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ABSTRACT

This guide offers suggestions to Peace Corps returnees for getting college credit for Peace Corps service in the context of how prior learning (experiential learning) relates to mainstream academics. It offers a set of writing exercises to help the ex-volunteer evaluate his/her Peace Corps service. It gives suggestions for putting together a portfolio to document what the volunteer has learned. In addition, the guide discusses acquiring credit towards an academic degree and how much credit the Peace Corps experience might be worth. Appendices contain sample pages from a portfolio which was used in applying for credits in sociology and additional information on assessment of college-level knowledge acquired through Peace Corps work by means of the College Level Examination Program. Contains a 17-item bibliography. (GLR)

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EARNING COLLEGE CREDIT

FOR YOUR PEACE CORPS SERVICE

Peace Corps
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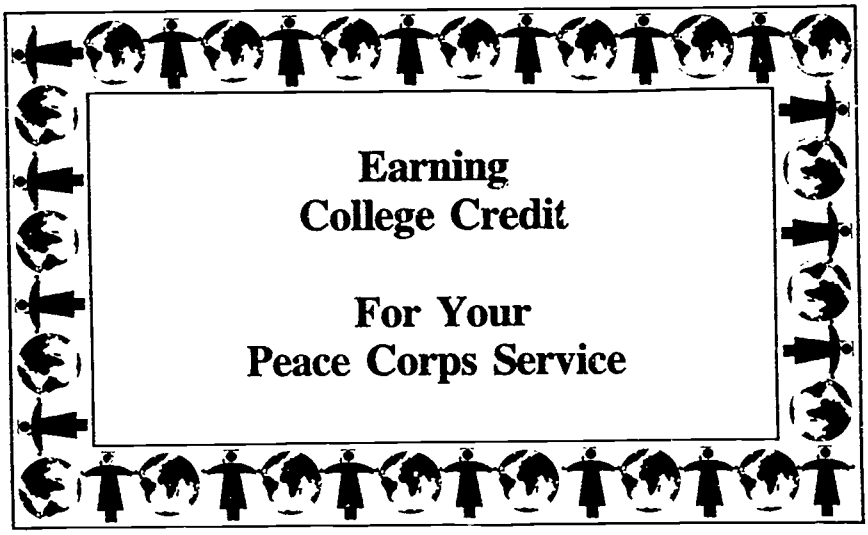

Earning College Credit

For Your Peace Corps Service

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Peace Corps of the United States
1990 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20526

August 1992

INFORMATION COLLECTION & EXCHANGE

Peace Corps' Information Collection & Exchange (ICE) was established so that the strategies and technologies developed by Peace Corps Volunteers, their co-workers, and their counterparts could be made available to the wide range of development organizations and individual workers who might find them useful. Training guides, curricula, lesson plans, project reports, manuals and other Peace Corps generated materials developed in the field are collected and reviewed. Some are reprinted "as is"; others provide a source of field based information for the production of manuals or for research in particular program areas. Materials that you submit to ICE thus become part of the Peace Corps' larger contribution to development.

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Prepared for the Peace Corps under Contract # PC-8 91-5432, 1991.

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Dear Volunteer:

You may be wondering why Peace Corps would put together a guide like this. The answer is simple: *Because it is needed.* The need is both personal and professional. The first need is personal. Peace Corps service is a guaranteed learning environment. This guide will help you begin to make sense of what you are learning about yourself, others, the language and the culture of your host country, and the field in which you work.

The second need is professional. When you complete your service, you *will* be able to use what you learned overseas. Many universities have programs whereby academic credit can be earned for learning through experience. In these programs, Peace Corps service is full of possibilities for credit.

The authors of this guide have extensive Peace Corps experience. Terry Anderson was a Volunteer in Liberia from 1979 to 1981. He also worked as a recruiter in Minneapolis and Chicago, and in Washington, D.C., as the Special Assistant to the Director of Recruitment. Gloria Ross served as a Volunteer in Tonga from 1979 to 1982, as a recruiter in Detroit, and as the Associate Editor of the *Peace Corps Times*. Both Terry and Gloria are still very active in Returned Volunteer endeavors.

You may find the exercises and information in this guide more useful once you have been a Volunteer for several months. Keep it with you and refer to it later on, and take it back to the United States with you.

Thank you for your service as a Peace Corps Volunteer and best wishes for success at your assignment.

Elaine Chao,
Peace Corps Director

INTRODUCTION

You've heard them before: the statistics concerning many famous and successful people who served as Peace Corps Volunteers—about the authors and politicians who were in the Peace Corps. Former Senator Paul Tsongas was a Peace Corps Volunteer. So was Paul Theroux, the author, and Julia Chang Bloch, U.S. Ambassador to Nepal. About a third of the employees at USAID were PCVs. In Washington, D.C., several hundred staff members on Capitol Hill served as Peace Corps Volunteers. But the more important question concerns you: "Are *you* really going to have more options because you joined the Peace Corps?" You may not yet have big plans of being a famous author, or an ambassador, but there is at least one perk from Peace Corps service in that it probably *will* give you a leg-up if you go back to college.

"Experience, travel—
These are an education in themselves."

Euripides

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you learn much through living and working overseas. You acquire new technical skills and learn a new language. You adapt to new cultural, social, and economic beliefs and values. You learn how to live and work in a foreign and, often, from a United States perspective, a very unusual environment. These learning experiences are valuable and they are worth college credit.

Meet Some RPCVs

Gloria Ross held several writing positions in advertising and public relations while raising a family in Ithaca, New York. She earned her associate's degree by taking night classes at a community college. Gloria joined the Peace Corps in 1979 and served in Tonga for three years as a cooperative advisor and an English teacher.

When Gloria returned to the United States in 1982, she wrote about her Peace Corps experience in feature stories that were published in her local newspaper, giving her further experience and exposure as a writer. In 1986, Gloria accepted a position as assistant editor for the *Peace Corps Times*. She also decided it was time to pursue a bachelor's degree. Trinity College in Washington, D.C. gave Gloria the opportunity to earn 33 credits in the Trinity Experiential Lifelong Learning Program. Twenty-four of those credits were based directly on her Peace Corps experience. She earned the remaining credits for her life-long experience in advertising and writing.

Ray Heberer had worked for three years toward his bachelor's degree when he joined the Peace Corps in 1979. He served in Ghana, working in agriculture extension and rural development. In 1984 he returned to California State University in Chico to finish his degree. He successfully petitioned the university to assess his Peace Corps service in lieu of a three-credit Introduction to African Studies course.

Martha Peterson held a bachelor's degree in biology and had worked as a medical technologist, a social worker, and an adult literacy trainer in California before she went to Sierra Leone as a Peace Corps Volunteer. During her service from 1982 to 1984, she made extensive notes about her experience, took dozens of photographs, collected memorabilia, and made tape recordings of music and conversations with her friends. She also had asked her family in the United States to save the letters she wrote to them.

When Martha returned to California, she thought of writing a book about her experiences. She spoke with a professor at Sonoma State University who encouraged her to enroll in a master's program. Martha wrote the book and was awarded nine independent study credits toward her master's degree. The book incorporated excerpts from her letters, photographs she had taken, and other items that depicted her two years in West Africa.

