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There is increased interest among institutions of higher education across the country to develop international service learning programs that enhance their more globally oriented curricula and provide an attractive alternative for students who want to study abroad. In countries where human needs are greatest and the opportunity for a service learning project to make a positive contribution is also high, educators should bear in mind the common goals we share with the U.S. Peace Corps, a service learning organization par excellence. This article describes St. Mary's College of Maryland's collaboration with Peace Corps, The Gambia (West Africa) to provide multiple mentors for "on the ground" guidance to students in individual service learning research projects. Collaboration between Peace Corps programs around the world and universities and colleges on service learning projects can generate multiple mutual benefits for all stakeholders: organizations, communities and individuals.

Good Guidance on the Ground: Mentoring International Service Learning Programs

The technological forces of globalization have reached a point at which ideas, people, and material goods can move with astonishing rapidity from one country to another at historically unprecedented levels. As the societies that comprise our global village become increasingly integrated through trade, travel, and communication networks, the importance for our future citizens and leaders to understand the people, problems and life ways beyond our own borders has never been clearer. All institutions of higher education—research universities, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges—have an important role to play in globalizing their curricula to better provide to students and faculty the appropriate conceptual framework to position themselves, their communities, and our country within the world system of societies.

The total number of students who travel and study abroad has increased in the past decade. Study abroad programs in Europe continue to attract the largest numbers of students, but programs to China, Africa, and Latin America have increased significantly. Students who study abroad with programs in Asia, Africa, and Latin America come face to face with the fact that, although the world has grown closer in many ways, disparities in the standard of living among its inhabitants continue to increase dramatically. The conditions and consequences of poverty that our students witness in Africa, South Asia and Latin America are, for the most part, unlike anything in their experience in the United States.

Sociologists, such as Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski (1999), have noted that although global development means greater overall wealth and social complexity, inequalities within single societies and among the societies that make up the world system have also increased. The United Nations Development Programme's annual *Human Development Report* uses measures of longevity, education, and income to construct a quality of life index that clearly shows the average quality of life in the top industrialized countries is about twice that of the more numerous industrializing countries. The World Bank's 1997 *World Development Report* argues that in many countries where the need for better education, health care, and housing is greatest, dysfunctional governments are unable or unwilling to deliver the much-needed services. Ironically, those regions of the world where poverty and its associated problems are most deeply entrenched, such as India and many of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, also have some of the highest population growth rates in the world. This predicts even more deprivation and human suffering for these regions.

These disturbing global trends are not just abstract concepts for discussion in the lecture hall or seminar room. We share the world with a great many people who have a great many needs. They are a strong reminder and even stronger justification of an obligation to expand our boundaries of civic responsibility and community service.

International service learning programs at U.S. American universities and colleges have developed as part of the effort to globalize the higher education curriculum. Ideally, programs allow students and faculty to gain experiences "on the ground" that test their previous knowledge in a new sociocultural context while making some type of contribution to the community in which they live and learn. Other contributors to this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* describe many of the difficult issues facing those who initiate such programs, such as, how to identify appropriate service learning sites or determine the best spokesperson for the "felt needs" of host communities. What criteria should be used to select students for service learning programs and prepare them for the shock of living and working abroad? How do you keep students on track and help them reflect upon the powerful experiences they encounter abroad?

The focus of this article is on yet another international service learning issue: What can be done to help students navigate the emotional and intellectual difficulties of adapting to a cultural system based upon a different set of assumptions about human interaction? Confusing social and work situations in other countries can hamper students who lack a sufficient degree of intercultural competence, and their frustration may be compounded by conditions of material deprivation that they observe, yet feel helpless to change.

In those countries where human needs, however they may be defined, are greatest, we who teach in the United States have a tremendous resource available to us that can greatly enrich our international service learning programs: The United States Peace Corps. The U.S. Peace Corps is one of the most effective organizational sponsors for service learning programs in the world. Their goals, which express the basic elements of service learning philosophy and ideals, include: 1) to help people of interested coun-

tries and areas meet their needs for trained workers; 2) to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of peoples served; and, 3) to promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans (<<http://www.peacecorps.gov/about/history/60s.html>> October 25, 1999).

Education is at the heart of the U.S. Peace Corps mission, just as it is for institutions of higher education. Although none of our students is able to commit the two plus years to their service learning programs that Peace Corps volunteers do, elements of Peace Corps training are useful to adapt to our programs. Although it takes time and other resources, we should explore ways to foster connection and collaboration between Peace Corps country programs and volunteers and our international service learning programs and students. There is potential for all stakeholders to benefit.

International Service Learning at St. Mary's College of Maryland

St. Mary's College is Maryland's public honors college and official monument to the first Maryland settlement. The majority of its 1600 undergraduate students are drawn from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, and the Maryland cities of Annapolis and Baltimore. Approximately 19 percent of the student body is African American, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American. First-generation college students from these urban areas make up 25 percent of the 1999 freshmen class.

