



## Transcript

### Welcome:

*Kelsey:* Welcome! On behalf of the U.S. Department of State and the Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs and the Institute of International Education, thank you for joining us today. Today we will be talking about Extending Your Exchange Experience. So whether you just returned from study abroad, or if you've been back in the United States for a while, the fact that you've tuned in today means that you're probably anxious to get back overseas and continue those amazing cultural exchange experiences that you gained when you were studying abroad. We at the Gilman Program think the Peace Corps is a wonderful opportunity for our Gilman alumni to do just that, and we hope that this webinar provides some helpful information for you today.

### Presenters:

My name is Kelsey Ullom and I am a Program Coordinator for the Gilman Scholarship Program. I'm joined by my colleague and co-Program Coordinator, Allie Gutshall and we're tuning in from our IIE office in Houston, Texas. The two of us will be facilitating the presentation today, and we're joined by three wonderful speakers, the first of whom is Meghan Costello. Meghan is a Regional Recruiter for the Peace Corps and she'll be sharing some information about different opportunities that are available through the Peace Corps, as well as information about the application process. We're also joined by Darrin Vander Plas. Darrin studied abroad as a Gilman scholar in Uganda in 2009 and volunteered as an agricultural support Peace Corps Volunteer in The Gambia. He now works at the USDA Farm Service Agency as a Farm Loan Officer in Massachusetts. And we also have Speare Hodges who studied abroad as a Gilman scholar in Nicaragua in 2009 and volunteered as a youth development Peace Corps Volunteer in Peru. He is currently in law school at Georgetown University.

Before we get started, I just want to remind all of our listeners that if you have any questions at any time in the presentation you can type them into the chat box. We will have some time at the end for questions and answers, so type them in the chat box and if we aren't able to get to all the questions at the end of the webinar, we'll be sure to follow up with you individually after the presentation.

Now I'm going to let Meghan have the floor, and begin the presentation by giving us some background information about the Peace Corps and opportunities that are available to our Gilman alumni.

*Meghan:* Great, thank you so much. My name is Meghan Costello, and I'm a Regional Recruiter here with the Peace Corps. A little background about myself: I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Rwanda from 2010-2012 and while I was there I taught English in secondary schools. I also worked with helping the students and teachers transition from a French educational system to an English educational system, as well as working closely with girls' education and empowerment initiatives in the country. Prior to Peace Corps, I went to the University of Notre Dame and studied Political Science, and I was able to study abroad while I was there, not with Gilman, but I spent a year in Rome. And I also in high school spent a semester in Ireland, so I really appreciate what you guys have done and I'm really excited to be working with Gilman.

### Peace Corps Today

So Peace Corps is a two-year international service opportunity, and we really try to make a difference in a community overseas, and well as in your life and back here in the United States. So it's a two year opportunity, something you do

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after you graduate, and like I said, I was a volunteer working with English education, but we also have programming in health education, working with community economic development or local businesses, with environmental awareness and sustainability projects, youth in development, as well as agricultural education. Little caveat- you do have to be at least 18 years old to be a Peace Corps Volunteer, and a U.S. citizen.

### Mission and Goals

Moving along- Peace Corps has a mission of providing world peace and friendship internationally, and this was a program that was actually started 55 years ago by President John F. Kennedy. We have three goals that are really important to Peace Corps Volunteers in order to achieve that mission. So we want to help the people in other countries with their need for trained men and women, so that's working in one of those sectors areas like I said (being a teacher, being a health educator, working in agriculture), but more than that, Peace Corps is also about raising cross-cultural awareness, so helping show who you are as an American, and the rich diversity that is America to people all around the world. This is really important because there are a lot of pre-conceived notions and I'm sure that you experienced that in your Gilman experience, so Peace Corps is really trying to help break down those misunderstandings, as well as teaching Americans about the people all over the world. One of the greatest part of my service is that it's never really over. For the rest of my life I'm going to be able to tell Americans about what living in Rwanda was like, and the amazing culture and experience that I had there. And as you can imagine, there's not a lot that Americans know about Rwanda besides the fact that it's in Africa and there was genocide. So it's an amazing educational opportunity here back home as well. So we really believe that by integrating into a community, and building relationships that are based on trust and respect, you are able to foster that cross-cultural communication that will lead to world peace.

### What Volunteers Do

We work in a variety of different sectors and how we decide where Peace Corps Volunteers go and what they will do actually comes from the host countries where we're working in. So we are working with the Ministries of Health and Education, and Youth Services, all around the world to see where they have a need for trained Americans to come and help, and we only go to countries that want Peace Corps Volunteers and to communities that apply for them. So I think that's a really important distinction to make as well. In the world today, there's a high need for education, so a majority of the positions are in English education, or math, science, sex education. But volunteers end up working in multiple sectors when they're abroad, because you're really living and working in a community for two years. So you have the opportunity to work in your primary assignment area, but then also develop projects that might have to do with other things. Like me, I did English education, but I actually only ended up teaching English about 20 hours a week, and the rest of my time I worked in Youth Development and with girls' education projects. So something to keep in mind.

