the brainstorm of initiatives that I would try to implement as a volunteer. That day, I also struck up a conversation with Kourtney Rusow, a fellow MI. With things in common outside of MI, we
formed a bond that followed us through our spring semester, our respective Peace Corps applications, staging’s, and to our current assignments.

How did we keep in touch? Of course we wrote letters and sent postcards but we wanted to change things up a bit. At first, the occasional phone call sufficed. Apparently AT&T allows you to keep an international cell phone line for a small fee. However that proved to be costly—to send and receive. I’m not sure of many people how could afford to spend hours on a phone for $.75/minute regardless of whether you’re graduate student, Peace Corps Volunteer, or a business executive. We eventually moved onto Skype and G-chat, but at the time managing a six hour time difference was difficult. Restless for a better way to communicate I decided to go digital. I didn’t have a handheld camera for a while, but I my laptop did. So I decided that I would record myself for in front of the camera for thirty seconds. The first message I sent I was entitled “I hope this works”. Despite the loading time lasting almost an eternity, the video got through. After a little more than year of being in site, we’re still sending letters and postcards, Facebook status updates, having Skype conversations, and even sending video messages—we both have our respective Peace Corps “Cribs” videos.

All have been helpful in keeping us sane. It is as if we are each experiencing two assignments. I share my tribulations—working with troublesome, underage birthrates and malnourished babies in marginalized, urban Latin America; she relays her trials of promoting bed nets and making seasonal community gardens in the sub-Saharan. And from time to time, our perennial blog post remind us that there are lull points in development everywhere. It’s amazing how the stories which we were tentatively listening to not so long ago are now our realities.

As we start the close of our assignments, our questions and anxieties now lie in where our public health careers will take us: D.C. or the CDC?, academia or more field work? We’re both scared, but we have the comfort of sharing our preoccupations whether in ink, photo, video, or in person. No doubt we’ll continue to keep each other posted.

And so, the distances between us can only get shorter as the proliferation of technology in the developing world grows, benefiting our host country nationals as much as volunteers, and giving all of us footholds in relationships that span oceans.
The close of Peace Corps service is usually a time filled with many different emotions. It is also a time to look back and reflect over what has been accomplished. Alex Marr finished his Peace Corps service as a District AIDS Coordinating (DAC) volunteer in Kanye, Botswana. Botswana is a landlocked country in Southern Africa and unfortunately has been greatly affected by HIV/AIDS with a current prevalence of 24.8% among adults aged 15 to 49.

Before Alex's arrival, there was room for growth in monitoring and evaluation of data relating to HIV/AIDS for the district in which he worked. This was problematic because these data are used to come up with plans to lessen the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Correctly reported data can be used to monitor STIs, HIV, condom distribution, and PMTCT. Using knowledge gained from his classes at Tulane, Alex decided to make revamping the data collection process his primary project.
Before he could really begin, the main problems of the system had to be identified. Next, the handwritten forms had to be digitized and data handlers needed to be adequately trained. This allowed for the much needed insight into the problems that were being experienced. The biggest problem reported was the lack of feedback.

Alex and his coworkers began reviewing the data. If something looked out of the ordinary, they went to the individual clinics to teach the nurses how to recalculate the indicator. After a few months, this extra training resulted in accurate data being reported allowing reports measuring the progress of their annual plan to be compiled. Due to this work, it is now possible to reliably determine if they are on track to meet the planned objectives and changes can be made if need be. This is clearly an enormous achievement that the community and Alex will benefit from for years to come.

Dominican Republic
Natalie Ferrel
Krista Brooks

Houston native Natalie Ferrel left just over 7 months ago to work with Caminante Proyecto Educativo, an organization that aims to combat the ill effects of child labor and commercial child sexual exploitation in a busy town called Boca Chica. While Natalie’s focus might be on the local youth in Boca Chica, the problems of sexual exploitation and child labor resound globally. In fact, Natalie’s organization frequently collaborates with other organizations from several different countries dealing with the same issues.

