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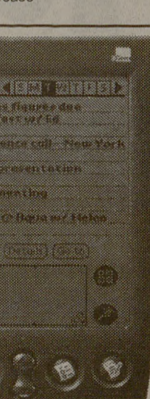
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**Ags in the 'Corps'**  
Students leave country on peace mission

BY AMANDA PALM  
The Battalion

When President Kennedy issued an Executive Order that created the Peace Corps on March 1, 1961, he had no idea that tens of thousands of people would volunteer their lives to serve people all over the world.

Thirty-eight years later, A&M graduates, Stephen Gruschkus, Brad Wallner and Javier Valdes are leaving the security of life in the United States for a two-year experience as Peace Corps volunteers.

Gruschkus, Wallner and Valdes are Class of '99 graduates who led separate lives while at A&M, but have chosen a common path to become Peace Corps volunteers.

The summer after his sophomore year, Gruschkus studied abroad in the island of Dominica in the West Indies.

While he was there, he met former Peace Corps volunteers who sparked his interest in the organization and helped him decide to join.

Instead of going straight to medical school after his undergraduate program, Gruschkus decided to apply for the Peace Corps.

"I wanted the chance to work in another country," he said. "I also wanted to apply the things I learned in school while I still remember them. Plus, I really wanted a break before starting medical school."

Wallner has a similar story. He studied abroad in Monterey, Mexico, with 120 foreign exchange students. He became friends with people from China, Finland and Asia.

"I got to know a lot of people up close, and it was amazing," Wallner said. "I learned customs and bits and pieces of the language from each of my friends."

Eight months after returning from his trip, Wallner turned in his Peace Corps application.



Stephen Gruschkus, a Texas A&M graduate, joined the Peace Corps after meeting volunteers on the island of Dominica.

The application process for becoming a Peace Corps volunteer consists of four main steps. First, a person must fill out an application with the on-campus recruiter. Second comes an interview.

Gruschkus said his interview took three hours, and he was asked "anything and everything."

"The process is tedious and frustrating, but it's worth it," he said. "I think it's set up to make you take the initiative to get in touch with people."

Third, the application and interview evaluation are sent to the regional office in Dallas. From there, the applicant is nominated to Washington where the person is matched with an assignment.

Patrick Niemeyer, the on-campus Peace Corps recruiter, said there have been 473 Aggie Peace

Corps volunteers in the state since 1961.

These Aggies are in five categories which are education, environment, business, culture and health.

Niemeyer said there are currently 21 Aggies being trained to begin their service.

The living conditions of volunteers vary depending on the location they are put in. Salaries can range from huts, tents, or small houses.

"Hopefully, I'll be in a house, and I have a chance of getting running water and electricity," Gruschkus said.

Wallner said his living arrangements are not what he hopes for the best.

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