



Greetings From Master's International!



Master's International Staff

(From Left) Sylvia Alejandre, Program Manager;
Gina Piacentino, Summer Intern, the Washington Center for
Internships and Academic Seminars;
Asherra Meskheniten, Administrative Assistant

As a prospective Master's International student you probably want to know as much as you can about the program and the students. In this newsletter you will learn more about some of our current and former students and what they did while serving in the Peace Corps. You will also be able to find out what your next steps should be to becoming a Master's International (MI) student, get current statistics on the program, and find the answers to some of the most common questions about the program.

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<p>Fast Facts about MI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ 50 Participating Universities❖ 82 Programs❖ 521 Enrolled Students

Student Profile: Frank Aragona

In August of 2000, I began my service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Bolivia. Prior to my departure, I had spent a year preparing for my service as a Master's International student in the Michigan Technological University forestry department. The northern hardwood forests of upper Michigan are an unlikely place to prepare for a two year stint as a tropical forester. Preparation involved as much talking to returned Volunteers and learning theories of community development as it did cruising timber and writing forest management plans. It was time well spent.

In the rural Third World there is no infotainment, no cell phones, no shopping malls, none of it. And for many of us, this was the draw. We



Frank in the soybean fields of Bolivia.

believed, perhaps with an uncomfortable mixture of naiveté and wisdom, that there is something ancient there—something, a tradition, a way of life, a language, a hilltop, a river, that isn't tainted by the drab, rootless monoculture of modernity. In the *campo* there is only time, space, people, and poverty.

There was a plus side to all the extra time. We didn't feel like procrastinators because there were no deadlines. The idea was to try to be good people, learn the language, respect the culture, do the best we could with what we had, and make some great friends. It doesn't sound so hard, but some people make it harder than you might think.

I'm not trying to suggest that the Peace Corps isn't committed to development. But development, just like progress, is a tricky word. These things don't just involve new technologies, better banking systems, and an established manufacturing sector. Development means growth and change in human understanding. And as any good scientist knows, such things are difficult to quantify. For a short time, the people of a faraway land become our best friends, our father figures, our lovers, and our neighbors. And during this time, who can say what walls are being torn down? What palaces are being built? What seeds are being planted in our hearts and minds? The experience blesses us with a brief glimpse of the way forward.

As an agent of change in a small, rural community, there were several realities that I was forced to come to terms with. Change occurs slowly. Indeed, democracy, science, and modern technology did not emerge from the Western mind overnight. These were institutions and ideas that were pondered, debated, and fought for over the course of centuries. So patience became my mantra.

The people were quick to convince me that seeing is believing. For them, my ideas of producing mushrooms, making compost, reforestation, and building latrines were nothing more than fanciful theories with little basis in reality. Even if I personally had never grown a mushroom on a log, I knew it could be done. How? Well, of course, I'd seen it

in books and pictures and on the Internet. My friends and neighbors were not so easily convinced by a picture. And rightfully so. They needed to see the process to understand it and believe in it. Agriculture, but especially Third World agriculture, is a risky business, and farmers are reluctant to drop what they are doing for the sake of theory and experimentation.

Yet during my service, a pattern of process began to emerge. I realized that open minds exist in every community. This is a beautiful thing, for regardless of people's socio-economic status or level of education, for whatever reason they are willing to dedicate their time and energy to trying something new. And so I was able to channel my energy and resources into helping these families, all the while nurturing the hope that seeing is believing, and through action and concrete results we could inspire others to experiment for the benefit of their families and their communities. It was no easy task, but it was certainly worth the effort.

Frank Aragona is an MI graduate from Michigan Technological University. He served in Bolivia. Frank is now the Project Director at Agricultural Innovations, Inc. To learn more, please visit www.agroinnovations.com.

Student Profile: Christina Breuer

During my junior year of college, I began to think seriously about what to do once I graduated. While I thoroughly enjoyed academia and felt a strong desire to continue with graduate school, other paths were also calling. I had recently completed a variety of study- and work-abroad programs and desperately wanted to return overseas and immerse myself in yet another new culture. But another part of me wanted to pursue a

professional career after graduation and get myself established in the working world. Everything sounded appealing, with no one path clearly edging out another.

Needless to say, I was more than overjoyed to discover the Master's International program. I couldn't imagine a better way to combine my interests in grad school, international exposure, and professional work experience. After completing three semesters of coursework in the American University TESOL program, I was sent to the Kingdom of Nepal as a skilled and trained English language teacher and trainer.

In the Peace Corps the rule of thumb is flexibility and adaptability. Things won't always go as planned, and you just have to learn to make the most of things and work around them. Despite my trying to keep classes fun and innovative, the attendance rates of my fourth- and fifth-grade students depended primarily on the planting and harvesting seasons. While I knew how to operate only on a system of punctuality, many of my colleagues had only a vague concept of time and would conduct class for as long as, or as briefly as, it took to complete the day's lesson, ignoring the structure I



Christina teaching her 5th grade class in Sipadol, Bhaktapur, Nepal.

was accustomed to. When the monsoon season came, the sound of rain on the tin roofs of the classrooms was nearly deafening. When we closed most windows to keep the rain out, the classrooms became too dark even to attempt to teach—electricity wasn't an option since we didn't have it.