Natalie views this collaboration as a chance to exchange ideas, talk about resources, and share experiences they have had working with similar at-risk populations. Furthermore, she finds that her experiences working for a local NGO would be applicable to almost any international work. She states that, “all of our funds come from international organizations and I think it is pertinent that employees of these organizations understand the reality on the ground.”
My Life in Ethiopia

by Caitlin Quade

The whole premise of Peace Corps is pretty outlandish to begin with—that you’re sent into an otherwise unsuspecting town of strangers and tasked with cultural integration, which is really just a never-ending process of socially awkward moments. I used to assume, looking at all those colorful Peace Corps promotional brochures, that once at my site, I’d suddenly enjoy playing soccer with kids, Chacos would magically appear on my feet, and I’d lose all personal hygiene habits. False! I’m smugly pleased to find I’m still the same soccer-avoiding make-up wearing person as ever, only “playing” Peace Corps when I’m too lazy to wash my hair.

What’s even more amazing is that we actually go through with it, and (at least by the end) find some satisfaction in the whole thing. Some days, you just want to go home. I never thought I’d finish my two years, much less sign up for a third; the trick is to find something about each day, a reason not to E.T. (early terminate). It could be as simple as a chicken laying an egg on your bed, finally learning to dry your laundry inside-out so it doesn’t get sun bleached, or seeing a boy walk by with a second-hand shirt that reads, “Oklahoma State GRANDMA.”
Having an MPH doesn’t make any of the day-to-day work easier, but it does provide a framework for analyzing the burden of disease and making sense of the resultant community interventions. The most helpful thing about having a background in public health has been knowing all the acronyms—really. I’ve definitely employed my M&E skills in writing grant proposals and evaluating projects, but (sadly!) none of my community members have ever asked me to calculate a p-value.

Out of the many projects I dreamed up, a few actually saw the light of day. My favorite was working with a group of commercial sex workers to start an income generating activity, a café called Addis Berhan (“new light” in Amharic). The café project was actually initiated by a gentleman in my town working for the Ethiopian Anti-Malaria Association (AMA for short; they work on HIV/AIDS & TB in addition to malaria). With the help of a very dedicated local counterpart, we constructed and outfitted the café, trained our baristas and bakers, and opened the doors for business last November.

The aim of the café project was to educate and mobilize a small group of commercial sex workers about HIV/AIDS and have these women, in turn, educate others, with the distant goal of providing an opportunity for the women to get out of sex work. My PC assignment was Health-HIV/AIDS, so it was a natural fit. AMA organized the initial trainings (covering HIV, but also general health and life skills) and then each of the twenty women held informal “coffee conversations” at their homes with 10 other CSWs to discuss the issues covered, reaching 200 CSWs total. During a second phase, AMA trained the women in organizational management and small business development, leading to the creation of their official CSW association, Yerefu Atalelna Guadenyoch-achew, and their joint decision to start a café. At this point, I worked with the chair-woman and my counterpart to calculate a budget, request land from the town administration, and submit a VAST grant proposal to Peace Corps, which we were awarded a month later. The ladies are already making plans to expand the café into a full service restaurant with the help of the town administration. It’s been really heartwarming to work with such motivated and genuine women.

As I mentioned, I’m now in my third year. Since January, I’ve been working with Population Services International (PSI) as part of a third year extension opportunity. They’ve put me to work on a grant proposal, a newsletter, a training mechanism to link PCVs with PSI programs, and most recently, a large scale assessment of the current donors and implementing organizations involved in family planning in Ethiopia. It’s a great opportunity to become familiarized with health programs at the national level after two years at the woreda (district) level. And I’ll admit—hot showers, a refrigerator, and non-dirt floors have also been nice upgrades for my third year. Since moving here, I traveled back to my town, Adet, a few months after moving to Addis Ababa to follow up on the café project. When I spoke to one of the women involved in the project, she said “I don’t have much in life, but I have this one opportunity—and when I walk by the café, I think, ‘This is mine’.”

