

An Adventure into the Peace Corps: What It's Like to Join

Sociology 98/198, Fall 2006 [2 units]

Time: Monday 6-8 pm

Location: 121 Wheeler

Course Facilitator: Sierra Garthwaite

Instructor of Record: Professor Ann Swidler

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Course Description:

This course has three objectives. The first goal is that students formulate their own decision as to whether they would like to join the Peace Corps. The second objective is that students learn about the cultures in which Peace Corps volunteers serve. And finally, by the end of this semester it is my goal that students acquire an understanding of current world affairs.

The purpose of each class is to accomplish these three goals. During the first 15 minutes of class students will participate in a mock Peace Corps experience by chatting 1 on 1 with each other. These chats will always be about a specific topic. For example, a few topics are marriage, the Iraq war, favorite things to do in Berkeley, and good movies. Besides the fun of getting to know your fellow students in a friendly atmosphere this exercise has a purpose which is for you to experience one of the main things Peace Corps volunteers do during their day. Socializing allows Peace Corps volunteers to strengthen relationships in their community, learn about the local culture, and grow in themselves. Since it is such a key part of the Peace Corps experience and Berkeley students come from a wide range of backgrounds I thought it would be good practice for students to get to know the stranger sitting across from them. Could I work with this person for 2 years? Do I like socializing with people unlike myself? If the entire community thought like this person could I adapt? -- these are all things you should ask yourself during this exercise. Your answers should help guide you in your decision. During the next hour or so of class a returned Peace Corps volunteer will speak about his or her Peace Corps adventure. This is an amazing opportunity for you to learn about what life is like in places like Slovakia as well as ask any questions you might have about the Peace Corps. The final section of class will be spent discussing *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: 2 Years in the Heart of an African Village* by Sarah Erdman, James' emails which cover his recent experience in Bulgaria, current world news, and short stories by Peace Corps volunteers.

Evaluation Procedures:

In order to receive a pass students must do 3 things:

- 1) Attend class - students are allowed to miss 2 class periods
- 2) Complete a weekly crossword puzzle which covers main points in the readings.
- 3) Write a final essay 4 pages double spaces (2 pgs single spaced). The essay needs to use *Nambonkaha*, James' emails, class discussions, and guest speakers to answer one of these 2 questions:
 - A) Would you like to join the Peace Corps in the future? Why or Why not?
 - B) What have you learned about cultures in which Peace Corps volunteers serve?

Proposed Topics

Week #1 (September 5th): Introduction to the Peace Corps

- When did the Peace Corps begin and who started it?
- What is the Peace Corps mission and goal?
- What are the benefits of joining the Peace Corps?
- What program or job can I do while I'm in the Peace Corps?
- Do I get to choose where I go and what I do?
- What changes have occurred since the Peace Corps began in 1961?
- How many volunteers are serving today?

Reading:

- *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: 2 years in the Heart of an African Village* (pgs. 1-28)
- James' journal entry (#1-2)
- World news headlines for this week
- "The Meaning of Time" by Kimberly Camara Peace Corps Volunteer, Guinea (1999-2002)

Week #2 (September 11th): The Training Process

Guest Speaker: Laura Plummer Guinea 1991-1993 Math Teacher

- What is the Peace Corps training process like hour to hour each day?
- How long does it last?
- Will I be prepared to live alone in my home country for two years?
- Where will I be living during the training process?
- Is it difficult to learn the language in 3 months?

Reading:

- *Nambonkaha* (pgs 29-76)
- James' journal entry (#3-4)
- "A Straw Fence the Height of a Man" by Micheal Varga Peace Corps Volunteer Chad (1977-1979)

- World news coverage

Week #3 (September 18th): Daily Life

Guest Speaker: Heather Driscoll Regional Recruiter at San Francisco Peace Corps
Regional Office Peace Corps Volunteer Romania 2003-2005

- What can I expect to be doing from the time I wake up to the time I go to bed?
- Will I be living in a mud hut?
- Will I have electricity and running water?
- How will my neighbors and colleagues view me?

Reading:

- *Nambonkaha* (pgs. 77-110)
- James' journal entry (#5-6)
- "Running" by Peter Hessler Peace Corps Volunteer, China (1996-1998)
- World news coverage

Week #4 (September 25th): Daily Life

Guest Speaker: Sheldon Koiles Slovakia Business Development (2000-2002)

- Why do they call the Peace Corps the toughest job you'll ever love?
- Will I get lonely?
- What do successful volunteers do during their average day?

Reading:

- *Nambonkaha* (pgs. 111-163)
- James' journal entry (#5-6)
- World news coverage
- "Music in the Fields" by Carrie Young Peace Corps Volunteer, Mali (2001-2002)

Week #5: (October 2nd): Daily Life

Guest Speaker: Geoffrey Nelson Environmental Management Ivory Coast (1993-1995)

- What are some of the high and low moments in the Peace Corps?
- How will I get from place to place?
- What sort of food would I be eating in the Ivory Coast?
- Will I get enough food, sleep and exercise?