### Benefits During Service

There are a lot of benefits to doing Peace Corps, and we'll talk a little bit about that. But I think the biggest benefit is that it will change your life and it will change that community, and you can really make a difference being there for two years. So you'll hear a little about that from some of the return panelists that are going to be speaking a little later in the session, but in terms of a tangible benefit, you can have your federal student loans deferred. So if you have any federal loans that are subsidized, both the principle and the interest would be deferred. If they're not subsidized you'll probably still have to pay the interest. And private loans sometimes can be deferred, but that's up to your loan provider. If you have Perkins loans you get 15% per year, which ends up being 30% over the two years of your Perkins loans cancelled. And then you also get all of these great opportunities that you're already interested and excited in, in terms of international travel. It's a completely free program, so you get a living stipend that covers your basic expenses. We really want volunteers to be working and living at the same level as the people in their community, so the living stipend isn't very much, but it's enough to get by. You also get vacation days (two a month) and you can use those however you want. So a lot of people come back to the States. I myself traveled throughout East Africa, I went to Ethiopia for a month, I got to white water raft on the Nile, so you do get a little bit of that adventure in there as well. But it's not really

a travel experience, it's more about integrating into one community, so if you want to travel to a lot of different places, maybe Peace Corps is not what you're looking for because we really focus on integrating into one community the whole time. You get medical and dental coverage, and that was probably the best in my life. You have two medical officers on call 24/7, anything you need. And we also train you in the fields you're going to be working in. So I was a Political Science major, I had done some tutoring, I had never really been a teacher, and Peace Corps training really prepared me to go into a classroom and hit the ground running to be a teacher for two years. Obviously it's not as much as having an Education degree, but the training is really, really solid. And you also are trained on the local language in the community so that you can develop those relationships.

### Benefits After Service

There are also some benefits after service. So once you finish service, you are given about \$8,000 in transition funds that you can use however you want. So this is actually where you have that opportunity to travel. Most volunteers do some sort of a big international trip after they finish Peace Corps. I got to go to Southeast Asia for two months before coming home so that's really great as well. Or you can use that to pay down your student loans, to buy a new computer, put money down on an apartment, whatever you want. You also have some of these other benefits like job placement support. We have an office and that's there just to help returned Peace Corps Volunteers get into grad school and get into job placements, as well as some federal employment advantages. So I'd be interested to see if the other speaker who works at the USDA, Darrin, if he got his job with some of these federal employment advantages. I certainly did. Basically what it means is that you can, for one year, have non-competitive eligibility for federal jobs, which is kind of like Veterans' Preference, where if you qualify for a position, that organization can just hire you instead of having to go through the whole competitive process. So that's pretty cool. You also are part of more than 220,000 returned Peace Corps Volunteers when you come back, and we really are a big family, so if you feel some sense of family with the Gilman Scholars, this is another form of having this opportunity. Nobody really knows what Peace Corps is like unless they've done it, and so you get this instant connection with the alumni. I think one of the greatest benefits, which I really wanted to go a little bit more in depth on, is the graduate school benefits.

### Graduate School Benefits

So we have two programs where we pair up with graduate schools where you can do Peace Corps and graduate school. The first one is called Master's International and this is a really great program if you know exactly what you want to do. So if you know what Master's degree you want, you can apply for it, study for a year, and then go and do the Peace Corps for two years. And when you come back, you write your research about what you did in the Peace Corps and you finish up any classes. So I think that's a really good way to tie everything together, because your research is really part of your degree, and then you also get some credits for the time you were gone, so it's a little bit of a financial incentive to do it as well. The other option is you can become a Peace Corps fellow. And I'd say in my group of 70 in Rwanda, about half of the people came back and went to grad school and got scholarships and fellowships. And your Peace Corps experience will be so valuable in a classroom and colleges and Master's programs know that. So they really want to give some of this financial assistance to returned Peace Corps Volunteers, because you have such a vibrant perspective on the other side of it. So that can be as much as a full-ride with a stipend, or it can be just several thousand dollars over a semester, either way, really great opportunities. And that's with over 160 universities, and that's a benefit you have for the rest of your life. So I've been home from Peace Corps for three years and just now I'm starting to look at graduate school programs and I qualify for these scholarships and fellowships which is really great. So with that I wanted to pass it off to some of our Gilman returned Peace Corps Volunteers for their perspective, and then at the end of the session, I'll talk to you a little about the Peace Corps application process and what we're looking for in terms of a volunteer. Thank you.

*Kelsey:* Thanks Meghan. So we'll pass the mike on to Darrin.

### Darrin's Introduction

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*Darrin:* Hi everyone. First I want to thank you all for having me today. As a Gilman scholar in 2010, I was studying at Iowa State University and I completed an internship in Uganda, and it was a three month internship. My eventual goal after graduation was to join the Peace Corps, so I'll just explain a little bit about how perfect my Gilman experience was, and translating that into my Peace Corps experience in The Gambia.

### **Darrin's Gilman Experience**

So I was studying Agriculture and Community Health at Iowa State University. For my internship I wanted to do something a little bit different, and I had previously been to Uganda on a service-learning program for a month, and I wanted to go back and stay there for longer and work with the community and build relationships. So I was able to work in a small city in Eastern Uganda called Kimuli, and I worked in neighboring villages. I was paired with a non-governmental organization, Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns. I had a primary counterpart and I worked with one farmers group. With this group, we created a project focusing on nutrition, fruit tree propagation, and hand washing stations. And that spanned about three communities and 20 farmers. What was neat about the hand washing stations is that the water from the hand washing station also fed into a canal which watered the fruit trees that were being propagated. So during that time I was able to learn how to monitor and evaluate a development project, and assess for the organization and myself, whether or not the project was effective. All of those things were very much translatable into my Peace Corps experience. One of the biggest take-aways from that experience in Uganda was I became sensitive to cultural concepts of time when I was working in another culture. So I realized it was more rewarding to work on a couple of projects that the community wanted, than work on multiple projects that I wanted, because when I leave, the communities were already interested in those projects, and they were able to maintain them. During my time, I also learned that I needed to drink a lot of water because it was very, very hot and easy to become dehydrated. And also I learned how to take my malaria prophylaxis regularly. And I realized that cow intestines were not my favorite food.