I’d love to continue in the international public health spectrum, but I’m very open to whatever direction that might be, both geographically and programatically. I’ll admit that I was never interested in HIV work before Peace Corps, and the last two years have shown me that it’s always possible to find an interesting niche, whether it’s working with CSWs or other MARPs in my site, working on BCC and product marketing here at PSI, or foraying into family planning and reproductive health. As Professor Chen always used to say at the end of his powerpoints, “Sky is the limit!”
“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.”

Virginia Woolf

What’s Cooking?

Tzatziki (Greek yogurt sauce/dip)
16 oz plain Greek style yogurt (if no Greek style yogurt available, strain plain yogurt using yogurt strainer or several coffee filters for several hours)
2-4 gloves of garlic (depending on how much you like the taste of garlic)
1 tbl olive oil
1 tsp chopped dill (optional, can also substitute with mint)
2-3 cucumbers (depending on size)
dash of salt (to release water from cucumbers)
Wash cucumber and cut into long halves. Remove the seeds of the cucumber which can add extra water and make the sauce watery. After seeds are removed, chop into large chunks, place into colander, sprinkle with salt and let sit to drain for 30 minutes. This will release additional water. Cut the root off the garlic clove (at the ends, will also help in peeling). Peel garlic then using side of knife crush the clove to release juices and taste. Mince garlic into fine pieces. In large sering bowl mix yogurt, chopped cucumbers, minced garlic, chopped dill and mix well. Olive oil can be mixed in or served on top of yogurt. Chill over night.

This can be used on gyros, souvlaki, or just eaten by itself with pita/bread (my favorite way) :)

Anna Adams, Masters International Student

Guacamole
1 cup frozen peas or 1 cup rinsed and drained canned peas
1 ripe avocado, peeled
1/2 cup mild tomatillo salsa verde
1 clove garlic, minced or 1 teaspoon chopped garlic
Juice of 1 lemon
1 tbsp fresh cilantro
1 scallion, minced (optional)
salt and pepper to taste

Rinse frozen peas with cold water and drain. Cut avocado into large chunks. Mash avocado and peas together with a masher or fork. Mix in salsa, garlic, lemon juice, scallion, and cilantro. Add salt and pepper to taste.

This is a new spin on a popular dip without sacrificing the traditional taste. Peas are an excellent source of fiber and provide a sweeter taste! If a creamier texture is desired, place mixture in food processor or blender. You can also add some iced tomatoes and onions...if you are feeling really festive!

Sierra Mullen, Masters International Student
The Cameroonian Dish
An MI learns about dishes from Peace Corps Cameroon

by Meredith Miller

My friend Emily recently was assigned her post in a rural village in the West Region of Cameroon. She is a big foodie and loves to include descriptions of all the delicious food she has been eating in her letters. When asked to explain a favorite recipe to me, she wrote:

"As per your request- there are many Cameroonian dishes that represent the country, “FouFou” is a polenta-like grain that is served with at least 1/3 of the meals. It is also sometimes called “Couscous,” but it is not like the couscous we would think of. It’s solid like a matzo ball. This is served with fish stews- cooked with mainly tomato base and hot pepper shaved into it.

There is also a dish called “endole” which is a dark leafy green veggie. It is cooked with garlic, onion, oil, and pistachio in a mushy stew which sort of looks like creamed spinach.

Beans and beignets are also popular! This is something you could probably make in NOLA since you have so many beignets. Instead of being covered in sugar though they are served with spicy bean stew for a savory breakfast of lunch.”

She eats each of these, the FouFou, endole, and beans and beignets, at least four times a week. Fish, chicken, plantains, rice and goat are also pretty common. She has also tried porcupine, though she didn’t seem eager to eat it on a regular basis...

Beignets

120 ml water
60g unsalted butter
1 tbsp sugar
½ tsp salt
75g plain flour
4 large eggs
2 tsp vanilla extract
oil for frying
icing sugar, to dust

Add the water, butter, sugar and salt to a saucepan and gently bring to a boil over medium heat. Once boiling take off the heat and then add the flour and stir very vigorously until the mixture comes together and takes on a shiny appearance (stir very hard for this.) Return to the heat and continue to cook over low heat for about 3 minutes, stirring constantly.

