

What was your undergraduate alma mater? Program-of-study?

I graduated from Washington & Jefferson College with a B.A. in Environmental Studies.

Where did you serve? When?

I served as an Environmental Action Advisor for Food Security in Benin, West Africa from 2015 – 2017.



What was your primary job? Did you have any secondary projects? How did you go about starting those?

I worked with a beekeeping and agro-forestry cooperative in a protected forest. I constructed a community rabbit raising center with them to encourage domestic rabbit production across the community, constructed a community food security center that taught vegetable producers different food transformation technologies like drying and canning, and helped improve the groups reforestation efforts in the protected forest where they produced honey and vegetables.

My secondary projects included a commune-wide Let Girls Learn Campaign where I led a march with 500 high school female students to demonstrate to the community why their education is important. The campaign also reached over 200 fathers with a behavior change video that encouraged them to support their daughters. I also coordinated with the U.S. Government's Presidents Malaria Initiative where I introduced a malaria test and treat program in five pre-schools with a total of 300 5-&-unders in collaboration with the CDC and USAID/US Embassy. I was inspired to do these projects by reviewing different Peace Corps training materials to understand what the best practices of the agency were and identifying opportunities for me to adapt them in my community.

With so many other volunteering programs, why were you specifically interested in the Peace Corps?

I am a firm believer that cross-cultural exchange is a catalyst for transformational change. While I could have volunteered in a wide number of programs across the globe, the Peace Corps is unique in that it places cross-cultural exchange at the core of its mission (Two out of three goals are concerning culture). Peace can be achieved if we all just better understand one another. Giving that the Peace Corps is a soft power US foreign policy tool for peace & diplomacy, I was excited to answer JFK's call to action and serve.

If you had to only name one thing, what was your favorite part about being a Volunteer?

My favorite part about being a Peace Corps volunteer was serving as a US Cultural Ambassador for my community. I would field all sorts of questions about America and it was a great opportunity for me to better appreciate my own culture while thriving in another.

What was it like reintegrating into American culture?

Reintegrating was a challenge. During my first year of Peace Corps, I was so fixated on how different Beninese culture was to American culture. During my second year of service, I realized how similar we were to one another. When I returned to America, I kept fixating again on what was different and what was similar. You don't really get to realize how much the experience changes you until you return back home and all your friends and family say so. Perhaps it has something to do with me changing my values in certain aspects of life, while I drew comparisons across the culture I was raised in and the culture I lived among for two years.