### **Darrin's Peace Corps Experience**

So after graduating, my wife and I joined that process. We were both in school and we were applying for the Peace Corps and as a married couple, we did not choose a place to go, because it's difficult as a married couple to be placed anyway because they have to find two positions for people in a community. So after our invitation, we realized we were going to The Gambia and I didn't know where that was, and that was exciting to me. During my time in The Gambia, we started with training in Senegal for one month. And after one month, we went to The Gambia for another month of training, and then from there, we lived in a village named Wayam in Western Gambia. So I spent two years working with two non-governmental organizations and this was my primary project. I worked with multiple counterparts from those organizations and multiple farmers' groups. I was able to create an independent project which spanned five communities focusing on, again, fruit tree propagation, youth beekeeping, and marketing and business for beekeepers.

I lived with a host family and that experience was so wonderful because I was able to learn a new language in order to speak to the host family in the language of Mandinka. And I learned how to play a West African instrument, the kora. I also participated in public health outreach activities and trained other Peace Corps Volunteers how to make hand washing stations, which were very similar to those that I made in Uganda and that was my secondary project. Just like Meghan had said, you have the opportunity to work in multiple different sectors depending on what your community would like, what type of projects they're looking for.

The biggest take-aways from the Peace Corps was that I learned to be aware of my ego and to control it, because it's not about me, it's about building relationships with people and working with that. It was such a great experience to be able to stay in one place for two years and make friends and the host family that we lived with is now, I consider them my real family. I keep in contact with them. I learned that culture sneaks up on you when you least expect it, meaning that you will change, and that's fine. Coming back from the Peace Corps, I realized that a lot of my values had changed and maybe my family and friends weren't expecting that, but it happens, and it's fine. And in The Gambia, I learned that

everyone is the same, we all want the same things in life, so it doesn't matter who you're working with anywhere in the world, we all want the same things and it's quite an amazing experience to realize that.

### Darrin's Application Tips

So translating the Gilman experience to Peace Corps, I have a few tips. First of course is to be patient and flexible. These are two very important skills that I learned as a Gilman scholar, because you never know what happens when you're working in another culture. There's no way to fully understand cultural norms, so you must be flexible in order to work and to learn in another culture. As far as translating that, adapting to working in another culture require mental fortitude, and flexibility to change yourself. So being patient and flexible with the Peace Corps application process, it shows your fortitude, and it'll be good practice for your service. Many of you have lived, and studied, and worked abroad, so you you're familiar with what skills you have from that experience. My suggestion is to use what you've learned, and highlight it for the application process for Peace Corps. You realized that you had resourcefulness when you couldn't speak the language or you lived in another culture, so highlight how you can communicate without speaking a language that everyone else speaks. Your ability to observe and listen in order to work on a team that may see things differently from you. This shows your respect for others opinions. Also highlight your ability to take care of yourself when you are unfamiliar with your surroundings. That's a very important skill to have during Peace Corps service because it shows you can make healthy decisions, and you're able to be safe and aware and responsible. Also highlight your creativity in times of challenge. Working in another culture requires creativity, so independent projects that had limited funding that you worked on, or finding alternate ways to accomplish a goal when something unexpected happened. And like Meghan said, it's never over. Peace Corps has very much integrated itself into my life as well as the Gilman Program. Thank you.

### Speare's Introduction

*Kelsey:* Alright, thanks Darrin. Now we'll hear from Speare. Speare, are you there?

*Speare:* Yup, I'm here! And again, to echo Darrin thanks for inviting us on to share a little experience and help some people make some pretty life changing decisions. So as was said, I was a Gilman scholar in fall of 2009 in Nicaragua. During the summer I was also there as part of a summer development program, this is all through Emory University. Then I went on to the Peace Corps in 2010 through 2012.

### Speare's Gilman Experience

Gilman was really instrumental in helping providing the funding that was necessary to work in Nicaragua. As I said, during the summer I had already been there, so that kind of helped learn a little bit of the lay of the land. It's not a particularly large country even though it can have very diverse cities in it. When I was there in the fall program, I was through a program with the School for International Training and it was partly also funded through Emory University for a research grant that was looking at responsible capitalism, the idea that companies and especially places like Nicaragua that receive a good deal of investments from outside sources (international countries including the United States) could take a fair cut on the amount of profit their making in order to reinvest in their communities and their actual employees. So a lot of the time was spent doing a case study. I started the language of Spanish. I look French up until junior year of college, so it was also pretty intense language training as well, which I highly recommend. I'm sure that many of you on the line right now regardless of where you were, probably had some language barriers, so I thought that was wonderful integration to really, really try to master something that was new-ish to me, especially in a more professional setting and for research.

The program that they had there was great. Nicaragua, as you may know from the 80s and 90s, a period of instability, revolutions, Nicaragua had a successful revolution to overthrow the dictator, the only one in Latin American other than Cuba at that time. Also Nicaragua as a country has a very different east coast on the Caribbean side of it. I was on the



Pacific side, and it was great, it was my first time in a developing country. The top right is the end presentation that we were making to the rest of the student body and the coordinators of the program. The slides on the side are examples of other things you can do in addition to your research or actual abroad program. The top is from a program called “Techo Para Mi Pais” which is “Roof for My Country” and it’s about rebuilding a home outside of the metropolitan areas. And on the bottom is a radio program we were doing. So at the end of November or December of that year, I think I was certain. I think Gilman really helped propel me into making a decision to continue to live abroad. Half a year, it seems like a lot of time, but I think that most Peace Corps Volunteers at the end of two years will say, two years is really, really nothing, especially considering the kind of philosophy the Peace Corps has of making sustainable change in wherever you’re sent.

### Speare’s Peace Corps Experience

So I applied to the Peace Corps, and as you’ll see later, the program was a little different when I was applying. You could get some kind of preferences, but it seems like the organization is a lot more open to direct preferences now. But I was willing to go wherever. I really liked Latin America, that was obviously where I had a lot of experience, but I really did like the idea of you go wherever is needed, and that has kind of been a guiding principle that has stuck with me even in law school, which may not be the place you think you would go to find that. So this gives a brief sense, two years into four photos is difficult, but it kind of just shows what the program was about.

