Planning a Master’s International Peace Corps Project in Natural Disasters

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Management, Communications, and Health Session

Introduction. Michigan Technological University’s (MTU’s) Peace Corps Master’s International Program (MIP) in the Mitigation of Natural Geologic Hazards is the only geology-related MIP program in the country. This program focuses on increasing awareness and reducing geologic hazards to communities in Peace Corps countries. Students attend classes at MTU for one year followed by two years of Peace Corps service where the students work simultaneously on their Peace Corps’ and Master’s Projects. The goal of this poster is to present examples of preparation, obstacles and strategies encountered by Peace Corps MIP students in the geology MIP program in planning their master’s project and also gives an example of my project goals.

The Program.

•The MIP program in geology at MTU began in the fall of 2004.
•Two students have returned to MTU to finish their research projects conducted during their Peace Corps assignment. Their projects include volcano seismology in Guatemala and an aquifer study in Nicaragua.
•There are currently eight students in the Peace Corps that are conducting a range of volcanic studies in El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, and the Philippines.
•Two students have recently received assignments in Africa (Benin and Tanzania) where they hope to study water-related issues and two more are awaiting their assignment.

Preparation.

•Required classes for geology students: Community Planning and Analysis and Intercultural Hazards Communication in Latin America which includes a film series.
•A number of other classes are also available to students in the geology and other departments based on their research goals.

Obstacles.

•Not knowing their host country. Most students do not know their host country until their second semester at MTU.
•Not knowing their site location until after they have arrived in their host country.
•Working in a new culture and environment.
•Not being fluent in the local language.

Strategies.

•Remain flexible. Students may not get into the host country they want, or sometimes even into the region. It is also possible that if they want to study volcanic hazards they may get sent to a country or site that does not have volcanoes.
•Remain open to new ideas. Students may learn that while they wanted to study one subject, after living in their community, they find out there is another subject that is more interesting or who’s results would be more beneficial to the community.

Developing My Project.

My research goals:

•To be placed in a Latin American country and particularly at a site near a volcano.
•To work with my community to determine what they believe is a major geologic hazard and to utilize their local knowledge to help develop a project.
•To develop a hazards map using participatory methods or to conduct a participatory disaster risk assessment in my community.

Conclusion. Students in the MIP program face numerous obstacles in developing and conducting their research projects both before they leave and after they arrive at their site. While they have two years to complete the field part of their project, they are dealing with limited resources, adjusting to living in a new culture and environment as well as completing their Peace Corps projects. Students should remain flexible and resourceful and keep their eyes open for research opportunities they did not know existed before they arrived at their site.

Resources:

Peace Corps Master’s International Program in the Mitigation of Natural Geologic-Hazards. Michigan Technological University.

<http://www.geohazards.mtu.edu/>