After this time take the pan off the heat and transfer the contents to a heat-proof bowl. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating thoroughly to combine after each addition. When the final egg has been added beat for about 2 minutes, then add the vanilla extract.

Meanwhile, add oil to a wok or deep fryer and heat to 180 C. When the oil has reached this temp carefully drop in the beignet mix, one tbsp at a time. Fry for about 4 or 5 beignets at a time, cooking them until they have puffed up and are golden all over.

Beans “Haricots”

Wash and rinse beans in cold water, soak uncovered overnight. Rinse beans again, fill pot with water, add beans and cover the pot. Boil for about 2 hours or until soft. Strain the beans and set aside.

In a pot, heat about 4 cups of oil (soybean, olive or canola), add finely chopped tomato, onion, and garlic when oil is boiling. Mix and fry until soft and the onion is yellow.

Mix in half a cube of "maggi tomato stock" (a dry, concentrated tomato paste powder) and some salt and pepper. Add the beans to the oil and pour in water to cover them. Let the whole pot “fry” uncovered for about 30 minutes or until water is gone.

Meridith Miller (far left) seated with Emily Olsen-Harbich (far right) and another friend shortly before Emily’s Peace Corps departure. Emily is currently serving as a volunteer in Cameroon, she and Meridith remain very good friends.
From Student to Professor  
RPCV Democratic Republic of the Congo

by Rachel Kramas

Dr. Patricia Kissinger described to me the link between her Peace Corps experience and her current research. “Peace Corps helped me to understand the importance of culture and context in health. I have applied that to my research in HIV and other STDs. My experience in the Peace Corps taught me how to be flexible and patient and to understand the big picture.” We were speaking in her office in the Epidemiology Department at Tulane, where she now teaches Epidemiology of HIV/STIs and, Analytical Epidemiology, is on the executive committee for Tulane’s Center for Infectious Disease and is the principal investigator on 3 grants.

Hailing from Chicago and earning her Bachelor’s degree in Nursing from Marquette University, Dr. Kissinger worked as an RN in a pediatric ICU before joining the Peace Corps from 1982-1986. She contrasted the intense, resource-heavy focus of nursing a tiny premature infant in the ICU with the low-tech, public health nature of working in a rural clinic in Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). She recounted the experience of being one of a handful of nurses in her area, working primarily to supervise the administration of childhood vaccinations and other primary care activities, but also to help train other health care workers and serve as a resource of knowledge for her community.

Dr. Kissinger spent two years in Kongolo, serving as the coordinator for a rural health zone of 160,000 people. She then spent another year as a Peace Corps volunteer leader, and yet another year as the training center nurse. “One of the things the most important impressions I learned from my Peace Corps experience is teaching using a practical approach.” she said, referring to her days using the most low-tech teaching methods to transfer knowledge of even the most basic health interventions to her counterparts in Zaire. During her service, she learned French and Swahili, and later learned Spanish. During her doctoral thesis research on perinatal HIV transmission in Haiti, she also learned Haitian Creole.

Dr. Kissinger said “Peace Corps made me passionate about exposing the plight of vulnerable populations.” Most of her current research is focused on the influence of STIs on HIV transmission. Most recently she has been examining HIV and substance abuse risk among Latinos in New Orleans post-Katrina. She is also working on an internet pregnancy prevention intervention among African American teenage women and examining the origin of repeat STIs among African American young men.

Dr. Kissinger currently mentors five doctoral students and has positive encouragement for Peace Corps volunteers who are thinking of returning to academia after their service: “It teaches you to be a self-starter, to have perseverance, to be flexible, to be humble and work with many different types of people. These skills are really important for field research and for completing the whole doctoral process.” For MI students and PCVs in the field right now, she advises them to “Keep your mind open! Take every experience, good and bad, for what it’s worth and to never stop learning.”

I decided to come to Tulane because of the Global Health Systems Development department and the way that nearly every professor continues to be actively involved in working to strengthen the health systems of developing counties.