So if you look at the top left, you’ll see a lot of the work I did was in youth development and that really consisted of higher education access issues, it’s a very different country, the kind of credit access students have and the career guidance is radically different from the United States in the sense that both of those don’t really exist. So a lot of that was getting information to students that there are opportunities outside of secondary school, and to create a little bit of life planning. The top right is some of the professors I worked with. Bottom left is kind of the same kind of approach. Peace Corps gives a lot of flexibility to work on projects that the community wants and that you want to work on. I think that there is a tremendous amount of need, there’s plenty of development work to be done, and one of the great things is that, at least from my experience, Peace Corps is very open to the projects that I wanted to work on that the community also wanted. I was able to work with really great community partners during that time in order to get things done. It is, as Darrin said, the way to make this kind of work sustainable and it was incredibly fulfilling. I think that you’ll find if you end up doing Peace Corps that there is a lot of work and even in two years you don’t get to do everything that you actually did want to do. The second area which you see there is the Spanish acronym for AIDS, was a lot of the sexual health education and that was something I really enjoyed. It got a lot into the secondary schools. It was kind of a social taboo. You may not think of Peru as a place where people want to talk about that, but the law actually required it and it was something that, for someone that eventually went to law school, a very huge difference between what the law says and then what actually happens in reality. That’s certainly a lesson that I carried with me into law school.

### Speare’s Application Tips

So the tip portion: A lot of what Darrin said is on the mark. For me, I think the language skills were just crucially important especially in Peru. I really liked the idea of using a language and being bilingual and that was just a huge part. I did a lot of work in Nicaragua to get me up to that level and integrating in another country when you already know the language really helped out. I mean, I barely used English during the time that I was in Peace Corps. The second part, research experience, I think even if you weren’t doing something that was a little independent of the program that you were in for Gilman, you were still there for classes, learning in a different country. And I think that really helped in Peace Corps because one of the first things you do is research. It’s a little more hands on. You’re going into a community and figuring out what the needs are, who your potential collaborators, and community associates and people you can work with, but you really are trying to understand in the broadest sense, where you are, and those kind of analytical skills are really important. And the third thing is the cross cultural work. As you’ll see, for Peace Corps, you can go to many, many different countries, and just the ability to understand how you operate- flexibility that Darrin talked about, the dynamic settings, always having a plan B- has really helped me out in the work environment. When you plan an entire event and the electricity doesn’t work, it’s not something you encounter much in the States, but it is something that builds a kind

of, I think, character: Flexibility in changing circumstances, being able to roll with the different things life gives you. And that experience of being in completely unfamiliar surroundings and still getting a job done. Those are some of the elements I really liked and Gilman helped bridge that gap and made me way more confidence that I think I otherwise would have been going into Peace Corps. I think there's one another part about transitioning back. I'm a person who worked a lot before going into higher education, and Peace Corps really gave some solid skills that I was able to use immediately in the working world- one of which was language. I highly recommend it, I think it worked incredibly well for me, and I encourage you all to apply.

### Peace Corps Application Process

*Kelsey:* Great, thanks Speare. Alright, now we're going to hand it back over to Meghan, who's going to give us some more details about the Peace Corps application process.

*Meghan:* Thanks again Darrin and Speare. That was wonderful. But I really appreciate this perspective that you brought up, about how when you're working and living in a community, there's a lot of flexibility to make your own assignments and to figure out where your skills and backgrounds match up with the needs of the community. Because Peace Corps is not going to tell you what you should be doing in that community every day, that's why you're there, to figure out what projects are really going to be useful and sustainable, so that after you leave, that community can still continue on with those projects, and will have a longer lasting impact. So that's something that's really important with Peace Corps and I didn't really bring it up, so thank you for bringing that up.

Now, with the Peace Corps application process, it looks pretty complicated, but it's actually pretty straight forward. And this is a different process than when I applied, or when Darrin or Speare applied, because now you can actually choose where you'd like to be considered for service. Peace Corps has been pretty much the same for the last 50 years, but just a little bit different in terms of the application. It only takes about an hour to apply, which is really wonderful. Because what we're looking at is your résumé and your motivation statement. So we have quarterly application deadlines, and the next application is actually due on October 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, and that's for programs that are leaving in April, May, or June of 2016. And then if you'd like to leave in July, August, or September, you have to apply by January 1<sup>st</sup>. So those are just some dates to keep in mind.

Once you fill out your application, you will complete a health history form, and this is just to help us know where we can send you so we can make sure to support you as a volunteer because your health and safety and security are our top priority. So once you fill that out, you'd actually get a list of countries where we know we can support someone with your type of medical background. Or you might not get a list, it might say you can choose anywhere or anything. So after you complete the health history form, this is actually where you choose where you'd like to be considered for service. And both Darrin and Speare touched on this- I think flexibility is really, really important to Peace Corps. But we also want to make sure that you are going to a country that you're interested in going to and that fits your professional development goals. So as I brought up in the beginning, we are responding to requests from countries and those communities are really our top customers, so we need to make sure that we fill all of the positions with the best and brightest of Americans, and then you can choose which one of those programs you'd like to be considered for. So you can be as specific or as general as you want, but you want to be honest when you make that choice. Are you willing to go anywhere and do anything? If so, you should definitely put that on your application because it means that we can put you into consideration for a program that really needs somebody like you. That's what I did- I probably never would have chosen Rwanda. I knew a lot about it, but most of it had to do with the genocide in 1994, and now it's changed who I am and completely changed my perspective. So keep that caveat in mind. But if you do already know French and you want to go to a French West African country, you can say that. Or you can say, I really just want to go to China and teach English, and then we'll only consider you for the programs that you've selected. So it's up to you making that choice- it's not a preference- it's choosing where you are willing to be considered. So something to keep in mind when you are at that stage: if you are very specific, and you're not the best fit for those programs, you might not get invited to Peace Corps. So that flexibility is important too, so we can fulfill all our position requests.

