

Peace Corps sees increase in Miami grad volunteers

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Even though the possibility of danger does exist, Miami University students are continuing to turn to the Peace Corps as a viable post-graduation alternative in greater and greater numbers every year.

According to a recent ranking of the number of Peace Corps volunteers, Miami has climbed from the 12th to the eighth spot for medium-sized colleges-jumping from 34 to 42 volunteers over the past year.

Miami is tied at the eighth spot with Boston College and Georgetown University, with the rankings determined by comparing the number of students applying for the Peace Corps and the size of the student body at the university.

"We consistently see high-caliber student applications from Miami," Christine Torres, regional recruiter for the Peace Corps, said. "We look for the most well-rounded and enthusiastic candidates. Miami students are always well-prepared ... very professional yet approachable and service-oriented."

And in the past, Miami students have more than exemplified these traits, explained Monica Ways, director of community engagement and service at Miami.

"Peace Corps recruiters have had very positive experiences with Miami grads," Ways said.

"Miami students are prepared to be Peace Corps members as the result of curricular and co-curricular opportunities afforded to Miami students."

According to the Peace Corps' official Web site, the Peace Corps was founded in 1961 and is an agency that works internationally to provide service to those in need, often in developing countries around the world.

Today, Peace Corps volunteers serve in more than 70 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Europe and the Middle East. Volunteer positions include education, youth, business and community development, health, agriculture, environment and information technology.

Doug Shumavon, a Miami professor of political science and former Peace Corps volunteer, describes his experience as "educationally enhancing."

When asked about Miami students' interest and success in the Peace Corps in light of the dangers of living in the developing world, Shumavon praised Miami students' willingness to try new experiences.

"I think that there are students at Miami who are willing to take a risk and explore something different: a different world, a different culture, a different way of living," Shumavon said. "They are among the bolder students who do not hesitate to confront the fear of something different and learn and grow from it."

However, while Peace Corps volunteers try to do good in their work, reports have surfaced that seek to show the potential danger volunteers are faced with everyday.

A special report from the Dayton Daily News recently uncovered years of crimes against Peace Corps volunteers, discussing the dangers they encounter, the security and supervision they sometimes do not receive, as well as the unsafe areas in which volunteers are asked to serve.

According to the report, titled "Casualties of Peace," volunteers are often given jobs in isolated, rural locations with little to no contact from their superiors for months on end.

The report-whose accuracy was challenged by Peace Corps representatives in a letter to the newspaper-pointed out that a crime involving a Peace Corps volunteer occurs once every 23 hours, and between 1991-2002, crimes against volunteers increased 125 percent.

However, despite the risk, Miami students continue to apply.

Jennifer McLaughlin, from the Office of Career Services at Miami, said there is no definitive reason for the large number of Miami volunteers and that each student has his or her own reasons. Ways agreed, but pointed out the history Miami students engaging with their communities.

"The rising rate of Peace Corps volunteers from Miami could be a direct or indirect result of the myriad opportunities Miami students have to engage with surrounding communities," Ways said. Miami students in the past have also shown interest in AmeriCorps as well, McLaughlin said. AmeriCorps is a local-level volunteer group that is often paired with nonprofit organizations.



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