

A Head Start on Service: SIUE Students Complete Peace Corps Prep Program

February 19 2020 11:08 AM



EDWARDSVILLE – Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Engineering alumna Dana Sigman and College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) senior Brett Bertok are one step closer to leading lives full of educated and impassioned global service.

The duo has completed the United States Peace Corps Prep Program to earn a spot among the top 400 applicants in a pool of 24,000 should they choose to pursue the Peace Corps, and live its mission to promote world peace and friendship.

“The intentionality of achieving this certificate is significant,” noted SIUE Study Abroad Advisor Kim Browning. “Dana and Brett can now make a reality out of their desire to serve. Many people think about doing this, but don’t follow through. The commitment these two have shown is admirable and makes them ideal candidates for the Peace Corps when they’re ready.”

Sigman, of Mascoutah, completed a bachelor's in civil engineering with a minor in Spanish in December 2019. She aspires to combine her engineering training and interest in foreign cultures to help build society.

“At SIUE, I was involved in the Mustard Seed organization, and we traveled to Guatemala,” she explained. “Right after that, I went to Costa Rica. Going to those types of countries makes you appreciate your life in the U.S. As an engineering student, you need real-world experience. Getting that experience in a foreign country made me quicker on my feet, and more creative in problem-solving and decision-making.”

Sigman plans to achieve her professional engineer license, gain engineering-related experience in Latin America and save money before applying to the Peace Corps.

Bertok, of Hoffman Estates, is slated to achieve a bachelor's in geography with a minor in French in May 2020. He transferred to SIUE specifically to pursue the Peace Corps Prep program and quickly fell in love with the geography program. Bertok aims to complete a master's in geography at SIUE, and then hopes to serve in the Peace Corps.

“I'm hoping to learn a lot about life outside the U.S., and see the struggles people face in underserved communities and areas like those in West Africa,” Bertok said. “The prep program expands the number of post-graduation opportunities for students, regardless of intention to serve abroad. I found the foreign language skills and field experience requirements to be the most impactful components of the program. Earning this certificate is a small step in the direction of what I want to do with the rest of my life, which is to make a difference in the world.”

“It is incredibly rewarding to see our students exemplify the core values of SIUE in very real way,” said CAS Dean Greg Budzban, PhD. “Our faculty work hard to ensure that our students understand the importance of positive engagement with the global community in the service of others. These students are wonderful ambassadors in this critical mission. I couldn't be prouder of them.”

For more information on the Peace Corps Prep Program, visit siue.edu/study-abroad.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and

only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 13,000.

Photo: (L-R) SIUE Study Abroad Advisor Kim Browning stands alongside Peace Corps Prep certificate recipient Dana Sigman, a School of Engineering (SOE) alumna, and SOE Dean Cem Karacal, PhD. College of Arts and Sciences Dean Greg Budzban, PhD, shakes hands with geography major Brett Bertok. Kim Browning stands alongside.