The World Is Your Office

By Charles Piddock

- Where can you find great international jobs when you’re just starting out?

  **Attention:** You are now free to roam the world, live in a different culture, learn a new language—and, of course, earn some badly needed bucks.

  You could get all that by winning a big prize on a quiz show or stowing away on a tramp steamer. But you’d have a better chance of learning about the world and building valuable work experience by getting an international job that allows you to work overseas at least part of the time.

  Most international careers require an advanced degree, but you don’t have to be an expert in world finance or possess a Ph.D. to get a great international job when you’re just starting out. There are many jobs suited to students and recent college graduates. Here’s where to look.

**Private Volunteer Organizations**

(See picture, “Deles, Neal with Children in India.”)

Private volunteer organizations (PVOs) try to make the world a better place. They fight poverty and hunger, promote health, and provide shelter for refugees. Some PVOs, such as Catholic Relief Services (www.catholicrelief.org), are connected to religious organizations, others are independent. There are hundreds of PVOs operating in all parts of the world. Some charge a fee for participation as a working volunteer. But if you are interested in other cultures and are not afraid of roughing it a little, working with a PVO may be just the way to find out if an international career is right for you.

(See picture, “Harrison, Dawn with Children in India.”)

**Oxfam International (www.oxfam.org)** is a group of 12 organizations working together in 100 countries to find lasting solutions to poverty, suffering, and injustice. Oxfam interns and volunteers, many of them recent college graduates working for a fixed time period, ranging from several weeks to a year, don’t just hand out relief supplies. Volunteers work with people in Africa, South America, and Asia to organize and empower them to improve their own situations.

**Operation Crossroads Africa (www.operationcrossroadsafrica.org)** is a cross-cultural exchange program between the United States and Africa. Since 1957, Operation Crossroads Africa has sent more than 11,000 Americans to a number of African and Caribbean countries and to Brazil. The Africa program has a three-day orientation in the United States and a six-week stay in Africa working on development projects in education, public health, and farming, followed by a week of travel in the host country.

Sonja Oakcurn, 29, who served in a fishing community in Ghana in 2003, found her work rewarding: “When you encounter a new cultural experience, it’s like seeing the world in a totally different way.”

**Cross-Cultural Solutions (www.crossculturalsolutions.org)** is a nonprofit international volunteer organization that operates programs in Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Peru, Russia, Tanzania, and Thailand. It offers volunteers an opportunity to work with local people on projects for two to 12 weeks at a time. Unlike many other PVOs, Cross-Cultural Solutions has no strict educational requirement. In order to work alone on a project, however, a volunteer must be at least 18 years old.

**The Peace Corps**

The best known of all international volunteer organizations is the Peace Corps (www.peacecorps.gov). It was established by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 as a way of challenging young Americans to serve the cause of peace by living and working in poor countries. Since its beginning, more than 170,000 Peace Corps volunteers have worked and lived in more than 136 host countries. Thousands of jobs are available—among them, teaching children in South America, helping farmers in India, and helping those living with AIDS in Africa. Volunteers commit to a three-month training program and then serve in their assigned countries for two years.

(See picture, “Jamal, Raquib: Peace Corps Volunteer in Ghana.”)


For many volunteers, the experience of being completely immersed in a foreign culture was a life-changing experience. Ellen Florian, now a writer for Fortune magazine, served in Kenya from 1993 to 1995. She told Career World that serving in the Peace Corps "opened my eyes to how people in developing countries live. Their lives are a struggle for a good grass roof over their heads, daily food, maybe a little extra money for things like laundry soap. It's one thing to read about Africa and another to be living there. I hope that what I did there helped."

(See picture, "Chandler, Azikiwe: Peace Corps Volunteer.")

Peace Corps volunteers should have a college degree, be enthusiastic about learning a new culture and language, and have a desire to succeed at an often-difficult job in conditions that may be tough.

**Teaching Overseas**
Some of the hottest international jobs today are in teaching—specifically, teaching English as a foreign language. Most overseas teaching jobs involve teaching adults. There are a number of programs in the United States that prepare college graduates, regardless of their majors, to receive certificates to teach English as a foreign language.

Emily Hunter was not ready to settle down after graduating from the University of Colorado in 2001. She had always wanted to experience another culture and didn’t want to let the opportunity pass her by. In an interview with Transitions Abroad magazine, Hunter said that she stayed home for a year to earn money and to look for a teaching position overseas. Hunter found the Native English Center, an English school in Bogota, Colombia. She decided to take the plunge. “In the end, I made my decision and left with little more than faith,” said Hunter. “Looking back, it was awesome.” For more information, log on to www.transitionsabroad.com.

Private International Companies

Because almost all major companies today are global in scope, you can get an international job in just about any large firm. You could find yourself managing a Gap store in Japan, selling General Electric appliances in Africa, or advertising Ford trucks in Asia.

What is the most important factor in getting a job with an international company? You should have a skill that the company needs, such as engineering or sales. Second, a strong knowledge of foreign cultures and languages is helpful.

Sharon Secki, director of admissions at the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS), agrees. Secki, who speaks French and German, manages international study programs in 40 countries and travels abroad and across the United States from her office in Stamford, Conn. "Speaking French has helped me communicate more effectively with the French consulate," Secki says. "Although [consulate officials] do speak English, it's sometimes easier conversing in French."

Secki was a French major and was always interested in other cultures. A year of study in Cannes, France, sealed the deal for her in seeking an international job. She started at AIFS right out of college.

"I found my student time abroad to be a life-changing experience," Secki told Career World. "The experience changes your perspectives, takes you out of your comfort zone—a good thing—and presses you to fend for yourself."

Do You Have What It Takes?

Living and working overseas is not for everyone, says Pat Mullane, the director of the Career Center at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pa. “Interest is one thing,” Mullane told Career World. “But the ability to adapt to immersion in another culture is another. You need to be open-minded and adaptable. You shouldn’t be someone who gets all bent out of shape if things don’t go as planned.”

If a person is flexible, has an interest in foreign cultures, likes to travel, and is good at languages, Mullane says, the first step is to look for a college or another organization that has a study-abroad program, so the person can actually experience living in another culture.

If you choose to take that step, it could be the beginning of a great career—a career that literally makes the entire world your office.

Discuss

Ask students:

• If you were interested in a volunteer job overseas, where would you go to find information?

• If you know you want an international job, what are some good ways to prepare?

• What traits and skills are important for success in an international job?

Write

Promote Understanding

Two goals of the Peace Corps are to “help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served” and to “help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of all Americans.” Why might working toward those goals be important and rewarding work? How could this work be applied in a post-Peace Corps career? Encourage students to explore the Peace Corps Web site for more information (www.peacecorps.gov).

More Resources

The Peace Corps kids page is full of great information about how kids can make a difference in their community and in the world; what life is like in other countries; what the Peace Corps is; and more. www.peacecorps.gov/kids/index.html

Students can explore international job listings at the following sites: www.internationaljobs.org and www.4icj.com.

Drake University’s International Relations department has an informative Web site with information about international careers. www.drake.edu/artscllr/ir_careers.html

Citations

MLA 8
APA 6