When I first arrived at my school, the other teachers were eager to know exactly how I could help their school. Although I was clearly motivated and enthusiastic about my assignment, they were interested in my skills and qualifications. Did I have anything more to offer than what they were already giving their students? Just because I was American, did it really mean that I knew better than they did? Once I explained that I had

already completed all the classes in my graduate program and was using my experience with Peace Corps Nepal to gain practical skills, not only were my colleagues impressed, but they were honored that I chose to gain those skills by working in a poor, rural public Nepali school. They quickly realized that not only did I have the qualifications to teach and that I wanted to share with them the skills that I had gained during graduate studies, but also that I genuinely believed that my greatest learning experience would come from working alongside my Nepali counterparts. ***Christina Breuer is an MI student at American University currently completing the final requirements for her master's degree.***

Tracking Our Graduates

- ❖ **Monica Monk** completed two years of Peace Corps service in El Salvador in 1997, working in agroforestry. A graduate of the MI program at the University of Montana, she now works as a biologist, organizing a program that restores about 800 acres of agricultural land to native brush each year. She and her family live in Texas.
- ❖ **Chad Pfitzer** is currently an extension educator with Agriculture and Natural Resources at Purdue University. He was an MI participant at Colorado State University, earning his master's degree in agricultural sciences and was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Moldova from 2001 to 2003.
- ❖ **Deanna Kepka** served in Jamaica from 1998 to 2000. She earned her master's degree in political science from Illinois State University. She now is the director of development at Alvio Medical Center, in Chicago.
- ❖ **Michael Dougherty** served in the Peace Corps in Guatemala from 2002 to 2004. He earned his master's degree in political science from Illinois State University. He is now executive director for Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partners of the Americas, in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

Watch for our section called "Where are they now?" on the MI website for information about past MI Volunteers and what they are doing.

Where to Begin

Steps for becoming a Master's International student:

1. **Choose a school.** Search "Participating Schools" on the MI website to identify which MI schools and programs interest you most. Contact the

- schools to discuss your interest and obtain information about admissions procedures, qualifications, and financial assistance that may be offered.
2. **Apply to the school.** Request an application and apply to the programs that meet your needs.
 3. **Apply to the Peace Corps.** Apply online at www.peacecorps.gov, or contact your regional recruiting office at 1.800.424.8580.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Master's International?

Many U.S. colleges and universities have graduate programs that are particularly relevant to the work assignments that Peace Corps Volunteers perform overseas. In cooperation with the Peace Corps, more than 45 institutions now offer an opportunity to simultaneously earn your advanced degree and gain international experience. As a Master's International student, you can earn your master's degree by completing approximately one year of intensive on-campus study, then serve for two years in the Peace Corps in an assignment related to your course of study. These programs are designed to help you develop skills that are in high demand among countries requesting Peace Corps Volunteers.

Prior to beginning your Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps will provide three months of intensive technical, language, and cross-cultural training. This training, combined with two years of work in your assignment, will provide you with unparalleled practical experience. Upon completion of the program, MI graduates possess both excellent academic credentials and international field experience—an attractive combination for prospective employers.

What will I do as a Peace Corps Volunteer?

MI students are placed in projects relevant to their course of study. The many projects in which MI students have worked include

- A public health project in Madagascar to introduce improved nutrition and hygiene practices to schoolchildren and their mothers.
- An agricultural project in Nepal introducing more efficient crop production, pest management, seed production, and storage techniques to increase both food production and income.
- A forestry project in Paraguay to promote the integration of forestry with current agricultural practices, working with farmers to help increase farm income and conserve local natural resources.
- A business project in Kenya to assist entrepreneurs in gaining practical business skills, including inventory management, accounting practices, marketing, and accessing credit.

- A project in Kyrgyzstan to teach English to secondary students and to introduce new teaching methods to local English teachers—improving their English skills in the process.

What are the benefits of being a Master's International student?

In addition to receiving excellent training and practical experience, Master's International students receive a number of benefits from the Peace Corps, including

- Transportation to and from the country of service.
- Living and housing expenses.
- Full medical and dental care.
- Vacation time and allowance.
- Just over \$6,000 readjustment allowance, earned upon completion of 27 months of service (can be used to defray tuition costs).
- Career counseling and support.
- Noncompetitive eligibility for federal government jobs for one year upon completion of full term of overseas service.

All participating Master's International schools offer academic credit for Peace Corps service. In addition, several schools provide scholarships or tuition waivers for these credits. Depending on availability at specific universities, Master's International students may also compete for research or teaching assistantships. These benefits are unique to each school.

The opinions expressed in the Master's International newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Peace Corps or the government of the United States.