The college has reaffirmed its commitment to expanding international educational opportunities for its students. The Study Abroad Office (formerly study abroad and internships) currently oversees programs in Europe (England, France, Germany and Italy), China, Central America (Costa Rica, Belize), and Africa (The Gambia, Senegal). A study abroad advisory committee, comprised of faculty members and administrators, defined the primary goal: to make available to students at St. Mary's College of Maryland international educational opportunities and overseas resources that are not available on campus. Within this overarching goal are a number of sub-goals: to deepen the understanding of other societies and cultures, and consequently of one's own; to appreciate diversity; to encourage international friendships; to develop leadership; and to develop educational, career, and professional opportunities (Hopkins, 1999, p. 36).

The Gambia program meets goals defined by both the college's Study Abroad and Community Service and Field Study offices. The latter office supports efforts for "...St. Mary's students [to] give back to the community and at the same time enrich their own learning through work in the schools, with those in need, and for the environment" (St. Mary's College Catalog 1999-2000, p. 140). As I show below, effective giving requires good guidance.

Intercultural Guidance on the Ground in The Gambia

The sun continued its rise into the West African sky, and with it, the heat rose and the humidity even seemed to increase. Jen looked up and smiled at the next woman in line. All Jen could do to convey her friendliness and helpful intention was smile. She had studied the

local language, Mandinka, for a week, but still couldn't say more than a few words of the highly ritualized greetings. She had come to this village with the mobile Maternal Child Health (MCH) unit of the Divisional Health team that operated from the hospital built to serve the rural population in the eastern part of the country. She would later write about feeling overwhelmed by the large number of women and children who showed up that day. Outwardly, everything appeared to be chaotic to this young American woman who herself aspires to become a doctor one day. But there was both structure and order here. The village women and children knew where to go for different services: infant weighing in one area, immunizations for children or prenatal examinations in another. And the nurses were incredibly efficient. They used a minimal amount of equipment and space to serve the needs of the assembled crowd. By the time Jen finished her six weeks of study and service in The Gambia, her admiration for Gambian health professionals had increased immeasurably.

Although Jen initially felt overwhelmed by this experience, she actually managed quite well. She had been introduced to a Peace Corps volunteer working at the hospital who, in her turn, had introduced Jen to the MCH crew. Over the course of several meetings, Gambian and American professionals explained to Jen their views about what went on at the clinics. She felt increasingly comfortable and confident with the advice she was offered by one of the Gambian nurses about what to do on the day of the village trek, and, on that day, experienced a breakthrough. She was finally able to see and understand how the mobile medical service system worked in the village, and how nurses and patients interacted with one another.

Jen visited many different health facilities during the remainder of her stay. She had been asked to collect information for the national chief nursing officer on the question: At which trimester do Gambian women show up for their first prenatal visit? During the next academic year at St. Mary's College, Jen worked on the Gambia Pediatrics Project, an effort she initiated to collect medical donations for the children's ward at Royal Victoria Hospital in Banjul, the largest hospital in the country. These much-needed supplies were sent by sea freight to The Gambia the following summer, 1999.

Promise, Potential, and Problems: International Service Learning

International service learning is a wonderfully attractive concept. Basically, it implies that students from U.S. colleges and universities go abroad to live, study, and provide some type of needed service to the people of another country. Integrating study abroad with service learning creates a potentially powerful combination of learning experiences. Recent studies carried out by RAND corporation (Gray et al., 1998) and Alan Melchior of Brandeis University (1998) for the Corporation for National Service have shown that high school and college service learning courses in the United States

actually help to increase what students learn. Service learning also increases students' sense of civic responsibility, promotes personal growth, and increases self-confidence. It is an ideal example of the link many think should exist between communities of higher education and other segments of society.

But international service learning presents unique challenges to the institution, the faculty, and administrators who organize and run these programs, as well as for the student. Postuniversity experience as exemplified by the United States Peace Corps offers an excellent model of effective service learning. However, a Peace Corps volunteer normally spends two years in another country in addition to the intensive three-month training program in language and cross-cultural skills. Because a college or university is constrained by the academic calendar, programs must contribute to our students' goals of obtaining a degree in a reasonable amount of time. This means that international service learning programs must be designed to prepare a student to successfully live, work, and contribute to another society in a time frame that corresponds with current course and credit configurations. The Gambia field study program, for example, is a six-week summer course. Other options include programs tied to course and credit bearing configurations in the semester or quarter system, or perhaps even an entire academic year.

Preparing students for international service learning is an incredibly challenging task. A student must not only learn or improve her or his language skills, but also learn the much more subtle and complex cultural rules that shape appropriate social interaction. Because culture is not some homogeneous trait or quality of life shared among the people of another country, students can expect to find the same degree of variation in people's expectations, values, and attitudes in other countries as is found here in the United States. Increasing students' intercultural competency to enable them to provide appropriate and meaningful service to people from another cultural background whose values, attitudes, and expectations probably differ significantly from our own, and certainly those of the student, is essential.