About This Booklet

In this booklet, we examine how to get college credit for Peace Corps service. We review how prior learning (often called experiential learning) relates to mainstream academics, we offer a set of writing exercises to help you evaluate your Peace Corps service, and describe one way of putting together a portfolio to document what you have learned.

You will find useful information in this booklet regardless of your goal—if you attend graduate school, if you start or finish an undergraduate degree, or if you earn continuing education credits toward a license or a certificate. If you do not have a college degree and you want one, you should be able to earn a significant number of credits for your Peace Corps experience. Even if you already have a bachelor's degree, you can earn credits toward a master's degree if you are willing to invest time and energy in analyzing your experience and putting together evidence that documents your Volunteer service.

A Word About Words

Experiential learning combines education, work, and personal development. In this booklet, we use the terms *experiential learning* and *prior learning* interchangeably. In simple words, these terms refer to knowledge you've absorbed in your day to day living. To a college professor, *prior learning assessment* is the process of reviewing a student's experiences and considering whether the experience is worth college credit.

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

Experiential learning is rooted in the philosophies of three 20th Century educational and psychological researchers: John Dewey, who studied how learning occurs in both "traditional" education and through experiences; Kurt Lewin, who conducted research on group dynamics; and Jean Piaget, who studied the learning behaviors of children and found that intelligence is based largely on experience.

As students, we all have had some exposure to experiential learning. Internships, cooperative education, work-study jobs, apprenticeships, role playing, and game simulations are all examples of how experiences are integrated with traditional classroom learning. If you think about it, the field of training and development is largely based on experiential learning. Your Peace Corps training probably used simulations and practical experiences more than it used traditional lectures.

Giving credit for life experiences outside the classroom, however, is a relatively new development in American education. About 20 years ago, a few colleges, particularly community colleges, saw a large number of adults either starting to work toward a degree or returning to college after being away for several years. Many of these students were bringing with them life and work achievements that were equivalent to college-level learning. Giving credit for life experience got its strongest impetus in 1973 when the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) was established in cooperation with the Educational Testing Service. CAEL and other organizations, such as the American Council on Education and the National Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction (PONSI), help universities find practical ways to assess how much adult students have learned outside the classroom. Colleges and universities increasingly recognize the value of learning that takes place outside the classroom. Today, nearly 1,000 institutions offer credit for prior learning.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A FREE LUNCH

There's a big difference between just *having* an experience and *learning* from it. In order to earn credit from a university, you must show or prove that what you learned is at a level of sophistication comparable to, or greater than, what you would have learned in class.

Earning credit for prior learning may save you time in the classroom and money spent for course fees. But don't be fooled. Depending on your faculty advisor and the university you attend, describing what you learned outside a classroom can be a *lot* of work. If you ever took an independent study course, you were probably tested at the end of the term on what you learned, either by taking an oral exam or by writing an extensive paper. The same may be true to get credit for your Peace Corps service. You may have to analyze your Peace Corps experiences, as a scholar would, through research and writing. Most students are asked to compile a portfolio of writings that documents their Peace Corps service. Portfolios can range in size from just a few pages to nearly 100 pages.

"The kinds of talents, energy, and enthusiasm that adults bring to the classroom are a product of their varied life experiences, many of which are credit-worthy."

Loretta Shpunt, Ph.D.
Trinity College
Washington, D.C.

WHAT'S A PORTFOLIO?

In prior learning assessment, a portfolio is a collection of your writings and other proof that you have gained college-level knowledge from your experiences. Your portfolio could be presented in a three-ring binder or a booklet, possibly backed-up with slides, tapes, artifacts or artwork from your country of service. Although some universities permit students to present portfolios of their own design, many require a specific format. Regardless of the format you use, the more creative, thoughtful, and scholarly it is, the more likely that your portfolio will earn credit.

Documenting your Peace Corps experience will not be difficult if you save materials from your training and service. You will also want to keep notes about feelings and reactions you have to people and events during your service. If you are just beginning your service, *now* is the time to start keeping a journal and to collect items and memorabilia that will help you claim credit for your experience. Depending on the types of courses you wish to claim credit for, and the level of sophistication you will want to show in your portfolio, these are some of the things you'll need to save. They will help you remember credit-worthy parts of your Peace Corps experience:

- Accounts of everyday life and responsibilities
- Books published by in-country authors
- Description of Service documents
- Foreign language test scores (such as FSI/ACTFL scores)
- Grant proposals (even if you didn't get the grant)
- Guides from Returned Volunteer Services
- In-country newspapers

- Journals and diaries
- Lesson plans
- Letters from people at home
- Notes about other Trainees; their backgrounds, experiences, education, personalities, etc.
- Photographs of *everything* around you, including developing or completed projects
- Project plans and reports
- Quarterly reports
- Reference letters from Volunteers, staff, and co-workers
- Schedules and agendas
- Slides that depict your experience
- Small Project Assistance (SPA) documents
- Swearing-in memorabilia: photos, programs, etc.
- Tape recordings of conversations, local music, etc.
- Technical training guides and manuals
- Textbooks
- Training completion certificates

You might also want to include notes, diagrams, drafts, and writings about your assignment or a project you worked on. Prints, collages and handicrafts are also useful.

You will also need letters of reference, performance appraisals, and materials written by other people on your behalf. It is *very* important to get reference letters from Peace Corps staff and other Volunteers while you are still overseas. Your relationship and performance will be fresh in their minds, and it can be very difficult to get in touch with those people once you return to the United States.

Where To Find More Help

Suppose you've already COSed as you read this, you did not save books and papers, and you did not keep a journal. You will have plenty of work to do to recover some of the items you might need, but don't despair. You may be able to find copies of training manuals and related documents that you used during your training and service. You might find help from staff in the library or resource center in your country of service. Or, ask for help from the library or the office of Information Collection and Exchange (ICE) at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C. Make a list of things you already have, and another list of the things you need. Review any possible resources (people who know you, places to get things you need) and then request what you need.

Putting Your Portfolio Together

Most portfolios include several sections: A title page, table of contents, a resumé, documents that verify your experience, and two essays, one that introduces you and another that explains what you learned.

Your portfolio will need a title. Relate it to the subject for which you are seeking credit. For example,

Teaching and Cross-Cultural Learning

Deforestation: A First-Hand Experience

Community Organizing: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

An Overview of Small Business Development in Cameroon

Write an essay or narrative to explain who you are and why you are applying for credit. You might want to write a brief autobiography or a simple chronology of your Peace Corps experience. Make sure you draw a relationship between your experiences, your knowledge, and your educational goals.

When you explain what you learned, you must be thoughtful and thorough. For example, let's say as a Volunteer you worked as a public health educator. You are applying for credit toward a master's in public health, and you are asked to explain your duties. You might first review the goals and history of the project and then describe the technical training you received and your duties as written in your Volunteer assignment description. Explain what you did on a day-to-day basis, and then draw a comparison between the assignment description and the reality of your job.

You could describe typical living conditions in your community by discussing cultural approaches to health and sanitation practices in your community, the availability of potable water and sewage systems that may have promoted or hindered good sanitation. You might discuss some of the communicable diseases that existed in your host country and provide statistical evidence of morbidity and child mortality rates. You might then go on to describe your role as a public health educator by explaining the successes and perhaps the frustrations you experienced. Tell of real

"You cannot create experience. You must undergo it."