After you choose which country you'd like to be considered for, there's a soft skills questionnaire, and this just gives Peace Corps an idea of what type of work style you enjoy, the type of environment where you excel, it's not a scored thing, it just helps us get a little bit more of a background of who you are. And then you submit it and wait. If you are qualified for a program, you would be put into consideration for a program and then it's up to the placement officer who's in charge of that country to determine whether you are competitive enough for an interview or not. You would get an interview before the know-by date for that program, and then be invited by that know-by date to the program. So for example, October 1<sup>st</sup> deadline, you're going to know by December 1<sup>st</sup> whether you've been invited or not to that program. And all this information is on the website as well, so you can definitely find some more specifics there. Once you're invited- congratulations- you begin your final medical clearance, you start getting your visa and your passport. This is about six months before you leave, and then you depart! So it is a long application process, there are a lot of steps that go into it, but the goal is that when you arrive in country, you're going to be prepared and safe and healthy to serve there the next 27 months.

### Choose Where You Want to Go

This is a little bit what I was explaining – you can kind of choose where you want to go or what you want to do, or you can just choose what type of program area you're interested in. Are you interested in youth? Do you have experience with business? Those are all outlined on the website, so definitely make sure to check it out.

### Do Your Research

You should really do your research. We get a lot of people who apply for programs that they don't really have all the required or desired skills for. That's obviously not going to look good on your application. When you're choosing which countries you'd like to be considered for, make sure that you have the language requirement. Make sure that you have the degree in the specific field we're looking for or some of that hands-on experience so that you're choosing countries that you might actually have a chance of getting invited to.

### Application Tips

Now we have a couple of application tips. Like I said, it's a pretty streamlined process, but you want to make sure that you are presenting yourself as well as you can. You want to tailor your résumé to the sector in which you are applying. You might have a lot of different kinds of volunteer experience or research experience or class experience. You can include as much of it as you want and a two page résumé for Peace Corps is totally fine. But you do want to tailor it so that we can see which is your area of interest and how we can see that passion for that sector. You also want to apply early. Don't wait until the application deadline. We do have a lot of people who apply right at the deadline, so if you can get in early, that's only going to be beneficial. Also, like I said, do research into your country preferences or other Peace Corps countries or just be flexible because you might be happiest in a country you've never heard of. And then the other thing to note is that a large number of programs have fall deadlines for spring or summer departures, so it's better to apply in the fall because we have a lot of people leaving in the spring and the summer than to apply in the spring or summer because we just don't have as many positions at that time.

Now, for Gilman specifically, I'd say definitely include your international experience and try to quantify it, too, and give a little bit of detail about what it actually was that you did and if any of it is going to make you a better Peace Corps Volunteer, which of course it will. Did you live with a host family? Did you get involved with your community? Were you speaking and working in the local language? Did you make an attempt to learn it? Any of those types of cross-cultural experiences you had in Gilman will help you stand out when we look at your résumé, so make sure to really go into detail there. And if you were working or if you were volunteering while you were there, make sure to include that, too, because a study abroad where you live and talk with Americans the whole time is much different than the type of experience you had where you really integrated and we want to make sure that that comes through on your résumé.



So that's the application tips. I also am happy to help direct you to your recruiter. We have recruiters all around the country. And on the website if you just go to [peacecorps.gov](http://peacecorps.gov), there's actually a link to find your recruiter. So you can type in which city you're in or which school you're at and you'll be able to connect directly to a recruiter who will be happy to look over your résumé and give you some advice in terms of where you might be a good fit.

### Gilman Alumni Opportunities

*Allie:* Great, thank you so much, Meghan. We have a lot of questions that came in about the application process and Peace Corps in general and we're going to go over those in just a few minutes. Before we do that though, I'd like to share with you a couple of other Gilman resources that we offer that are exclusive to alumni and they're meant to help you in all aspects of your professional and career development.

We've created multiple information sharing outlets to stay connected and extend your exchange experience. And those include our alumni portal, and this is our alumni section through the Gilman application system. It allows you to log in at any time and update your information, such as your name, so if you get married and have a new last name for the ladies, please be sure to update that there. Also, you can update your current location and contact details. So for example, if you are graduated and you no longer use the email that you had when you applied for the Gilman Scholarship because you don't have your school email anymore, be sure to update that in there so we have the most recent email for you. Additionally, the Follow-on Service Project and other great information about you as an alum can be shared here. We're always excited about the things that you are doing and want to encourage our alumni to stay connected with us. Please don't feel bad about tooting your own horn or bragging, because Kelsey and I love getting emails from you all to hear about the accomplishments or interesting projects that you're working on.

We also have newsletters. We in the past have been sending them out quarterly, but we'll be moving to bi-monthly newsletters. If you're not already subscribed, please sign up to receive the Gilman alumni newsletters to stay current with what is happening through the Gilman Program as well as find out about other scholastic opportunities abroad and through the U.S. State Department. You can find the registration link for the newsletter on the Gilman website section for alumni.

We also have a LinkedIn page and we highly encourage you to join the Gilman alumni group on LinkedIn to stay connected with the Gilman Scholarship Program as well as your fellow Gilman alumni. There are sub-groups for alumni who wish to stay connected to both their world region of study or interest as well as connect with alumni that live within their region in the United States. Many job openings and other announcements are also posted through this page as they come through to us. As for webinars, which you guys are attending today, as part of our commitment to engaging and supporting our alumni, we put on several webinars throughout the year, such as our re-entry webinar to help recent returnees process their culture shock and emotions and this webinar is conducted twice a year as well as a webinar for Gilman scholars interested in applying for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program with information and advice from Fulbright staff and recipients. And you can find more information through newsletter and on our website about those webinars.

