U-M ranked in Top 10 for Peace Corps Volunteers

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ANN ARBOR—Abbey Edwards is one of 55 University of Michigan alumni volunteering with the Peace Corps in countries around the world—the 10th-most among large U.S. colleges and universities.

She is an official community health facilitator in a rural community of about 600 people in the Andes mountains in Peru. Her work focuses mostly on three main health issues: anemia, malnutrition and adolescent pregnancy.

“A huge part of my job is finding and motivating community counterparts to become invested in initiatives that will improve the health of their neighbors, friends and family,” she said. “I think the sustainability aspect of the work is the hardest but also the most essential. I want to make an impact on my community that can be seen long after I have left.”

Edwards graduated from U-M last May with a degree in community and global health and a minor in Spanish. She began her 27-month service in September 2019.

“I wanted to gain first-hand experience of the realities people face when it comes to their health outcomes, especially in developing countries,” she said. “Additionally, I saw the Peace Corps as a way to grow both personally and professionally in ways that wouldn’t be possible with a traditional job in the United States.”

Besides teaching English classes for students ages 6 to 18 during summer school—which runs from January until March—Edwards is working with health personnel and school-based staff to provide training and assistance in their implementation of projects.

“I am drawn to the field of public health because of its focus on changing health outcomes from the population level,” she said. “I believe my Peace Corps experience will help me to better understand my own strengths and personal interests in the field. I anticipate my service staying with me into future classrooms and jobs, giving me perspective and experience that will undoubtedly shape my career.”

U-M also ranked No. 6 among graduate schools, with 11 graduate alumni currently serving worldwide. Overall, U-M ranks No. 4 all-time among top producing schools on the Peace Corps list. It is the only university from Michigan on the list this year.

Since the agency’s founding in 1961, around 2,775 alumni from U-M have served abroad as Peace Corps volunteers. There are 211 volunteers from Michigan currently serving worldwide.
“We are pleased that the University of Michigan’s tradition of successful Peace Corps applicants continues again this year,” said Judith Pennywell, director of U-M’s International Center. “I feel confident that our graduates enter their Peace Corps experiences well prepared, thanks to our strong community of returned volunteers and Peace Corps recruiters.”

U-M graduate student Adrianne Kline is a returned Peace Corps Volunteer and became an on-campus recruiter. She served in Fiji as a health empowerment volunteer from 2014 to 2016.

During her service, she worked on a range of projects at a primary school; worked for the local nurse, as well as with the broader community; instructed healthy living classes; created sports programs with local health workers; and promoted healthy life choices by creating home gardening and exercise programs.

Kline also worked alongside local leaders, and Ministry of Education staff on a USAID climate change/water project to increase storage of clean drinking water and to improve the level of hygiene among the Ratu Naivalu Memorial School community.

“Living on a remote island in the South Pacific taught me more than I could have ever imagined about community,” she said. “Within this context, survival depends on your neighbors so everyone worked together. I had never before been a part of such a strong and resilient community. I was and continue to be humbled by the simplicity of life, the importance of community and relationships, and the kindness I experienced in Yalobi.”

Upon graduating in May 2021, Kline plans to work with vulnerable communities on health adaptation strategies due to climate change.

“In the meantime, I will be traveling back to Fiji to conduct thesis research in two remote communities,” she said. “I will be looking at health impacts due to climate change and examining strategies to increase adaptive capacity.”

Source: Global Michigan [1]