Albert Camus

conversations with health officials and townspeople. Review how cultural practices could have been directly attributable to certain health conditions, and how your work affected general living conditions in your community.

One of the most important sections of your portfolio is verification of your experience. You will need to include documentation such as copies of your Description of Service, certificates you received when you completed training, language test scores, awards, letters from co-workers, Peace Corps staff, and co-Volunteers, and other material that provides concrete evidence of events or experiences from your service. For sample pages from a typical portfolio, see appendix A.

LEARNING IN THE PEACE CORPS

Peace Corps Trainings and Experience

You may be able to earn college credit for your Peace Corps technical training. The Regents of the University of the State of New York sponsor a program called PONSI (the National Program On Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction). PONSI reviews training programs sponsored by government and industry and determines how much college credit they are worth. PONSI's findings are published in a book titled *College Credit Recommendations*. [Note: the American Council on Education (ACE) also sponsors a PONSI program. Only the New York State PONSI has reviewed the Peace Corps training programs listed below.]

When this booklet went to press PONSI had reviewed six Peace Corps training programs, and recommended that universities award credit to RPCVs if they had participated in one of the Peace Corps training programs listed below:

Agriculture - Crops and Agroforestry Track
Agriculture - Small Animal Husbandry Track
General Agriculture
Aquaculture Training
Forestry Training
Public Health Training

Note that PONSI only makes recommendations. Some universities may grant the full credit suggested by PONSI, some may not grant credit but instead waive a prerequisite or required course, and still others may simply reject the PONSI recommendation altogether. In order to find out if your particular training program has been recommended for college credit, consult the most recent edition of *College Credit Recommendations* (see the bibliography), and for additional information, contact the office of Returned Volunteer Services.

Identifying What You Learned

Most of the decisions we make in life are directly related to experiences we have had in the past. Many of the skills and beliefs we develop in the Peace Corps are actually based on talents we had or opinions we held before going overseas. The example below illustrates how one RPCV's professional work was built upon the interests and talents he developed early in life:

> I was always interested in different cultures. I used to read a lot, and I've always worked. I delivered newspapers, worked in a shoe store, a gas station, and a restaurant. I also worked my way through college as a carpenter, a painter, and a waiter. I guess I just developed a good business sense early on. In college, I majored in marketing, took three years of French, and was involved with the international students organization. When I graduated, I joined the Peace Corps—something I always wanted to do. I worked in Africa as a small business advisor. When I came back to the States, I worked a few years in a government office, but I just didn't like working for someone else. Still, I saved enough money to travel during my vacations. Eventually, I decided to go into business for myself. I opened a small store in an ethnic neighborhood and sold Kenya bags and cloth and clothes from Guatemala. That was five years ago. Now I have two stores, and I travel three times a year to import goods for my stores. I have the best job I could imagine!

Many universities offer courses that are designed to take students through a very methodical process of thinking about what they've learned. Mandel and Michelson, in their book *Portfolio Development & Adult Learning: Purposes & Strategies*, describe eight different approaches to assessing one's prior learning. There also are other books you may want to read that will help you identify your college-level competencies. Some of them are listed in the bibliography.

PRACTICING FOR THE REAL THING

Examining your experiences and developing a portfolio are processes of reflection and self-assessment. Learning through experience gives us knowledge that tends to be specific and deep in practical areas, and thin in theoretical areas. Academic study, however, often deals with both theory and practice. In assessing your prior learning, you want to link your experiences with academic theory.

Many universities are willing to give you credit for your Peace Corps experience, but you must be able to *describe* your experience, often in significant detail. This will mean writing about how you and the work you do as a Volunteer are connected to larger issues of development, cross-cultural understanding and social change. For example, if you were a community organizer in the Peace Corps, no doubt you could explain what you do on a day to day basis. You will also need to discuss the theoretical, historical, socio-economic and cultural dimensions of community organizing.

Suppose you were a teacher in the Peace Corps and you were asked to compare the differences between the American and your host country educational systems. You might describe your daily teaching routine and explain how you created lessons that were appropriate to the local culture. You could tell about how you got reticent students to speak out in class. You might describe under what circumstances corporal punishment may have been used and how it conflicted with your own cultural beliefs.

In the four exercises on the next few pages, you'll think about your Peace Corps life experiences and identify the things you learned for which you might earn college credit. These exercises are only an *introduction* to this subject—they are for practice only. Keep them for updating and reference when you write a more thorough analysis and evaluation of your experience.

Exercise One

By identifying what you did and when you did it, you may notice how some events in your life influenced you to do other things. With this in mind, make a list of all the key events in your life in chronological order up until the time you joined Peace Corps. In addition to listing jobs and education, include significant events such as getting married, buying a home, doing volunteer work, traveling, etc. When you create your list, notice which parts of certain experiences you were good at, and why you were good at them.

Review the sample chart on the next few pages to help you create your own list of key events.

"A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions."

Oliver Wendell Holmes

Date	Personal	Professional/ Vocational	Education	Volunteer/ Community
6/56	Born in Michigan			
9/65	Moved to Milwaukee		Went to my first "big" school.	Very involved in boy scouts.
9/69	Read a book about Peace Corps.	Wrote articles for Jr. High newspaper.		Active in plays and stage events.
6/72	Dad died.	First job—washed dishes in hospital kitchen.		Marched in hunger hikes and protests.
8/74	Moved away from home.	Worked as a janitor on a work-study job.	Started college.	
9/75	Shared a house off-campus with 3 others.	Worked at Sears & university bookstore to make money.	Nearly failed Organic Chemistry.	Worked on 2 Univ. committees—Budget & Activities.
9/76	Moved to Denmark to begin Jr. yr. abroad.	Found Danish difficult to learn. Not fluent, but I got by.	Took classes at University of Copenhagen.	

Date	Personal	Professional/ Vocational	Education	Volunteer/Community
11/76			Used railpass to travel on weekends to Paris, Amsterdam & Munich.	Voted absentee ballot for Jimmy Carter
12/76	Decided there were better things to do in Europe than go to school. Quit.		Bummed around Europe. Developed a serious interest in art.	
2/77			Saw Middle East conflict first-hand.	Worked on a kibbutz in Israel for 3 months.
6/77	Returned to Wisconsin	Returned to job at Sears.		
12/77	Developed serious interests in foreign languages, history & political science.	Worked on campus in Biology department	Grades picked up considerably.	Active in French club & international festival days.
1/78		Held 2 jobs: at Univ. bookstore & bartender at "Camaraderie."		Elected as Student Senator

Date	Personal	Professional/ Vocational	Education	Volunteer/ Community
9/78	Saw a commercial on TV for Peace Corps—rekindled thoughts of travel and adventure.		Senior year began. Lots of research and writing.	Senate took up all free time. Got involved in community politics.
2/79	Applied for Peace Corps service			
5/79	Got medical rejection from Peace Corps.	Took work part time as a landscaper	Graduated from college.	Worked as an English language tutor for southeast Asian refugees.
6/79	Appealed the Peace Corps rejection.	Worked at the State Office of Education.		
8/79	Summer got boring. Started thinking of other options besides Peace Corps.			

