A combination of experiences led Zach Barricklow ’05 to the Peace Corps. But after living in Panama for nearly two years, he also realized Hope’s atmosphere of open dialogue on campus was instrumental in preparing him for the ”cultural shock of being dropped in a very foreign place.” By living in a very remote area that’s often only accessible by airplanes. As an environment volunteer, his responsibilities range from operating a tree nursery to assisting with animal and insect studies.

“The biology here in Madagascar is fascinating; most species are endemic and endangered, so as one of the few people in my field, I feel my impact in environmental protection here is significant,” he said.

For Laura Rojeski ’07, international opportunities and service focus at Hope led naturally to serving as a Peace Corps volunteer. She is in French-speaking Burkina Faso in West Africa, focusing on health initiatives, and is pictured at back left with a woman’s group that makes liquid soap. (Photo courtesy of Laura Rojeski ’07)

Rojeski credits her classes at Hope, particularly the ones in French and culture, for exposing her to the need to communicate with the people in her community. Developing leadership and mediation skills through volunteer work during her time at Hope has also proven vital in terms of motivating her to initiate new projects.

Like many Hope alumni working in the Peace Corps, Ben Byl ’04 recognizes the role his service abroad as a student played in leading him to the Corps. But after living in Madagascar for nearly two years now, he also realizes Hope’s atmosphere of open dialogue on campus was instrumental in preparing him for the “cultural shock of being dropped in a very foreign place.” By living in a very remote area that’s often only accessible by airplanes. As an environment volunteer, his responsibilities range from operating a tree nursery to assisting with animal and insect studies.

“Although it was only a week long, it made me realize my passion for serving others, learning about a different culture, and speaking a different language,” said Mick, who now plans to stay in El Salvador to work for a non-governmental organization.

Mohsen Carrier ’05, another participant in the Mexico trip, now works in Morocco as a Youth Development Volunteer. One major motivation that drove her personally in her work in the Peace Corps is to bridge cultural understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims.

“This task does not just involve religious understanding, but also cultural understanding between Western and non-Western peoples,” Carrier said. “Every time my students and I share ideas and beliefs with one another, and debate controversial issues important to both of us, we are involved in a cultural exchange that challenges and molds us into better world citizens.”

Reflecting on her Hope experience, Carrier noted that students were always encouraged to "clothe themselves with servant hearts," both at home and abroad. “It was impossible for me to not be affected by such motivating servant-heartedness,” she said.

Like Wierenga, Scott Rynbrandt ’07 seeks to improve the health of people in his country, Moldova, which is situated between Romania and Ukraine. His role includes teaching classes on health topics and working in a medical center. He is especially grateful for the cross-cultural communication class he took at Hope, since he applies many of the theories he learned to daily life. “I think it made me more understanding of people here, and that’s why I keep working and struggling,” he said. “I’ve learned what it takes to communicate with people and to effectively implement lasting change. The solution is not to throw money at a problem. You need to live with people, learn their language and establish relationships.”

Earlier this year, Hope appeared for the first time on the organization’s annual rankings of the top post-secondary institutions producing Peace Corps volunteers.

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