We also have the Gilman Alumni Ambassador Program. Every summer the Gilman Program accepts applications from Gilman alumni who have returned to the U.S. and have completed their Follow-on Project to represent the Gilman Program. We recently selected 26 ambassadors this past year and they conduct outreach on behalf of the Gilman Scholarship Program across the United States. If you are interested in this, we highly encourage you to apply next July for the next cohort. And lastly we do networking events throughout the United States. We recently did one in DC, but we have a couple others coming up in the spring semester in other locations so please be sure to stay connected via the LinkedIn group as well as the alumni newsletters to find out about when we are coming to a city near you.

## Opportunities Through IIE

There's also other opportunities through IIE, such as the Boren Scholarship, Fulbright Scholarships and Awards, the Confucius China Studies Program, the Whittaker International Program, Global E3, \*Hilton Teacher Treks Program. And you can find out all about these on IIE's internships and jobs page at [iie.org](http://iie.org).

*\*Note: The Hilton Teacher Treks Program has been discontinued.*

## Contact Information & Questions

Before I wrap things up I would like to ask a couple questions on behalf of our participants today. I think most of them are for you, Meghan. Our first one that we have is: "Are we allowed to get a part-time job as a Peace Corps Volunteer to obtain additional funds?"

*Meghan:* So Peace Corps is definitely only a full-time opportunity and it's something that you are committing 27 months to. So while you are there, the real focus is to live and work in the community and so we don't actually allow volunteers to work with any other organizations or make any other forms of income while you're there. However, we like to think of the finances as like putting your finances on hold, because you're not spending any money, Peace Corps gives you the stipend that should be enough to live on and you're just not making any money either. The way that it works for most folks is that you can put your loans on deferment. And you're not paying your rent, you're not paying your payment, or your phone bill, so you don't have any of those other expenses. So, no, while you're a Peace Corps Volunteer, there's no other types of income generating activities that you can do because we really want you to focus on that community and living and working there 24/7.

*Allie:* Thank you, Meghan. Our next is regarding training. So one of our participants is curious as to whether the training is online or on a specific site. Can you speak a little bit more to that Meghan?

*Meghan:* Sure, that's a great question. So Peace Corps training is actually a three-month experience. And so Peace Corps is 24 months with three months of training so that's why it ends up becoming 27 months. That training actually happens in-country in the country you're going to be living and working in. So what happens is you meet together in a United States city for two days of staging and then you and the other Peace Corps Volunteers in your group will actually fly together to the country where you're go to serve and begin three months of training. Now that's pretty intensive. You live with individual host families during those three months, but you come together during the day with other Peace Corps Volunteers. That's where you get about four hours of language training a day, four hours of technical training. You also get safety and security training and health awareness training and then some of those cross-cultural trainings that are really important especially for your safety and security. So it's a lot. I thought it was going to be like summer camp and it ended up being like the week before finals for three months, because at the end of those eight to ten hours of training a day you go back to your host family and then you have to put it into practice. So it's really intense, but the goal by the end of those three months of training is that you'd actually be at an intermediate-medium or intermediate-high level of the local language. So it's really important because after you're finished with the three months of training, you'll go to your permanent site and you're most likely going to be the only Peace Corps Volunteer there at that site to begin the two years of service. So we really want to give you the tools to succeed once you get to the site and we find that works the best by actually being there on the ground and learning from the local people how to speak and work and interact in that country.

*Allie:* Thank you, Meghan. Our next question is: "Would you consider joining before going to graduate school?" So would you like to talk about that, what the benefits are of going to graduate school first as opposed to going into the Peace Corps first?

*Meghan:* Sure. So that's a question that we get pretty regularly and my answer is that it kind of depends on your career goals and expectations. So for me, I did Peace Corps right after I finished undergrad and I thought of it as a way to kind

of help me decide exactly what I wanted to study in graduate school. And a lot of Peace Corps Volunteers think that way; you know, they might be interested in public policy and health and education, but they're not really ready to go straight into grad school yet. And so Peace Corps is a way to help discern which path you want to pursue in terms of graduate study. So for people like that, like me, I think doing Peace Corps first and then going and getting a Peace Corps Fellows Scholarship is a really good opportunity. Now the other argument side of it is that if you know exactly what you want to do and there's a program that you can do Peace Corps and study that together, then you might want to go that path. If you know you want to get a Master's in Education, we have so many schools that we're partnered with where you can get a Master's of Education and teach English in Peace Corps all together. So you would be doing your research about what your experience in Peace Corps was like. And so that's really nice if you want to get that hands-on practicum as part of your Master's degree.

Now we also have a lot of people who just have a Master's degree and when they finish they apply to the Peace Corps as well. And if you do that you can't take advantage of those benefits towards graduate school, but you probably will have a different perspective than someone just coming out of undergrad that can be beneficial in your community. So, it really depends on what your career goals are and what fellowship and scholarship opportunities are out there for you, because it can work differently based on who you are and what you want. I would say we have many more people apply for Peace Corps Fellows than we do for Master's International. And Fellows is the one that you do Peace Corps first and then you go to grad school. And that's just because your grad degree then doesn't have to specifically correlate with what you did in Peace Corps. So if you were an Education Volunteer in Peace Corps, you can then go and get a Master's in Social Work, and that's no problem. It doesn't have to correlate, whereas if you do Master's International, they have to be connected. So I hope that helped clarify.

*Allie:* Alright, thank you, Meghan. Our next question actually does correlate to the graduate school program you were speaking about. The question is: "Do you have to apply and be accepted to both Peace Corps and the graduate school program to do the graduate school program?"