Exercise Two

Create a similar chart of key events specific to your Peace Corps service. Identify dates, places, people you met, and significant memories. Include events that may seem common or everyday. Try to be as thorough as possible. Focus on feelings, ideas, thoughts, and reactions you've had to people and events. These memories will help you in later exercises when you need to identify some of the specific things you learned.

Use the sample chart on the next few pages as a guide. You may wish to create other headings for your own chart that are more appropriate for your circumstances. If you have access to a photocopier, you may wish to enlarge and use the blank forms on pages 22 and 23.

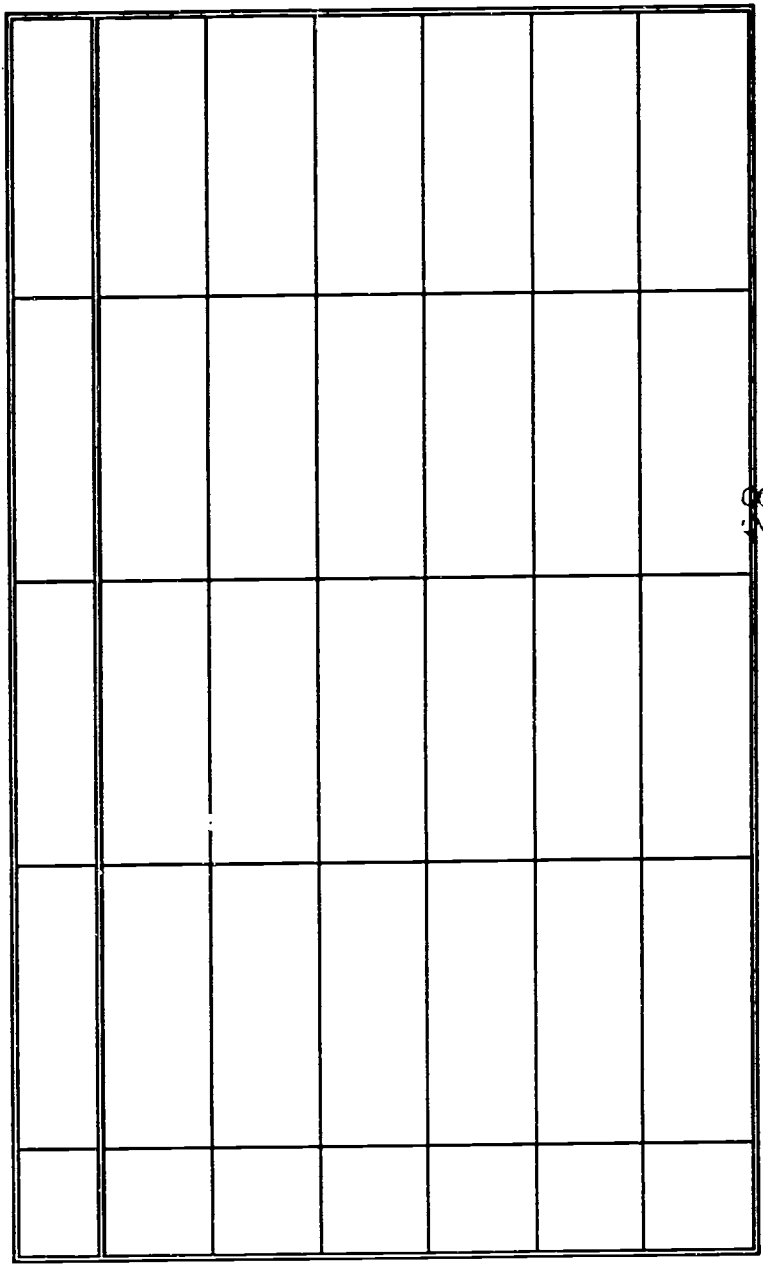
"It is my belief that learning through experience is to the nth degree more valuable, effective, and generally practical than traditional learning—I should say institutional learning, of books and classrooms. Experiential learning credit is a way for me to validate officially my Peace Corps experience and its role in my choice of graduate studies (public health) and career."