Peter Williams, RPCV The Gambia 07-09
Global Health Systems Development
MEASURE
Katherine Andrinopoulos and something

by Kelly Nowicki

While serving in the Peace Corps, volunteers have the tendency to question where this experience will take us. We wonder how the cultural understanding, language acquisition, and on-the-ground experience gained through Peace Corps service will be useful later. Here at Tulane, three RPCV faculty members offer an example of where the Peace Corps can take you in the field of Public Health. Dr. Katherine Andrinopoulos (RPCV, Dominican Republic), John Hembling (RPCV, Nicaragua), and Mary Freyder (RPCV, Honduras) are currently collaborating on the MEASURE Evaluation Project in El Salvador. Funded by USAID, the project is investigating the unmet health care needs of men who have sex with men (MSM), as well as potential barriers to accessing proper health care.

In El Salvador, as in many countries, men are less likely to access health care than women, regardless of their sexual orientation. The MEASURE Evaluation Project seeks to understand first the reasons for this lack of health care utilization, second, whether there is a difference in the quality of care MSM are receiving, and lastly, what improvements can be made in the access and delivery of health care services.

Through their research, Andrinopoulos, Hembling, and Freyder have found several potential barriers to health care utilization. Stigma and discrimination against MSM is prevalent, not only from communities, but from many health care providers themselves. When health care is accessed, MSM often receive inadequate care because doctors and nurses lack specific knowledge about MSM health. Stigma and lack of understanding create barriers to health care in general, but sexual health care in particular. Andrinopoulos, the lead researcher, mentions that HIV testing and treatment can act as a “double stigma” in that seeking HIV services and discussing risk behavior can “out” one’s MSM identity.

Another reason for a lack of access has to do with MSM fatalism, says Hembling. “Issues of stigma, depression, and lack of social support networks lead to a feeling of ‘Why even bother getting health care?’”. He also suggests there may be problems with the way services are being delivered. In Belize, Hembling witnessed a situation in which the building designated as the HIV testing and treatment center was separated from the main hospital. “Anyone waiting in line at the separate building was sort of ‘outed’ that they either needed an HIV test or were HIV+ and needed treatment. No one wanted to stand in line.” Research on health care delivery methods has therefore become essential to assess if similar situations exist in El Salvador and what improvements can be made.

In reflecting how each of the three researchers came to be working at Tulane on a project such as this, all mentioned the Peace Corps as having played a role. Freyder mentions that since all three served in Latin American countries, they became familiar with the cultural values and norms of the region. They gained a better understanding of the views on Machismo and MSM, as well as how the health care system works. Hembling, who initially concentrated on environmental issues, became interested in public health after meeting a Tulane Master’s International student. “Tulane MI’s were the best Peace Corps Volunteers. We were always wondering, ‘What is she doing, what are all those surveys about?’" These experiences paved the road to careers in public health.

Andrinopoulos agrees, saying that Peace Corps not only helped her to get to where she is now, but continues to help her in her approach to work as well. “When I first arrived in-country, I had my initial shocks and questions of ‘What’s going on, how did I get here?’.” But after a while you adjust and just go with it.” Andrinopoulos still carries that attitude with her in her work today, and is able to adjust to new cultures more quickly. “Now when I get to the point when I feel like ‘What’s going on, how did I get here?’ I’m able to just say, ‘Ok, let get adjusted, start talking, and figure this out. It’s very exciting.” There is also a respect she has gained from seeing development work from the other side. “There is tremendous capacity in Central America, and we are just trying to help develop that. We know we are not ‘teaching’ them anything; we are partners. We are there to serve our clients (USAID), but we also know that we are guests in someone else’s house, and have to be sensitive to that.”

While the MEASURE Evaluation Project currently focuses on El Salvador, similar projects have been implemented in other countries as well. The research team sees the issue of MSM access to health care as a global issue, and one that is under-researched. It is hoped that the results of this study will encourage positive changes in service delivery, which will in turn increase health care utilization among MSM. If this project is successful, it may encourage other projects along this same vein to be implemented on a global scale.