*Meghan:* So, with Master's International, which is the one that you do them together, you actually apply for graduate school first, and once you're accepted then you work with their Master's International coordinator to see if you'll be accepted into the Master's International Program. So these are all existing Master's programs and then there's a separate track that has the Peace Corps component in it. So say that I want to get a Master's in Social Work at the University of Michigan. I would apply to the University of Michigan; get accepted; say you know, I want to do Master's International; get accepted to that; and then you begin your Peace Corps application. You want to apply for Peace Corps about nine months before you're ready to leave, so you'd have to already be in your graduate program of study and you'd be working with that Master's International coordinator on your application so that you'd be accepted into Peace Corps. If for some reason something came up and you couldn't do Peace Corps, that's fine because there's still other tracks in that grad degree. So this is just one opportunity where you can tie graduate school and your Master's together, but you could always just do the graduate school and not connect it to Peace Corps. You just wouldn't get the same financial benefits.

*Allie:* Okay, thank you, Meghan. Our next question that comes up is: "How does training differ if you already speak the host language in the country you'll be serving in?"

*Spere:* It's hard to speak for other countries, but I assume that they probably worked on the same model that Peru did. So, in training, which is about two and a half months for us, the different language levels, you have like a language entrance kind of test when you're already in country and that determines which group you were assigned in. So you'll be placed for the most part with people that are on a similar language level that you are. I know that in my group, it varied dramatically. We had people that had been born speaking Spanish or you know, learning Spanish in their household from a very young age with Hispanic parents or parents that speak Spanish. And then there are also people who didn't speak a word of Spanish because they had originally been sent to a different program and then logistical things happened and they ended up in Peru. But I think that in general, it's probably easier in some respects if you already

speaking the language but if you don't, I wouldn't let that deter you at all. I know people that started the program with very little language capacity and ended sounding just basically like any other Peruvian that was there. So I hope that answered it.

*Meghan:* Yeah, and I'll follow up to that as well. So, for Spanish speaking countries, normally there's a training where you get to really high proficiency levels of Spanish, but a lot of the communities actually speak other languages or other dialects as well. So you might also have the opportunity to learn a Mayan language or Quechua or Guaraní, or whatever the case may be in terms of the local languages in the more rural communities that might not have as much of a Spanish level. And that's the same for French-speaking countries as well. If you want to go to West Africa, and some of those countries the language of education is French, but in your community you'd also be speaking a local language. So that's why we have some communities that require the language, because you'll not only be speaking French, but have to learn another language. So having a high level of French is really beneficial because it means you can dedicate more of your time to learning the local language. So it's definitely never a problem to know the language going into it. It's only more beneficial to your service, but it's not required for all the countries. I didn't know a single word of Kinyarwanda before I went and I was able to get intermediate-high by the end of the three months training.

*Allie:* Thank you both, Meghan and Speare, for answering that question. Our next question is: "What if I do not meet some of the requirements of the project that I'm interested in?" Do you have any suggestions or tips on that, Meghan?

*Meghan:* Yeah, I would say definitely talk to your local recruiter. Like I said, there's the "meet a recruiter" button on the [peacecorps.gov](http://peacecorps.gov) website. We are really happy to talk to people about how they can boost their résumé to kind of qualify or be more competitive for specific programs. So it depends on what sector it is in. If you want to go into education, I'd say definitely start tutoring, start working with substitute teaching, or leading an ESL program or something like that. If you want to do youth development, we're looking for hands-on experience working with at-risk youth. But it really depends on which country you're looking at and the required and desired skills. So reach out to your local recruiter and we'd be happy to make a game plan with you to get those skills.

*Allie:* Thanks, Meghan. Our next question is: "Would you recommend applying to Fulbright or other programs at the same time as Peace Corps, or should a person applying to the Peace Corps wait until they know if they've received a Fulbright or another scholarship before applying to Peace Corps?"

*Meghan:* I think that you should do what's in your best interest. And we know that there are many people who are applying for Fulbrights, for Teach for America, for AmeriCorps, all at the same time. I think that it never hurts to have options to make sure that you discern the program that's right for you. Because Peace Corps application process is about nine months, I would say apply for other things as well. But once you accept an invitation, that's where it gets a little more tricky, because accepting that invitation is essentially saying "I am ready and happy to go and to do this program." It's not like the army; you're never committed. You can always withdraw an application or even in-country, you can always leave if you want, but once you accept that invitation then you're kind of saying that you want to go and withdrawing later on in the process can look negatively because we might not be able to replace you at that stage if it's really late in the game and a community might go without a volunteer. So, if you're withdrawing your application, I'd say think wisely about that. But certainly pursue all the areas of interest that you're interested in. And you can even withdraw before accepting an invitation and apply to a program leaving later if you want to make sure that you hear back from Fulbright first or what have you.

*Allie:* Awesome! Thanks, Meghan. I think that's great advice. Our next question is regarding just in general about the requirements. Would you be able to just repeat what those requirements are for just applying to Peace Corps in general? Not specific programs, but what the baseline requirements are for Peace Corps.

*Meghan:* Sure. So we actually only have two things that are absolutely necessary to apply to Peace Corps. You absolutely have to be at least 18 and you have to be a U.S. citizen. Now after that, 95% of our positions are filled with folks with a

four-year education. We do have some people who are in agriculture who've worked on a farm their whole life, managed a farming business, and we don't require a degree for the agricultural programs and the same goes for some of the business programs. But typically we are looking for that four-year degree. Now once you have the four-year degree, qualifying for specific programs, what we do is we look at what your degree is in and what types of hands-on experience you have. So if you want to go into agriculture, we're kind of looking for some hands-in-the-ground agriculture experience. So if you've been able to work on a community garden or a farm, something like that will help your application, certainly. I'm sure a lot of the projects that you were working on with Gilman actually will help qualify you for Peace Corps. You know, the hand washing projects that Speare did, that sounds amazing and that could go for youth development or for health education. So for youth development, we're looking for working with at-risk youth, for education we're looking for ESL tutoring experience, for business we're looking for a business degree typically and then also some hands-on management experience or business education experience.