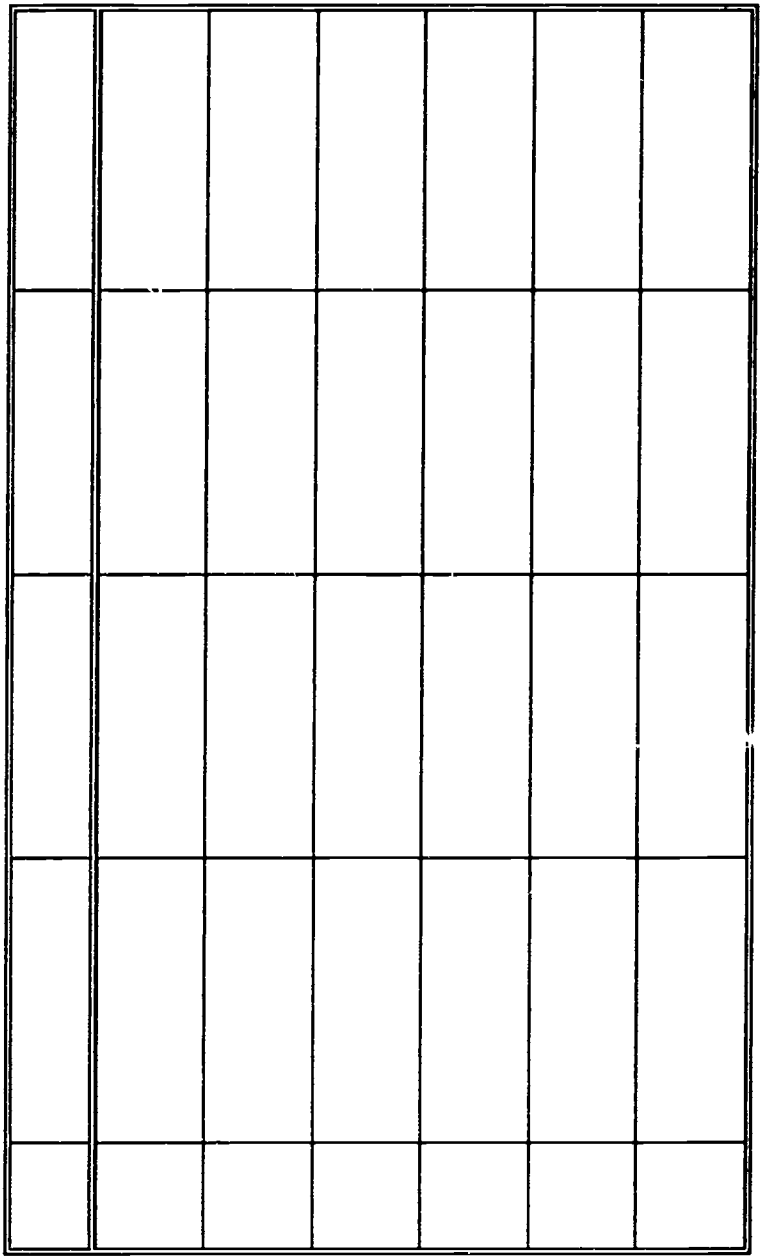
Pamela Neuharth, RPCV Honduras

Date	Activity	What I Did	What I Learned	Feelings & Reactions
7/87	Received my provisional invitation.	Accepted it.		
11/87	Attended a Pre-Invitation Staging in St. Louis.		That there were lots of other people with similar beliefs and ideas as mine.	Excited to be a part of PC. And proud of myself.
1/88	Arrived in South Carolina for 6 weeks of SST.	Took classes in Liberian history & customs. Attended seminars about teaching in Liberia. Learned to make lesson plans. Taught a 10th grade biology class for 2 weeks.	That Liberians like Americans & that it was probably poorer than I had thought. That I was probably a good teacher. I may have a degree in Biology, but I don't know the material in the curriculum.	Felt comfortable in front of a classroom of kids, but knew I had a lot of work ahead of me to be prepared every day.
2/88	Arrived in Liberia for 6 more weeks of ICT. Awake half the night staring overhead at a spider as big as my hand.		How to use a toilet without sitting down. How to take a bath with a bucket of water.	It's so hot. I can't live here—it's so dirty.

Date	Activity	What I Did	What I Learned	Feelings & Reactions
3/88	Went to my village for the first time.	School principal took me around town & introduced me to just about everyone in town.	Where the market, clinic, shops & school were. That school would begin in 2 weeks.	How am I possibly going to remember everyone's name? They already know my name. I feel alone.
4/88	I have 5 classes & more than 180 students.		That the lessons I had planned were too difficult for the students.	Absolutely overwhelmed. Can't stand this mud house. The kids in the area just stare at me all the time.
5/88	Five students asked if they could work for me at home.	Hired 2 of them, one as a cook, the other as "houseboy."	Hate having someone work "for" me, but they need the money.	Is this neocolonialism? No matter how much I try to fit in, I still have money.
6/88	I got sick. Must have been malaria.	In bed for 2 days.	I can still bounce back, but Musa, my neighbor, also sick, looked weak & pale. He had no money for the clinic.	God! I'm gonna die. I'm so homesick for a comfortable bed and nice clean sheets.
9/88	My house was broken into. Bicycle & money were missing.	Put a new lock on the door. Told the town chief.	I have good intentions, but I'm gullible & vulnerable.	Betrayed. Rich. Why did I need a bicycle, anyway? How dare someone?

Date	Activity	What I Did	What I Learned	Feelings/Reactions
10/88	Kolleh invited me to his farm for the weekend.	Helped him cut brush for planting. Had fun.	There's a lot of work to it. How to use a cutlass properly (sort of). How to find a good palm wine tree.	If this is what he has to do to grow rice, how does he ever feed those 5 kids?
10/88	Kutu yelled at me for carrying a bundle on my head.		Seems it's just not "appropriate" for me to do certain things. She told me that white people shouldn't do that.	She seems embarrassed. I'm confused. Did I offend her?
11/88	All Volunteer Conference.	Served as one of 3 planners. Responsible for coordinating 7 sessions.	How to plan a big conference for 100 people.	Learned about my feelings as a Volunteer. My living allowance may seem a pittance, but I really have plenty compared to most of the HCNs.
12/88	School getting ready to break for "summer."	Wrote exams for all classes.	Tests were all way too hard. 75% of my kids flunked finals. Have to grade on a steep curve.	There must be a communication problem. I know most of them know the material.





Exercise Three

When you explain what you learned as a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will need to provide as much information as you can. You will find below a list of topics that will help you to assess your experience overseas. Try to complete two or three of these tasks, which require both description and analysis. Write as much as you can on each subject.

1. Write a thorough overview of your host country.

   Explain the last 40 years of its history.
   Describe its current system of government.
   Describe its economy.
   Discuss your host country's political and trade relationships with neighboring countries, with the United States, with the European Community.
   Describe religious tenets observed in your community as they relate to every day life.

2. Describe how you developed friendships with people in your host country.

   What are the beneficial impacts you made on their lives?
   What are the beneficial impacts they made on your life?
   Describe some of the activities you participated in with your friends.

3. Describe the relationship your assignment has to your host country's development.

   Explain why your host country needs Peace Corps assistance.

Describe what you do at work on a day-to-day basis.
List some of the successes and failures your host country has had in its development.
Propose a theoretical plan for your host country's development related to the kind of work you do.

4. Develop a plan of action to train either your counterpart or another host country national who does similar work.

   Create a series of lesson plans for teaching what you know.
   Develop a set of questions to test your counterpart's knowledge of the subject.
   Discuss some of the cultural barriers that may affect your teaching.

5. Assess your host country's development.

   Analyze current world economic and political issues that affect your host country.
   Differentiate between "western" development and that which is appropriate for your host country.
   Make a set of recommendations for your host country's development based on your experiences.

This exercise is useful because it gives you some straightforward questions to answer about your host country. It lets you write about your host country and the people around you objectively, without having to include yourself in the scene.

Exercise Four

Most pre-service training in Peace Corps has four components: technical, cross-cultural, language, and personal health and safety training. The four are very closely intertwined, but if you examine your Peace Corps service carefully, you might be able to separate "work" experiences from "cultural" experiences. "Work" is the

technical part of your assignment such as digging wells, teaching school, working in a clinic, or advising farmers. "Cultural" experiences include making friends, understanding different values, customs and religion, and using another language.

To complete this exercise, review your chart from Exercise Two and choose an important experience. Describe it in as much detail as you can, and write about what you learned. You will find this easier to do if, instead of writing about a one-time event, you write about something that happens over a long period of time (such as learning a new language, or learning how to do your assignment, or gaining an understanding of certain cultural beliefs).

As you write about your experience, focus on your own personal behavior, judgement, feelings, and reactions. Note when and how your skills, beliefs, or attitudes changed. Be conscious of the voice you use. Instead of saying "I was taught," or "I was shown," try the active voice and say "I learned" or "I saw." Describing your experiences and what you learned is not easy. Try writing a pretend letter to your best friend. You may want to ask yourself some of the questions listed below to help you identify when and how changes occurred in your skills, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes.

1. What parts of my assignment do I do especially well?

2. What are the most enjoyable parts of my service?

3. What are the most frustrating parts of my service?

4. What do I know now that I didn't know before?

5. What can I do now that I couldn't do before?

6. How have my beliefs or ideas changed?

7. What would I have to know in order to train someone to do my work?

8. How well do I speak my country's language?

9. Have I given public presentations? Where and when? To whom?

10. Am I a leader in my host community?
Among other Volunteers?
What makes me a leader?

11. Have I picked up any hobbies or other interests during service (photography, writing, etc.)?
What's my level of expertise?

12. Have I written training or technical articles for other people doing similar assignments?

13. What kinds of training programs have I completed?

14. Am I certified in anything?

15. What have I accomplished?

16. What mistakes have I made?

17. What, specifically, have I learned about myself?

18. What changes have occurred in my attitudes or in my understanding of people?

19. When did I realize things weren't so "different" any more?

If you have trouble choosing a specific event from your own experiences, you may wish to try the exercises listed below:

a. In a few pages, write a guide for your Peace Corps replacement. Include information about your neighbors, the market, new customs, local transportation, holidays, etc.

b. Make extensive notes about a recent extended conversation you had with your counterpart, a co-worker, a neighbor, or someone in your host family.

c. Review one of the training sessions you participated in during Pre-Service Training. Rewrite one of the lessons incorporating what your experiences have taught you. Include a description of your own successes and failures.

