

History of the Peace Corps at the University of Michigan

The University of Michigan played an important and historic role in Peace Corps history. It began on October 14, 1960, at 2:00 a.m. on the steps of the Michigan Union, when then Senator John F. Kennedy gave an unprepared campaign speech challenging University of Michigan students to devote a few years of their life to working in developing countries around the world to promote a better understanding between those countries and the United States. Within weeks, 1,000 University of Michigan students had signed a petition calling for the establishment of the Peace Corps program. [JFK at the Union: The Unknown Story of the Peace Corps Speech](#) [1] tells about the role of U-M students in founding the Peace Corps. Less than a year later, the federal Peace Corps agency was formed, and today, it continues its original [mission](#) [2] based on three simple goals:

- To help the people of interested countries in meeting their needs for trained men and women.
- To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
- To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of all Americans.

Since the Peace Corps' founding in 1961, 2,684 alumni from the University of Michigan have traveled abroad to serve as volunteers, placing the university at No. 4 among the top five all-time producers of Peace Corps volunteers. Volunteers work in over 60 countries in the areas of:

- Youth in Development
- Education
- Health
- Environment
- Community Economic Development
- Agriculture

In 2017, the Peace Corps announced that the University of Michigan ranked No. 4 among large schools on the agency's 2017 Top Volunteer-Producing Colleges and Universities list. There are 60 Wolverines currently volunteering worldwide. The University of Michigan is also a top graduate school, ranking No. 4 with 15 alumni currently volunteering. This is the third year that the University of Michigan has ranked among the top ten large schools. In 2016, the school ranked No. 6.



Photo of Senator John F. Kennedy at the Michigan Union

In 2011, the University of Michigan celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the day when Senator John F. Kennedy gave his speech announcing his idea for the Peace Corps. Visit the [University of Michigan Peace Corps 50th Anniversary Celebration](#) [3] website to learn more about how the University commemorated this historic event.

The world has changed quite a bit since the Peace Corps was established, and the need for Peace Corps volunteers is more relevant than ever. Stop by the [U-M Peace Corps office](#) [4] or attend a [Peace Corps event](#) [5] to find out how you can make a difference.

Source URL: <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/abroad/peace/history>

Links

[1] <https://michigantoday.umich.edu/2008/01/03/jfk-at-the-union/>

[2] <https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/>

[3] <http://peacecorps.umich.edu/>

[4] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/abroad/peace/hours>

[5] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/events/peacecorps>