We're looking for people who have been able to translate what they've learned and put it into practice and teach other people about it, because that's what you'd be doing in the field in Peace Corps. Health, we're looking for health education or health awareness experience. So if you've ever volunteered at a community health clinic, if you've ever raised awareness about disease prevention or family planning, anything like that will definitely make you stand out. But most people qualify pretty easily and then it just depends on the pool of people that you're up against; some who might have years of experience and some who might barely have any. So my advice is to get involved in your community at school now or in your hometown or what be it so that when you do apply, we can see that you've been doing that community education and involvement here in the United States as well.

*Allie:* Great, thank you, Meghan. Our next question is: "What is the typical turnaround time for Peace Corps to give a response as to whether you've been accepted or not?"

*Meghan:* Sure. So if you apply by October 1<sup>st</sup>, you'll hear by December 1<sup>st</sup> if you've been invited or not. If you apply by January 1<sup>st</sup>, you'll hear by March 1<sup>st</sup>. So I know that some of those are two month spans, some of them are three month spans, and that has to do with programmatic demands. Those January 1<sup>st</sup> programs, we have over 1,000 positions we're looking to fill for June, July, or August of next year, so we have a little bit more need for time to evaluate all those applications. But no matter what, you will know whether you've been invited or not by the know-by date of the quarter you applied in.

*Allie:* Thanks, Meghan. Our next question is: "If you can apply before you have completed your four-year degree if you plan on departing after you've received that degree?"

*Meghan:* Yes. I would say seniors should apply now like in the next two weeks, because right now before the October 1<sup>st</sup> deadline, you have the opportunity to apply for programs leaving in April, May, or June. And what you can do is you can put your availability date as after your graduation. And that will actually mean that you can be considered for June, July, August, or September programs if you apply in the next two weeks. I definitely would recommend getting started while you're still in school.

*Allie:* Great. Our next question is "If you could discuss in a little more detail about the loan forgiveness program?"

*Meghan:* Sure. So in terms of Peace Corps' loan deferment, this actually comes from your loan providers and not from the Peace Corps, but typically if you have federal loans, you can defer them. So it's not forgiveness; it's just deferring them just like you're doing now while you're in school. So if you have subsidized loans, it will all be deferred just like it is right now. If you have unsubsidized loans, you'll have to pay the interest just like you do now. And then if you have private loans, it really is up to the loan provider. I know some people who are able to talk the loan provider into deferring for Peace Corps or for maybe even going into forbearance.



Now aside from those options that Peace Corps lays out in terms of deferment, we actually also have this new initiative from the White House called the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. So I'll talk a minute about that if that's what the question is asking. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program is actually for people who know that they want to commit at least ten years to a life in public service. And what happens is if you list your loans in a specific way and you have a specific type of repayment plan, after ten years of public service, any loans that you have will be forgiven. So that's pretty cool if you know that that's the path that you want to go on. And the two years of Peace Corps counts towards those ten years. So that's pretty cool, but you have to definitely talk to your campus finance people or some sort of financial advisor to help you work through that because it is pretty complicated and you have to list your loans as income-based payment plans, not deferment. So it works the same way when you're looking at it from the Peace Corps side; you wouldn't have to pay anything for those two years of Peace Corps because you have no income, but afterwards you'd be paying based on your income, not based on a traditional ten-year payment plan. So there's some information on the website about that that goes into more detail. It's pretty complicated as you can tell, but that program I'm talking about is called the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program and it's pretty cool.

*Allie:* Thanks, Meghan. And we have one last question. And that question is: "How many times can you apply for the Peace Corps?"

*Meghan:* So you can apply as many times as you want, but once a quarter. So once every three months. Now, it is a really competitive program and there is a possibility that you won't be selected the first round. And I would definitely not be discouraged and think that we don't want you if that's what happens. You just might have been in consideration for a really competitive program. So if that happens, I would definitely reach out to a recruiter and see if there's anything we can do to make your résumé look a little different or to talk about the choices that you're making in terms of where you'd like to be considered. But you can apply once a quarter. So if you apply by October 1<sup>st</sup> and you find out you're not in by December 1<sup>st</sup>, you'll still have a month there to reapply for the January 1<sup>st</sup> deadline, so that's what I would recommend. And before I go, I wanted to say that Darrin said that he actually did use Peace Corps' non-competitive eligibility status to get a job with the USDA. So it's a really cool other benefit besides the grad school benefit. But if you want to work for a U.S. agency, it's kind of a really nice in into getting a job in the federal government. So I just wanted to share that as well.

*Allie:* Thanks so much, Meghan. So first I'd like to thank all of our presenters today. Meghan, Darrin, and Speare, thank you so much for sharing your time and information with other Gilman alumni. And for alumni who have any questions, please feel free to contact both the Gilman Program if it's not related to specific Peace Corps questions, but also you can contact Meghan if you have any questions and you can find out about your recruiter on [peacecorps.gov](http://peacecorps.gov). And then you also will be able to view this recorded presentation, which will be available to alumni in the coming weeks.

In conclusion, on behalf of U.S. Department of State Gilman Scholarship Program, thank you all for joining this alumni webinar and for our special guests for providing valuable information to benefit our program alumni looking for ways to extend their exchange experience. And again, please be sure to be you're connected to Gilman alumni outlets to ensure you are staying updated with further Gilman alumni information, news, and announcements. Thank you!

*Transcript of original webinar recording, Extending Your Exchange Experience, September 18, 2015.*