DEGREES AND CREDIT

If you enroll in an undergraduate degree program after your Peace Corps service, you might use your Volunteer experience to earn credits in foreign languages, sociology, education, economics, anthropology, and African, Asian, European, Latin American, or Pacific Islands studies. Depending on what you did as a Volunteer, perhaps your experiences will qualify for credit in some of the sciences or professional studies as well.

Receiving *graduate* credit for prior learning, however, is a relatively new movement in the United States. Some universities offer no credit at all, others are fairly liberal in their awards, and still others may award credit only after you've been enrolled in a graduate program for a set period of time. It's best to review your options with the faculty in the department where you intend to study and with the staff in the prior learning assessment office.

Credit toward a graduate degree must usually relate in a specific way to the specialization of the degree. For example, if you're a forestry Volunteer and you want a master's degree in international forestry, you should be able to earn graduate credit *if* you can substantiate what you learned overseas. The same is true if you're a Volunteer math and science teacher who enrolls in a master's program in education. You should be able to earn credit because you have practical, hands-on experience as a teacher. Similarly, if you're in any kind of graduate program with a cross-cultural or international focus, you should earn credit for what you have learned through living and working in a cross-cultural setting.

Note, however, that if you pursue a graduate degree in something *unrelated* to your Volunteer assignment, you will probably not earn credit because your Peace Corps service does not specifically correlate with graduate study. The small business advisor who decides to pursue a master's in public health, for example, will probably not get credit unless the graduate program stresses *international* health.

Getting Credit—Some Basic Questions

It takes commitment and determination to study, either as an undergraduate or a graduate. If you are considering graduate study, we encourage you to read the information contained in the *Graduate School Guide* published by the Office of Returned Volunteer Services. This guide contains a succinct discussion of several important issues to consider before starting work on your degree: motivation, cost, choosing a university, admission procedures, and others. To obtain the *Guide*, write to Returned Volunteer Services, Peace Corps, 1990 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20526.

Once you've returned to the U.S. and you are interested in earning credit for your Peace Corps service, you need to explore a number of preliminary issues. Find out where the university prior learning policies are coordinated. These procedures may take place in a separate office, in the continuing education or academic affairs office, or individual academic departments may set their own policies. Because each university has its own policies for granting credit for prior learning, it's necessary to find the answers to some of these questions:

1. Can you earn credit for experiential learning?
   Is it through an assessment of a portfolio you create or some other form of assessment, like examinations or independent study?

2. How many credits can you earn for prior learning?
   Is there a limit to the number of credits you can earn?

3. Are there specific departments or areas to which the credits can apply, or can you get credits from any department?

4. How much do the credits cost?

5. If you develop a portfolio, when should you begin?
   During the first semester?

After you've met certain requirements?

6. What assistance does the university offer?
   Printed material?
   Guidebooks?
   Mentors?

7. Do you have to take a course in prior learning assessment or portfolio development?

8. If you develop a portfolio, do you have to follow a particular format?
   How much creativity are you allowed?

9. Who will assess your portfolio?
   Faculty members?
   Outside experts?

10. Can you appeal a credit recommendation decision? How?

Once you have answers to your questions, you should weigh your decision carefully. Which method is going to be the most rewarding and least expensive for you—taking classes or writing an independent portfolio?

How Much Credit is Your Experience Worth?

Many universities set limits on the number of credits they will award and the time you will be allotted to complete the portfolio. Often, a faculty advisor will suggest how much credit your experience is worth.

Traditionally, a student must spend 15 hours in class and 30 hours in preparation or study in order to receive one credit. For example, suppose your Pre-Service Training in fisheries required 45 hours of formal seminars on selected topics, and you needed to spend an

additional 90 hours on your own learning about site selection, pond construction, and pond management. You should be able to claim three credits for your training program. Remember one of the key concepts about experiential learning, though: time spent learning doesn't *prove* that you actually learned.

The most common way of requesting credit is to review a university catalog of courses and look for those that relate to your experiences and level of knowledge. Read *each* course description in the catalog and mark with a highlighter pen every course that resembles your experience in any topic. These are *all* potential college credits for you. You may not find an exact match, but sometimes a university will grant you credit for courses that are offered at other universities (the concept is similar to transfer credits) —ask your advisor.

Another method often used by students with skills and knowledge that don't readily fit into a neat description, is to group your skills into several different areas. Then request credit based on what you believe is your level of expertise.

One RPCV had many years of experience in design and layout for print advertising. As part of her portfolio, she presented photocopies of newspaper ads she had created. She was awarded three credits for her expertise even though the university's art department did not offer a course in advertising art.

Summary

In this booklet, we've provided you with an introduction to the subject of getting college credit for Peace Corps service. We have reviewed a lot of information on the subject, and have listed in the bibliography several sources that are appropriate for Volunteers.

Not all universities have established policies for granting credit for life experience, and in preparing this booklet, we found Volunteers who were pioneers—that is, they earned credit for parts of their Peace Corps service even though their university did not previously have credit-for-experience policies. If you pursue university study, be sure to ask about credit for Peace Corps service.

We reiterate our advice to save materials you receive in training and during your service (review the list on pages six and seven). Many of the books, training manuals, or handouts from your service and training may some day come in handy when you need to justify and prove your experience. Be a collector. You may not need them now, but one day they may help you earn college credits.

We hope this booklet is of value to you and wish you good luck in your studies.

APPENDIX A

[Note: the author of this portfolio applied for nine credits in Sociology. She was asked by the university to describe in great detail her experiences before and during Peace Corps (Parts I and II) and what it was like to return to the U.S. (Part V). She was also required to write extensively about Tongan culture (Part III) and explain her work as a Volunteer (Part IV).]

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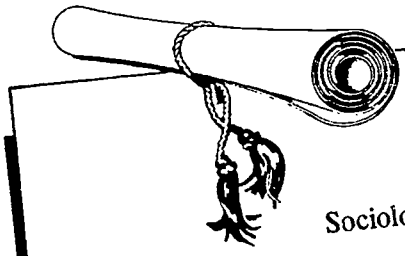

Sociology Portfolio

for evaluation by
David Vincent
Associate Professor of Sociology

Bea A. Volunteer
1824 Brookside Parkway
Escanaba, Georgia 24202

December, 1992

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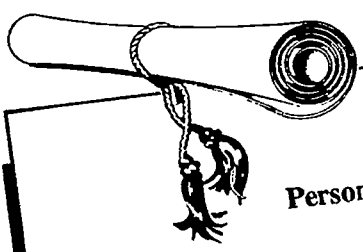


Personal and Professional Goals

(Part I)

Even having achieved a long career in writing, advertising and public affairs, I find that in order to reach my personal and professional goals, I must have a four year degree. When I was a Peace Corps Volunteer, I wrote for the local newspaper and radio station, and taught English in my country of assignment. Those were the most satisfying years of my life, and it is my primary goal to work overseas again. Lack of a degree is the only hindrance to reopening that international door.