Preparation is only part of the key to a successful international service learning experience. Equally important are mentors, or at least individuals who become intercultural guides, in the student's host country. Mentors are teachers and role models, but they are also advocates, mediators, and experts, and it is possible for a student to have several mentors in an international service learning program. One obvious choice is a faculty member from the student's home university who has a deep understanding of and commitment to the service learning program, and to the country and people involved. This faculty person is likely to have connections with potential mentors who are also members of the society in which the student will be living and working. The role of the mentor or intercultural guide is to advise and help guide a student's experiences "on the ground." Mentors stimulate students' reflection, provide them with valuable local contacts, and help translate experiences from one cultural framework to another. Our students need help in all these areas because they simply do not have the experience base on which to draw.

The United States Peace Corps, which has for the past 38 years provided more than 150,000 volunteers for service learning in over 130 countries, has developed one of the most efficient and effective systems that relies heavily on the multiple-mentor model outlined above.

An Emerging Mentorship Model

St. Mary's College of Maryland established The Gambia, West Africa field study program in 1996, when ten students spent four to six weeks in the country. I was faculty leader, and have had an extensive network of personal and professional contacts in the country since my days as a Peace Corps volunteer from 1979-81. I hired two experienced Gambian language and culture teachers, who worked periodically for the Peace Corps, to teach classes to the students at our hotel during our first week. Each student chose a research topic of interest and that potentially would be useful to any of the many Gambians we met during the first two weeks. Students met Gambian and expatriate professionals working in the fields of medical and health services, education, environment, fisheries, wildlife management, tourism, museums and culture, performing arts, and youth and sports.

After a tour of the interior, where we stayed with school teachers and students at several sites, students began their own projects. By this time, students had met a number of Peace Corps volunteers, some of whom had visited our hotel and others whom we visited at their work and home sites when we went up-country. Students learned a great deal about The Gambia and Gambians from their discussions with Peace Corps volunteer culture brokers. Gambian or expatriate professionals were, in effect, gate keepers who helped students gain access to information or people for their projects. Within a month of our return to the United States, students had completed their first drafts of the research reports that would be edited and published, then sent to our friends and colleagues in The Gambia.

It took longer than anticipated to polish and publish those reports. In the meantime, though, students met with two different groups of people to talk about their experiences in The Gambia. The first was a local organization of anthropologists in Washington, D.C. After the presentation, a student who had been in The Gambia was asked by an audience member to come to her classes at Georgetown University to talk with students. Another student had been accepted for Peace Corps service in one of the former Soviet states, and left for his site within days of the Washington presentation. The second presentation was to a large group from the college and local community. When we finished our spiral bound book, *Tubabs Under the Baobab: Study and Adventure in West Africa*, copies were mailed to the many Gambians who had helped us, and their initial feedback was very positive.

Two years later, a second, smaller group of students went to The Gambia. Three of the students hoped to go to medical school after completing their degree requirements at St. Mary's; Jen, who was described earlier, was one of them. As before, we prepared a volume of student reports, *Tubabs Two: from the Baobab to the Bantaba*. Before the

book was finalized, copies of each student's chapter were faxed to the Gambians with whom they worked most closely, and comments were requested. We received responses to many of the papers, and these were incorporated into the final version. Once again, books were mailed to The Gambia, and recipients commented that this edition was even better than the first.

In summer 2000, another group of students will travel to The Gambia. Our relationship with Peace Corps The Gambia continues to evolve. Students will receive even more language and culture training from Gambian Peace Corps trainers. Projects will be well defined before students depart, so that appropriate Gambian mentors for individual students can be contacted well in advance of our arrival.

Much has been accomplished, yet more remains to be done. In the future I hope to report that St. Mary's College has initiated an international service learning program for Gambians in the United States, thus completing a circuit for the exchange of people, ideas, and experiences that enhances human capacities all the way around.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Many Peace Corps alumni went on to graduate schools, and are now teaching or working in some other capacity at metropolitan institutions of higher education around the country. These former volunteers are a potential resource to link international service learning programs with current Peace Corps staff and volunteers. Although it would be nearly impossible for students in our international service learning programs to replicate the depth of understanding Peace Corps volunteers achieve after two years of service learning abroad, linking up with the Peace Corps can help both institutions fulfill their mandates. This would enable institutions of higher education to design and support international service learning programs for their students and faculty, and help the Peace Corps educate Americans about the country in which they serve. Working out the details of such collaboration is no small task. The St. Mary's College collaboration with Peace Corps The Gambia, for example, is a model in process.

Peace Corps programs around the world can help with the many issues involved in identifying communities and service activities for international service learning programs. When Peace Corps administrators, in collaboration with their counterparts from the host country government, develop a program, they calculate volunteer efforts in terms of "generations." A program would have at least three generations, or six years, of volunteer service; programs in some countries have existed in various incarnations for decades. As Harkavy (1996) points out so well from his experience in Philadelphia, service learning that aspires to be more than a window-dressing remedy or Band-Aid approach to a social problem must continue to commit efforts to enable structural change. For institutions of higher education to build or improve upon their international service learning programs, this means creating long-term relationships with organizations and individuals in another country who can help place students and guide their efforts to gain cultural competency, confidence and credibility.

Suggested Readings

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