

3 From UA Reflect on Peace Corps Service

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The Peace Corps community is particularly strong at the University of Arizona, which is one of the **top 20** ^[1] Peace Corps volunteer-producing colleges and universities, according to a ranking just released by the organization.

While many Peace Corps volunteers begin their service after graduating and leaving the UA, there are many who come to the UA after their service to become graduate students and employees. The UA has approximately 75 active and retired faculty and staff members who are returned Peace Corps volunteers.

To help mark Peace Corps Week, which runs through Saturday, three UA employees who served in the Peace Corps spoke with Lo Que Pasa about their experiences, and how their service has influenced their lives today.

Zack Guido

Program Manager

International Research and Application Program, Institute of the Environment

Zack Guido is famous ? or perhaps infamous ? among Peace Corps volunteers. He's the guy whose 110-pound luggage allotment contained 90 pounds of mountain climbing gear and just 20 pounds of clothes as he headed to the Bolivian Andes.

It was a logical decision for Guido, who spent a couple of years as "a climbing bum in Colorado and living in treehouses" after finishing his bachelor's degree in geology.

"I was just curious about the world," Guido explained of his decision to volunteer with the Peace Corps. "I didn't want to embark on a career that felt a little too stuffy to me, but I also didn't want to close the door on a career, so I was looking for something that sort of threaded that needle and that was adventurous."

His Peace Corps work was officially in environmental education, though he branched out into agricultural projects. He provided basic training and capacity building for local teachers and helped farmers grow roses and fruit trees.

With another Peace Corps volunteer, Guido founded a small nonprofit that developed water wells for rural Bolivian communities, continuing that work for three or four years after leaving the Peace Corps. He also went to graduate school to pursue a master's degree, a move he said "felt wholly unsatisfying."

"I was doing research on ancient climates. It was really cool research, but it felt pretty removed from people, which was the opposite of where I was in the Peace Corps," said Guido, who finished his master's at the University of Colorado and then did his doctoral work

at the UA, focusing in part on quantifying changes in glaciers in Bolivia.

"What I ended up finding was this niche that I'm in right now, which is the intersection of physical science and people working in climate adaptation," Guido said. "The Peace Corps helped focus what I wanted to do in life, and I wanted to continue to work in development. Now, I do live research, which is basically on development, related to climate adaptation. I work with rural farmers, particularly in Jamaica, and see if there are ways to help them become more resilient to seasonal changes in the climate."

Guido's service abroad shaped his life in more ways than one. While browsing an online dating site, he saw a profile that mentioned the Peace Corps. He connected with the writer, Alyssa, also a returned Peace Corps volunteer, who is now his wife.

Alyssa Guido

Program Director

Arizona AIDS Education and Training Center, College of Medicine ? Tucson

If there is such a thing as the "classic Peace Corps experience," Alyssa Guido had it. Her two years of Peace Corps service were spent in a mud-brick, thatched-roof hut in Zambia, where she educated locals about HIV. It was seven to eight hours by bike to the nearest town, there was no running water or electricity, and she contracted malaria ? twice.

She had never traveled abroad when she joined the Peace Corps, but she knew from a young age she wanted to serve. She was in the fifth grade when she learned about the Peace Corps, and she immediately knew it was something she would do.

After graduating from Roanoke College with a degree in sociology, Guido volunteered with AmeriCorps to prepare herself for the Peace Corps experience. Just as she knew she wanted to serve in the Peace Corps, she knew specifically what she wanted to do when she got there.

"When I joined, I said I really wanted to go do HIV/AIDS work in Africa, and that's what I got," she said. "I was placed in Zambia, which is in sub-Saharan Africa. I was 60 kilometers (37.3 miles) from the closest paved road and about 120 kilometers (74.6 miles) from the closest town."

On a typical day, she met with local groups to educate people about AIDS and HIV, as well as tuberculosis, water and sanitation. She taught HIV/AIDS life skills at schools and worked with the local health clinic on a growth monitoring program for children. Before leaving Zambia, she secured a small grant to train local teachers on the HIV/AIDS curriculum so they could continue teaching it after she left.