All during my career I have been able to write easily and convincingly to touch the hearts and humor, needs and wants of others. The contributions I have already made through newspaper and newsletter articles are valuable, and have reached an appreciative audience, judging from the complimentary feedback I've received from many of my readers.

My ultimate goal is to teach again, perhaps through writing, and serve as a channel for opening two-way dialogues between Americans and peoples of developing countries.

[Note: In this particular section, the author wrote a 20-page (double-spaced) autobiography. She describes her early interests in writing, beginning with junior high school. She talks about her memories of World War II, diaries she kept,

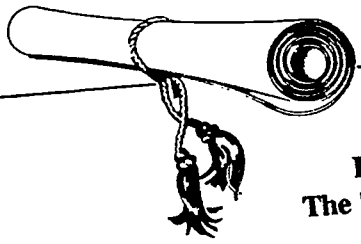
and how and where she fell in love, and married. She describes how she began writing advertising copy. She fully explains her interest in other cultures and how she eventually decided to apply for Peace Corps service. Twenty pages may seem like a lot of material, but the author had a story to tell, and she is a good writer. By writing about her own history she introduces us to the subject of the portfolio (the family structure in the South Pacific) in a very personal way.]

Work History
Honors

(Part II)

[Note: In this section, the author presents her background in a more standard format. She includes her curriculum vitae, which lists her work experience and all of the articles she has published.

The author also includes in this section photocopies of awards and certificates that support her experience. Included are copies of an award she received from her local Chamber of Commerce, a certificate of membership in a national honorary society, copies of two certificates of appreciation she received when she completed Peace Corps service, and her Associate of Science transcript.]



Families:
The Tongan Way

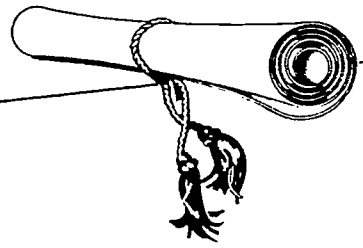
(Part III)

The Kingdom of Tonga is an archipelago of 160 islands scattered in the South Pacific, 500 miles south of Fiji and the Samoas. About 100,000 Polynesians live on 39 of these tiny, coconut palm bristled atolls. As in other countries, the population of this only remaining kingdom in the South Pacific has grown substantially in the last 50 years. But in Tonga's case, it has tripled since the 1930s.

Because of this tremendous increase in people-to-land ratio, the ancient custom of giving eight acres of land to each male on his 16th birthday has long been discontinued. There simply is no more land to give. But the Tongan people have wisdom, and in spite of cutting up their families' eight acres again and again to share with their young sons, they have kept most of their farmland or "plantations" intact and have limited their settlement areas to small towns and villages.

In spite of the overpopulation, and perhaps because of their wisdom in land conservation, Tongans are still able to feed themselves by farming and fishing, and they even earn money by exporting bananas, copra, and recently, highly prized and valuable vanilla beans.

By crowding themselves into smaller living areas, and indeed, into more people in each house, they have enhanced their already strong and healthy extended family system. But



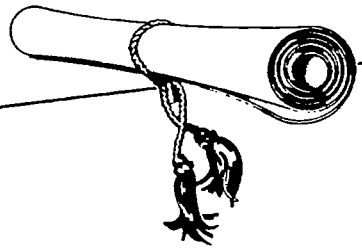
regardless of how little they have by American standards, they are a proud, easy going and happy people.

Of the many sounds emanating from an inhabited island—roosters crowing, dogs barking, pigs squealing, church drums clanging, women noisily pounding bark cloth, and radios blaring—Tongans' laughter was easily near the top of the decibel scale rating.

Each member of the family has his own role. Men fish or work the plantation. Women stay home with the children, sew, cook, spend hours doing the laundry by hand, and make handicrafts to sell to tourists.

Historians and archaeologists would have us believe that the Tongan culture is patriarchal. After having lived in Tonga as a Peace Corps Volunteer for three years, and having been fully immersed in the Tongan family system, I believe that statement is true only in that the real definers of the culture, the aged "aunties," allow it to be assumed.

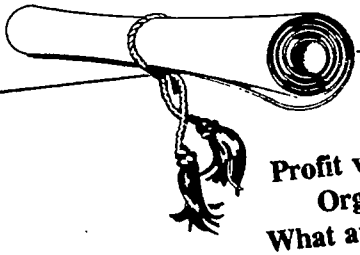
The first choice for that role of auntie/spokeswoman is the older sister of the mother of a given extended family. Lacking a woman of that status, the older sister of the father will automatically take the role. The position is a quiet, but determined, one. Men of the family can do just about anything they'd like to—to a well defined limit according to the auntie. In their personal, business, social or leadership relationships, they are free to be the rulers in the



hierarchy—so long as their actions meet the approval of the auntie. Men may make plans of great magnitude, for example, to host a huge feast, which is a very common social event in Tonga. They may arrange for the purchase or trade of food for one hundred guests. But if they invite some of the wrong guests or intend to have the feast at the wrong time (by auntie's standards), the whole affair can be suddenly cancelled by that same auntie—even after it is well underway. And, no questions are asked about her decision. Their feelings are expressed as, "Ko ia,"—that's the way it is. In French, we would say, "C'est la vie."

I lived with two extended families while I was in Tonga. The first was a five-week home-stay, one Volunteer to one family. That family consisted of two grandmothers (the mother's and father's mothers); the mother and her two young children; and the child of cousins who were away working in New Zealand.

[Note: The author continues for eight more pages. She talks about the extended family and how both children and older adults are cared for by other relatives. She discusses courtships, marriage and homosexuality. The author also describes celebrations of birthdays, weddings, funerals, and other family events. She also talks extensively about the role of religion in Tongan culture.]



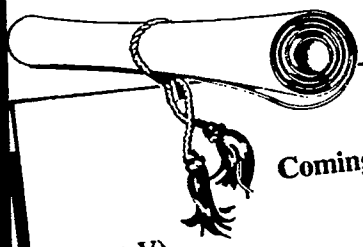
Profit vs. Non-Profit Organizations: What and Who Makes a Good Volunteer?

(Part IV)

Living on that remote island in the South Pacific for three years, we had plenty of time to discuss who we really were and why we were there. Twenty six of us trained together and became a family. We were of different age groups; I was the oldest and the others formed a typical bell curve right down to the six who were fresh from college. Our backgrounds were diversified—one held a Ph.D. in history; many were teachers of math and science; a few worked with retail co-operatives; two were electricians; one was an Alaskan fisherman, and there were two wives without assignments.

After a few months, and as our tasks led us in different directions or to different islands, we formed the logical small social groups. And those groups led to the most intimate discussions. Ours eventually decided we all had to be a little crazy to "give up" two years of our lives so we could be paid $130 a month and live in what amounted to squalor.

