

Remarks for the Talloires Network: July 9, 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am honored to join such a distinguished group of educators and applaud your commitment to strengthening the civic roles and social responsibilities of higher education.

As you know, colleges and universities serve as incubators for young people to develop their moral compasses, and colleges and universities foster skills that help students benefit society at large. So, it is fitting that the seed that grew into the Peace Corps was planted at a university. On October 14, 1960, Senator John F. Kennedy spoke to students on the steps of the University of Michigan Union. He challenged these young people with the question, *Who would be willing to apply their educations to help communities in need overseas?*

More than half a century later, over 200,000 American citizens have answered Kennedy's call to service, bringing their minds, hearts and drive to 139 countries around the world. Currently, the Peace Corps has more than 9,000 Volunteers—mostly but not only young people—serving in 75 countries.

I would mention that when I was a young man and I decided to join the Peace Corps, my parents' initial reaction was *"Why would you want to do that?"* I think it's a testament to how much our culture has changed over the years that volunteering for the Peace Corps is now regarded as a smart choice for a young college graduate to make. Spending two years mastering a new language; adapting to a new culture and community; and problem solving in many ways they never expected helps prepare Volunteers for the global marketplace. The outstanding professional of the 21st Century is a global citizen and will often be an individual with Peace Corps service on his or her resume.

In today's Peace Corps, we not only require Volunteers to serve 27 months overseas, we also require them to demonstrate a commitment to service, by volunteering in communities, even before they are invited to the Peace Corps. Often, this volunteer service is facilitated through a student's undergraduate institution, and I commend colleges and universities for making service opportunities available to young people and for prioritizing the value of giving back to communities in need.

Every year, the Peace Corps issues a report of the top colleges and universities in the country—among small, medium and large schools—that produce Peace Corps Volunteers. I am thrilled to see that nine universities in your network are among those that consistently produce some of the largest numbers of Peace Corps Volunteers. These are:

American University, Brown, Georgetown, The George Washington University, Smith, Syracuse, Tufts, Tulane, and University of Minnesota.

Indeed, the Peace Corps has been working with colleges and universities since its inception. In the early years of our agency, we turned to universities as natural brain trusts with the language and area expertise needed to train departing Volunteers. Schools of higher learning such as Berkeley, Rutgers, UCLA and Ohio State all took in and trained new Volunteers, preparing them for their life abroad in a new country and launching them on their paths to global citizenry.

The Peace Corps is also fortunate to have present-day partnerships with some 120 graduate schools in the United States. Through one track of these university partnerships, our Master's International program, students *combine* graduate school with Peace Corps service. These Master's International students complete one year of university to prepare for the Peace Corps, and then join the Peace Corps and receive academic credit for their service to their country. While abroad, they use their formal training to build water and sanitation systems, to introduce sustainable farming and vermiculture, to build safe and health-promoting playgrounds from recycled materials...

At this very moment, we are proud to have nearly 700 Master's International students either serving in the field or awaiting service.

The other graduate school initiative, the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program, establishes partnerships with American universities that provide fellowships to *Returned* Peace Corps Volunteers. Once enrolled in graduate school, these exemplary returned Volunteers serve their country again, engaging in high-need American communities to work on projects from preserving New Orleans' urban and architectural heritage, to facilitating statewide planning of services for seniors in Illinois.

This past school year, Coverdell Fellows had its largest showing ever with nearly 600 Fellows across the country participating in the program. Currently, we have 71 Coverdell Fellows universities where returned Volunteers can study subjects from creative writing to business, from social work or nursing to law. And this program is expanding. We welcome proposals from American Universities that wish to partner with the Peace Corps in our Coverdell Fellows Program.

Indeed, the Peace Corps is pleased to already have existing Master's International and Coverdell Fellows graduate school partnerships with nine Talloires universities in the United States:

American University, Bard College, Cal State Fresno, Duke, The George Washington University, Portland State, Tulane, the University of Minnesota, and Wheelock College.

We are also proud to collaborate with leading public- and private-sector development and service organizations such as USAID, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Save the Children, Malaria No More, Special Olympics, Teach for America, City Year, and the Corporation for National and Community Service. Through our formal collaborations with like-minded organizations, we are able to broaden our reach and also recruit a generation of Volunteers ready to serve their newly adopted communities.

These national and international collaborations, I believe, serve a key function in the Peace Corps today and will continue to play a crucial role in the Peace Corps of tomorrow. As our world becomes smaller and more complex, critical challenges such as rolling back the tide of HIV/AIDS, or ensuring food security, or stemming environmental degradation, can only be addressed through multi-party and even multinational cooperation—guided by the trained minds of truly global citizens.

In addition, we partner with nine minority higher education organizations including: The Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund, the United Negro College Fund, the Hispanic Scholarship

Fund, and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. In this way, we are ensuring that Peace Corps Volunteers reflect the rich diversity of the broad American community.

This past Father's Day, approximately a year after the passing of our founding Director, Sargent Shriver, his son, Mark, published a biography of his father entitled, "A Good Man." Mark Shriver describes his father as a *good* man, a man with a vision of promoting civic engagement and social responsibility and with an ethic to help people in need.

Speaking at Fordham University, Sargent Shriver said,

"Compassion and service shatter barriers of politics and creed: [they] dissolve obstacles of race and belief anywhere in the world."

An ethic of service is what motivated a former Master's International student, Courtney Owens, to reflect, looking back on his time in Burkina Faso, that "the only thing I would describe as a "minus" (during my Peace Corps experience) was that host country nationals considered me to be an expert in my field." According to Owens, this nagging fear that he could not be *of enough help* challenged him to find answers and solutions to farmers' problems.

A sense of social responsibility is what motivated Kevin McMahan, another Peace Corps Volunteer, to serve in Ukraine, a Talloires Network country, where he taught environmental education in six different schools, including an orphanage. He also, by the way, met his Ukrainian wife, which shows that another virtue, love, knows no cultural, or ethnic or political boundaries.

Today, I applaud you on your commitment to strengthening the civic roles and social responsibilities of higher education. In his closing remarks at the University of Michigan in 1960, Senator Kennedy said,

"this University is not maintained by its alumni, or by the state, merely to help its graduates have an economic advantage in the life struggle. There is certainly a greater purpose..."

I believe that everyone in this room today recognizes that greater purpose, and it is an honor and a pleasure to be among like-minded thinkers. Thank you again for your invitation to speak here today.