Top Photo: Dr. Andrinopoulos and doctorial candidate John Hembling with the MEASURE team in El Salvador

Bottom Photo: John Hembling, Mary Freyder, and Dr. Andrinopoulos
Como se dice Awesome?
by Emilia Meyers

Language acquisition and mastery are valuable skills necessary for working effectively in various international contexts regarding health and development issues. As a volunteer, I taught Life Skills to secondary school students and out-of-school youth. I also established a support group for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA) doing various activities such as bio-intensive and permaculture gardens, chicken husbandry project, emotional support. Without the language skills I received from the Pre-Service Training in the Peace Corps, I would not have been able to work with any of these projects, my understanding of the language was vital to my success as a volunteer.

When the Peace Corps Programs Office made available the opportunity for all MI/RPCV students to use Rosetta Stone software for French and Spanish, I was ecstatic. I am fluent in Swahili from my service in Tanzania (2008-2010) and wanted to focus on mastering French. Having the ability to efficiently converse with country nationals is important in all aspects of public health programming and will ultimately make me more marketable as a public health professional; there will be literally no limitations to where I can work in the East African community upon graduation. Rosetta Stone is a great program because it is a full-emersion experience and that allows you to work at your own pace. Since hearing about this opportunity, I have come up to the office two or three times every week to use it in between classes.

I came to Tulane because it is internationally recognized for the MPH program and for the strong RPCV community here at the school and throughout New Orleans. I know that if I am able to master French, I will have no problem finding a professor here at Tulane to help me find a practicum or research opportunity where I can master my language skills, and help me become more employable in the future – until then, I’ll keep the headset on and my eyes fixed to the screen!

If You Could Take One Book to the Peace Corps...

“Shantaram by Gregory David Roberts is about an expat in India, it’s pretty much his life adventure in Mumbai, and he sells drugs and just leads a crazy life, and it’s really long, so it gets you through the first couple weeks of trading before you start to trade with other people.”

Shannon Lindsay - GHSD
RPCV Swaziland - 07-09

“Cloud Atlas by David Mitchell would be my pick. The book includes different interwoven stories told across various time periods and genres. It’s basically a great way to transport yourself wherever you are.”

Megan Sauer - TRMD
Masters International Candidate

“I would take a Charles Dickens book (Great Expectations) or other similar classic. It is not the type of book that I might otherwise pick up to read but I found that I really enjoyed reading them with so much free time on my hands.”

Peter Williams - GCHB
RPCV The Gambia
What was the silliest thing you took to the Peace Corps?
RPCVs admit to their deep, dark, packing blunders

“I took a Yoga ball so that I could exercise.”
Patrick Olsen
RPCV Mongolia 2008-2011

“I took a set of resistance training cords, thinking that I would actually use them to stay in shape. Once word got around that I had them, I ended up giving them away, mostly to keep this guy from coming to my house at 5am every day begging to use them!”
Mirinda Gormley
RPCV Tanzania 2008-2010

“I can’t remember anything that I took that was silly, but I did know a person who brought all six HARD-COVER Harry Potter books. When the seventh one came out he hid in his hotel room and didn’t come to training until he was done reading it!”
Kelly Nowicki
RPCV Jamaica 2007-2009

“I feel like I did a really good job packing, but I did bring my garlic press and some little alligator clothespins!”
Aimee D’Avignon
MI Albania 2010-2012

“I took a French Press and coffee beans with me. I was afraid of getting a coffee headache once I got in country!”
Meaghan Tremblay
RPCV Zambia 2007-2009
Above: Jacqueline Lauer, Masters International Student in Peru, enjoying the beautiful view

Below: Jeol Barsky, Masters International Student in Fiji, dressed for success with other Peace Corps Fiji volunteers

Above: MIs gathered together after participating in Rebuilding Together New Orleans

Top Right: MIs and RPCVs gathered after the NO/AIDS Task Force Walk

Below: Kate Boyd, Masters International Student in Ethiopia

Below: Alyssa Young and Lauren Brunner with their mango salsa creation, prepared during the MI Iron Chef competition