Reading:

- *Nambonkaha* (pgs. 164-178)
- James' journal entry (#7-8)
- World news headlines
- "Mr. John and the Day of Knowledge" by John Deever Peace Corps Volunteer, Ukraine (1993-1995)
- Dayton Daily News Peace Corps Safety Report

Week #6 (October 9th): Medical and Safety Concerns

Guest Speaker: Patti Bortman Romania 2001-2004

- Will I get sick?
- Will there be a doctor I can go to when I get sick?
- Will I be safe in the community I am living in?

Reading:

- *Nambonkaha* (pgs. 179-203)
- James' journal entry (#9-10)
- World news headlines
- "Sharing in Africa" by Mike Tidwell Peace Corps Volunteer , Zaire (1985-1987)

Week #7 (October 16th): The Spirit of the Peace Corps

- Movie: *Born into Brothels* by Ross Kauffman and Zana Briski

- What does _____ learn about the children she is living with?
- What did you learn from the children?
- What do the children learn from her?
- How does she help the children help themselves?
- What obstacles does she face along the way and how does she overcome them?

Reading:

- *Nambonkaha* (pgs. 204-235)
- James journal entry (#11-12)
- "The Senegalese Miracle" by Leita Kaldi Peace Corps Volunteer, Senegal (1993-1996)

Week #8 (October 23rd): Peace Corps Social Scene and Correspondence with Home

Guest Speaker: Laura Weiss Senegal 2001-2003 Environmental Education

- Will I make friends in the Peace Corps?
- Is there a stereotypical kind of person who joins the Corps?
- During service will I live close to other volunteers?
- What is the Peace Corps dating scene like?
- Will I be able to write/email/call home?
- Can I receive mail in the Peace Corps?

Reading:

- *Nambonkaha* (pgs. 236-252)
- World news Headlines
- James' journal entry (#13-14)
- Story: TBA

Week #9 (October 30th): Peace Corps Policies/Application Process

Guest Speaker: Head Peace Corps recruiter at the San Francisco Headquarters

Nick Bosustow

- Will I be overseas for the whole two years or can I come home for a while?
- Can I transfer programs if I don't like what I am doing?
- Can I transfer countries if I don't like where I am?
- Can the Peace Corps terminate my service?

- Can I bring my girlfriend with me?
- Can my girlfriend visit?
- What is Master's International?
- How many people apply and how many are accepted each year?
- What is the medical examination like?
- How do I know if I am qualified?
- Do I need to take lots of language classes to join?
- How long does the application process take?
- How far ahead of time should I send in my application?
- Are there any tips for a smooth ride through the application process?

Reading:

- *Nambonkaha* (pgs. 253-274)
- James' journal entry (# 15-16)
- World news headlines
- "Soccer Until Dusk" by Mark Brazaitis Peace Corps Volunteer, Guatemala (1991-1993)

Week #10 (November 6th): Cultural Immersion Experience

Who: everyone

What will we be doing: Meditating and then listening to a Dharma talk

Where: Nygnignma Institute in Berkeley

When: dah

Why: To deepen your understanding of Buddhism and the value of meditation

Reading:

- *Nambonkaha* (pgs. 275-303)
- James' journal entry (#17-18)
- World news headlines
- website crossculturalsolutions.com

Week #11 (November 13th): Alternative Volunteer Option: Cross Cultural Solutions

Guest Speaker: Sierra Garthwaite Thailand Summer 2006 English Teacher and Medical Assistant

- What did you do on a daily basis?
 - What was the best part of your experience?
 - What was the worst part?
 - Would you recommend the experience to others?
 - What was it like to teach English?
 - What are Thai people like?
 - Where did you live and who did you work with?
 - How is Cross Cultural Solutions a different experience than the Peace Corps
- also
- how are they similar?
 - Was it worth all that time and money?

Reading:

- *Nambonkaha* (pgs. 304-318)

- James' last journal entry #19
- World news headlines
- www.habitat.org

Week #12 (November 20th): Alternative Volunteer Option: Habitat for Humanity

Guest Speaker: TBA

- What does Habitat for Humanity do?
- Where can I volunteer?
- How much does it cost?
- What skills will I learn?
- Can I go with my friends?

Reading:

- World news headlines
- www.americorps.com

Week #13 (November 27th): Alternative Volunteer Option: Americorps

Guest Speaker: TBA

- What is Americorps?
- How is it different from the Peace Corps?
- What do Americorps volunteers do?
- How long is the service?
- Where will they send me?
- Does Americorps look good on a job/grad school application?
- What will I learn from my experience in Americorps?

Reading:

- World news headlines
- Work on final paper

Week #14 (December 4th): Group dinner at the Thai House!