[Note: the author writes several more pages for Part IV. She discusses what serving as a "volunteer" means: ordering supplies and not getting them; trying to adjust to living in a culture where expectations and goals are interpreted differently. She describes what kept her going when her motivation and interest in her work waned. The author also talks about the structures of profit and non-profit organizations. She describes retail work in the U.S.: marketing, purchasing and accounting issues; employee benefits; and labor-management relations. She then describes a similar structure in non-profit organizations, emphasizing the role of volunteers and describing a different hierarchy between management and employees. Finally, the author draws her own conclusions as to what makes a successful organization, whether it is profit or non-profit.]



Coming Home: Re-Entry

(Part V)

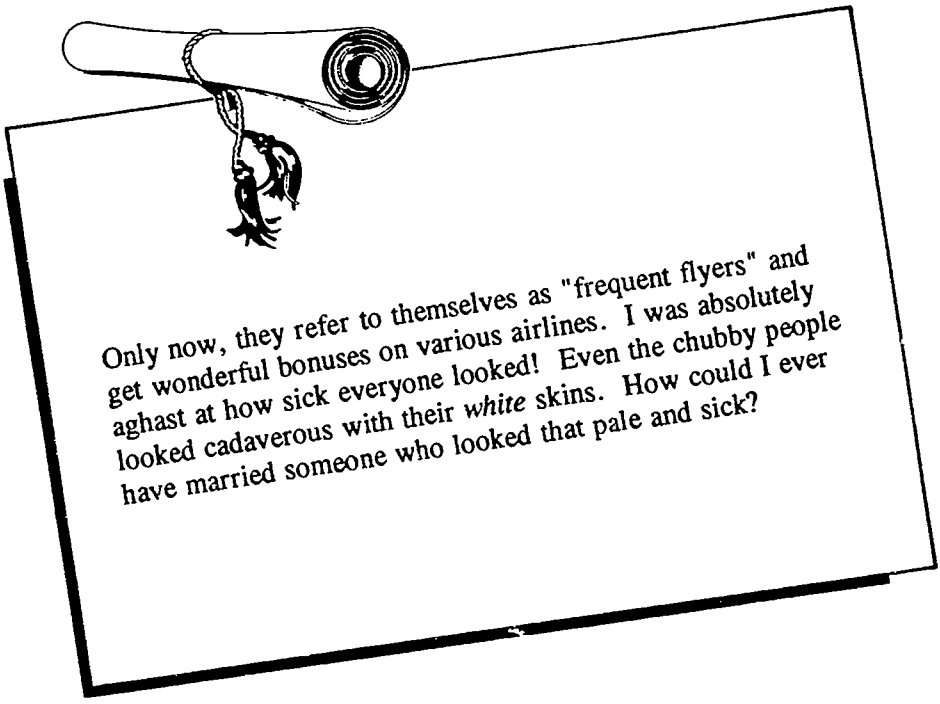
No problem. The United States is my home; I've lived there for more than 50 years. Why should I be concerned about going home again? I'd only been away for three, and I was still me, wasn't I?

There were farewell parties in Tonga and I said goodbye to friends I'd made and lived near. I put on my long, brightly flowered muu muu, and my new black coral necklace—a gift from Simaile whom I'd tutored in English for years—and was driven to the airport in the Peace Corps van, which was loaded with my collection of Tongan artifacts and books.

I didn't try to stop the tears as we flew over my smile-shaped island for the last time in the packed 737 plane, headed for Pago Pago.

A quick plane-change there to a much larger 747—the kind with a stairway going up to the cocktail lounge, they told me. Arriving at the Honolulu airport sometime after 2:00 a.m., there really wasn't much reason to get a motel room; my next flight was scheduled to depart at 9:00 a.m. So after the lengthy procedure of going through customs, I unrolled my sleeping mat in the lounge area of my departure gate, and stretched out, still in my muu muu. At the time, it seemed the only logical thing to do. Looking back, it was just crazy! Can you imagine doing that at JFK in New York?

Disembarking later in San Francisco, with five hours to kill before my next departure, I meandered among the flyers.



Only now, they refer to themselves as "frequent flyers" and get wonderful bonuses on various airlines. I was absolutely aghast at how sick everyone looked! Even the chubby people looked cadaverous with their *white* skins. How could I ever have married someone who looked that pale and sick?

[Note: The author takes several more pages to discuss the surprises that await her: the abundance she finds in stores; moving back into her house with working lights and heat; and the joy of seeing her grandchildren again.]

Documentation

(Part VI)

[Note: The author includes copies of the following items which attest to her experience:]

- A letter of reference from a Tongan friend who describes what she did as a Volunteer.
- Two letters of reference from people she worked with before she joined Peace Corps.
- A copy of her Description of Service.
- Letters of reference from co-Volunteers.
- A letter of reference from her Country Director.
- Copies of articles the author wrote for publication.

APPENDIX B

Another Way To Earn College Credit

In this booklet we concentrate on how you can get college credit for what you learn during your Peace Corps service, but there are other ways to earn college credit.

Taking an examination to assess your college-level knowledge for what you learned in the Peace Corps is a relatively fast and inexpensive way for an undergraduate to accumulate college credits. There are nearly a dozen different testing programs. The most widely recognized are the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), the Proficiency Examination Program (PEP), and the Advanced Placement Program (AP). Others, less widely recognized by colleges, include the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), the College Proficiency Examination Program (CPEP), and the Undergraduate Program Field Tests (UP). Most of the proficiency examinations are open to anyone who wants to take them. If you successfully pass a test, it means that the subject matter for which you were tested is equal to what you would have learned in a college-level course, and you receive the credits.

The university you attend may or may not award credit for proficiency exams, and if it does, it may place a ceiling on the number of credits it will award. Check with the academic affairs office at the university you wish to attend.

To obtain more information about taking proficiency examinations, including where the tests can be taken, how much a test costs and what kinds of tests you can take, use the addresses listed on the next page.

For AP examinations:

Educational Testing Service
Box 2815
Princeton, NJ 08541

Phone: 609/921-9000

For CLEP examinations:

College Board
45 Columbus Avenue
New York, NY 10023

Phone: 212/713-8000

For PEP examinations:

Proficiency Examination Program
P.O. Box 168
Iowa City, IA 52240

Phone: 319/337-1000

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The author discusses non-traditional ways to earn a college degree, including correspondence courses and credit by examination. Only a few pages of the book are dedicated to credit for prior learning. An extensive list of colleges and universities is provided.

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Neff, Charles B., ed. *New Directions for Experiential Learning: Cross Cultural Learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. 1981.

The editor was a Peace Corps staff member and one of the authors served as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Simosko, Susan. *Earn College Credit For What You Know.* Reston, VA: Acropolis Books. Ltd. 1985. (ICE publication No. TR051).

This book helps students evaluate their life experiences and describes, in detail, how to put a portfolio together. The book has been distributed to all Peace Corps posts and should be available in your In-country Resource Center. A new, expanded version of this book is due to be published in 1992.

Smith, Peter. *Your Hidden Credentials.* Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, Ltd. 1986.

This book profiles several adults who have varied, credit-worthy experiences.

State University of New York. *Innovative Programs Directory, 1989-1990.* Saratoga Springs, NY: Empire State College. 1989.

This booklet profiles an interesting collection of 25 to 30 universities that offer graduate degrees in non-traditional ways, such as credit for prior learning, and credit through correspondence.

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