

## Zach Jeremiah puts his Organizational Management skills to use in the Peace Corps

Peoria native Zach Jeremiah '08 earned his degree in Organizational Management and is putting those skills to good use as a member of the Peace Corps. He recently shared his experiences with us.

**Q: What led you to join the Peace Corps and what sorts of experiences were you hoping it would provide?**

**A:** Well, I had a classic fork in the road experience that led me here. My first love is baseball, and I hope to one day work in the front office of a major league club. Towards the end of college I was talking with the Pittsburgh Pirates front office about an internship doing exactly that. However, I also wanted to cover my bases, and doing service was the other path I had great interest in. I interviewed with Teach for America and the Peace Corps, but my wanderlust made the Peace Corps my far and away first choice. For



awhile it looked like I'd have to make the tough decision between PC and the Pirates, but when the internship fell through at the last moment I was spared that. And when I saw that I would be going to Peru, I was instantly pleased that it worked out like it did.

As for what I was hoping to gain from the experience- complete immersion in a new culture and the ability to live and travel in a continent I was so unfamiliar with were the prime motivators. And to be able to do all this while using the education I was lucky enough to receive to help others was about as ideal as it gets.

**Q: What can you share about the location in which you are living and working?**

**A:** I live in Madrigal, Arequipa in the south of Peru. Arequipa is often referred to as the Texas of Peru because of their pride and unique culture within the country. They even have their own (very much unofficial) passport. Where I live in particular is the Colca Canyon, the deepest in the world (or in the argument anyway) and even more imbued with unique culture and customs. My town has about 700 people and revolves completely around agriculture, although the last 10 years has seen a rise in tourist interest in the area.

**Q: What sort of projects are you focusing on in your work?**

**A:** I am a small business volunteer, so my main focus is helping build the human resource capabilities of the various small business organizations in my town, such as the artisans (who do beautiful needlework), milk production association, and tourism association. Since these groups don't all function as well as one would like, I also have plenty of time on my hands to teach English in the schools, help out with reforestation and landfill projects, aid the health post in their various campaigns and groups, and offer computer training to whoever wants it.

**Q: What aspects of your training in business are proving helpful?**

**A:** Since my job revolves around small business capacitation, most of what I learned has already proved useful. Management theory and techniques can be tailored to help the smallest of associations and planning is one major skill they all lack. I also teach rudimentary accounting and even find myself explaining some economic principals now and again.

**Q: What are the top three unexpected feelings or experiences you've enjoyed?**

**A:** So much of your job here is dealing with the unexpected that it's tough to say. In fact I've become so used to the completely foreign that coming back to the U.S. will be quite foreign in itself. Let's see...

- The top unexpected feeling would have to be the uncertainty I have for my next step after this. Leaving college I pretty much had it all planned out, but now I can see a number of ways to go and a number of career paths that I hadn't even considered beforehand opening up in front of me. I've got some tough decisions ahead of me but thankfully some time before I have to make them.
- As far as experiences, I wouldn't call it unexpected but the first time you try it it certainly is odd. I'm referring to cuy, or as we call it in the States, guinea pig. I'm used to seeing them in pet shops and my family even took care of one for a friend for awhile when I was a kid. So, seeing it on your plate is a bit of a shock, especially since they apparently just shave it and toss it in the frier. Still, kinda tasty...
- Another everyday experience that is quite different is going to the chacra, or farm. My area is so steep that they practiced the stepped farming that their ancestors did, and pretty much the same techniques. I never thought I would plow a field using a team of oxen or hand-plant potatoes in my life, but that's pretty much a weekly thing at this point.

**Q: What is something that has proven more difficult than you anticipated?**

**A:** Motivation. Not so much on my end but the community's. The people are at the farm all day, and when they get home they don't necessarily want to go to meetings or classes, which I can understand, but it forces me to be a lot more creative with my work than I would have thought. That's not necessarily a bad thing, of course.

**Q: If a student was considering the Peace Corps after graduation what advice would you give them to help them work through the decision.**

**A:** If they really want to help and get some international experience as well, they should definitely take a look at it. It's a process, so start early. I was lucky and got it done in about four months, but it can take up to a year. As far as making the decision, it was picked as one of the higher places to start a career, especially an international one. It also has good grad school benefits and in the present economy is a pretty sweet gig any way you cut it. Still, the cultural interchange and ability to help others trumps all that.



**Q: What lies ahead after your service is completed?**

**A:** I'm not entirely sure at this point. Grad school is always an option, but I might need to get some more traveling in before I can really focus on that. I have a hankering for Asia next, and might look into some English teaching programs or doing a third year with Peace Corps there. We'll see...