Prior to her Peace Corps experience, Guido assumed her career would involve social work. Like many volunteers, though, the time she spent in the Peace Corps was life-changing. She returned to the U.S. and spent two years working for the Peace Corps in Washington, D.C., where she learned about the UA's **Peace Corps Coverdell Fellows program** ^[2], which provides financial assistance to returned Peace Corps volunteers seeking graduate degrees. She applied to graduate school in Tucson based on the UA's active Peace Corps community.

"The Peace Corps really opened my eyes to the field of public health. It also gave me the interest and passion to work in HIV/AIDS and the technical experience of actually being an HIV educator," said Guido, who earned a master's degree in maternal and child health with a global health emphasis through the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health.

During her final semester at the UA, Guido volunteered with the Arizona AIDS Education and Training Center, where she is now the program director. Housed within the College of Medicine in Tucson, the program operates through a federal grant to provide education, training and capacity building about HIV to health care workers around the state.

"The Peace Corps impacts my life every day. It expanded my horizons in every way possible — professionally, through learning a new language, and also just understanding the world and how I fit into it," said Guido, who will celebrate her third wedding anniversary to Zack Guido on March 28. "Peace Corps was really the best decision I ever made in my life."

Paul Wilson

University Distinguished Professor
Agricultural and Resource Economics

Paul Wilson wasn't exactly sure what he wanted to do when he graduated from college with a degree in marketing, so he began filling out applications.

He would have been happy to receive one offer. He got four.

"On a single day, I got accepted in the Peace Corps and accepted into VISTA, and I had a job offer for the bank and I had also been accepted into an MBA program," Wilson said.

VISTA — or Volunteers in Service to America, now known as AmeriCorps VISTA — is a national service program similar to the Peace Corps.

"I had to make a choice, and because of my family background of helping others who are less fortunate than we are, I chose the Peace Corps. I thought it would be a wonderful adventure."

The Peace Corps job description appealed to Wilson's interest in economics. He would work as a business adviser to two cooperatives — one credit and one agricultural — in the Dominican Republic.

For the next two years, he lived without indoor plumbing. A single lightbulb illuminated his room. A motorcycle served as his transportation for the two-and-a-half-hour trip from the rural town he lived in to the office of the credit cooperative. When rain made the roads impassable, he went by horse.

Wilson uses one of his favorite Peace Corps stories to teach his students about participatory development. When a company approached Wilson about selling fertilizer through the agricultural cooperative, Wilson helped complete the deal, which allowed farmers to buy fertilizer at a much lower price than they were paying the two established wholesalers in town.

"I got a lot of pushback for that, but it transformed the lives, at least economically, of the people that the cooperative worked with," said Wilson, whose Peace Corps work involved accounting, feasibility studies, social promotion, and sometimes just reading pesticide and fertilizer labels for farmers who couldn't read. "It made me a firm advocate of participatory

development, and participatory development became something that I pursued even in graduate school and as a young assistant professor here at the University of Arizona. I still teach the concept today."

The work Wilson did in the Peace Corps also expanded his interest in agriculture. When he returned to the U.S., he pursued a master's degree in agricultural and resource economics, and eventually a doctorate. Well-known for his abilities as a research scientist and a teacher, Wilson has maintained three distinct areas of focus throughout his career: agribusiness and managerial economics; irrigation technologies and water policy; and economic development in poor countries.

The lessons Wilson learned in the Peace Corps went far beyond business skills and career development, though. In many ways, it was the experience itself Wilson will never forget.

"It's a dose of humility," Wilson said of serving in the Peace Corps. "You realize that there's a lot you don't know. You also realize that there are people with fourth-grade educations who are smarter than you are. It made me much more aware of culture, and cross-cultural opportunities and cross-cultural tensions. Those kinds of things stay with you forever.

"I would not be sitting here today if I had not gone into the Peace Corps," said Wilson, who is retiring in May. "It's been a real joy, the whole experience, and the Peace Corps set it off."

Watch Paul Wilson's University Distinguished Professor induction ceremony video below. He reflects on his time in the Peace Corps starting at the 1:17 mark.

Source URL: <https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/3-ua-reflect-peace-corps-service>

Links:

[1] <https://www.peacecorps.gov/news/topcolleges/#college/4832>

[2] <https://grad.arizona.edu/peacecorps/welcome>