

Peace Corps revamps program

The Peace Corps' "New Directions":

"We are going to recruit as volunteers not just young people, who now compose 95 per cent of our volunteers, but Americans of all ages — craftsmen from the ranks of labor, mid-career professionals from the ranks of business, experienced teachers and farmers."

Joseph Blatchford, Director of the Peace Corps, thus explained his new approach to the Corps in recent speeches at Boston universities. Blatchford called the program "New Directions: Partnership in Development."

Besides an increased emphasis on older volunteers, Blatchford

said a partnership must be formed. "We will form committees of local people (from the foreign countries) who will make the important decisions about how our volunteers are recruited, selected, trained, placed in the field and supported."

"Our approach must be one that encourages self-reliance and confidence," he said. "That means our aid can't be one-sided. It can't be conceived, initiated and operated by the United States."

Blatchford said he wanted it made clear that the new administration will not change the role of the Peace Corps. He said the new changes "aren't going to shut the recent college graduate

out of the Peace Corps; they are going to place people from all walks of life — from all backgrounds and of all ages — side by side with young Americans in the service of mankind."

"New Directions" will train volunteers as much as possible and aim at designing "programs of training and service for groups with special kinds of experience — such as teachers or former VISTA volunteers," according to Blatchford.

Eventually, he said, "We hope to see the day when half of our overseas staff is made up of local citizens, not Americans."

He summed up the total meaning of the "New Directions," saying, "They do not mean an end to Peace Corps service by the young college graduate.

"They mean, instead, that the young college graduate in the Peace Corps will be working side by side in the field with other Americans of different backgrounds, and with more people from the host country."

Tom English, ASUO Senator and district head of the Peace Corps in Oregon, said he doesn't think the new program will les-

sen the number of college graduates accepted into the Corps.

English said Blatchford told him they expected to increase the number of skilled workers and professionals from a current five per cent to 30 per cent. English said he thought a more realistic figure would be 20 per cent.

Because of the new plans, Blatchford said the Corps will "improve its selection process and become more selective." English said the "more selective" applies to the job to which an individual will be assigned and not to getting into the Peace Corps.

English reported that there has been a change in Oregon since the new plans were initiated. He said, "there have been a great number of older people inquiring, especially retired ones."

He also said the Peace Corps is being regionalized for more personal contact with applicants. In Oregon, English is the district director, based at the University, with an assistant at Portland State University.

English said not all of the problems of the "New Directions" have been worked out. For ex-

ample, the Peace Corps will be accepting 200 families with children in a pilot project, according to Blatchford.

Plans are to keep the children with their parents and place the family in one of the country's major cities. This could be a problem if the country's need is away from the city, English said.

To get more skilled persons working in the program, Blatchford said, "If necessary we will ask their corporations, universities or unions to support them while they do so." English said arranging this is still a problem.

Head finds bias in Corps' systems

"The Peace Corps is lily-white and we've got to change that," Peace Corps Director Joseph Blatchford said Monday, in an interview on a Boston radio station.

Blatchford was not referring to the Peace Corps' reputation. He said he has discovered the Peace Corps' selection process has been unintentionally discouraging applications from members of minority groups.

Blatchford cited two examples: "To begin with, a 16 page application would frighten anyone, but particularly those who haven't made a career of filling out forms as have most middle-class Americans.

"Then there is the reference system. The Peace Corps requires a large number of written references and members of minority groups are often from backgrounds in which their friends and associates are unfamiliar with or reticent about filling out government forms.

"Consequently, many applications from members of minority groups never get processed. They lack the proper number of references," he continued.

Because of this, Blatchford said, Black Americans are three times less likely to be accepted. He also said changes are being made to correct the situation.

"We are not looking toward a quota system of any kind. We are seeking minorities because we want the Peace Corps overseas to be truly representative of this country, and because these people have a special contribution to make," said Blatchford.

In other business about the Peace Corps, Blatchford said that in the future he hoped Americans would not have to just serve their country in military uniform.

"Too often when we speak of 'service to country' the reference is to military service, but the Peace Corps volunteer is serving his country just as surely," he said.

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