

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHILE CONSIDERING POST-GRAD SERVICE

I. Take a moment to rate where you are leaning in terms of these possible features of a post-grad program. Fill in the box on each scale that indicates what you would prefer for a post-grad program:

Domestic

International



Urban

Rural



Secular

Faith-based



Service in English

Service making use of a second language



Living on your own

Intentional Community Living
(living in a house with other
volunteers)



One year (or less)

Two years (or more)



II. What are some post-graduate service programs that you are aware of? List any programs here:

III. Here are some questions about you to consider. It may be helpful to write down your answers to these questions and any other thoughts you have.

Is there a particular region of the world or in the US that interests you?

Are you interested in benefitting academically from your post-grad experience (there are many programs such as PLACE Corps, that include a Masters degree in Education)?

Programs vary in regard to financial assistance. What kind of financial assistance would you require? Do you have student loans that you would need to be able to be deferred? (Educational loans are able to be deferred.) Would you like a program that makes you eligible for the AmeriCorps Educational Award (\$5,645) that can be used to pay for educational costs towards graduate school, educational training, and student loans? (Award money is dispersed after successfully completing a term of service for qualified domestic programs.)

Would you need a program to offer you health insurance?

Would you need a program to offer you a modest stipend? Full salary? (For instance, some programs provide about \$100 per month, while programs such as ACE and PLACE amount to \$1,000 per month or more.)

Are you interested in living with other local volunteers or would you rather live on your own (some programs provide increased stipends if one does not live in community).

Would you be comfortable participating in a program's fundraising efforts if asked? (Some programs ask you to raise funds. Typically if a program requires fundraising, it will be \$500 for a domestic program and \$3000 for an international program.) Domestic fundraising is not a common expectation but generally is required for international programs.

Is diversity (in life stage, age, religion, race, nationality) important to you? Or are you comfortable with a program where many people would come from a background like yours?

What is your comfort level with being in areas of service that might be considered dangerous? To what extent would you consider living in a place of political unrest or conflict? How much do you know about the security situations of places you might be considering?

Can you afford to be away from friends and family during your period of service? (Some international programs don't allow for visits home.) Would you like to stay close to home? How would a post-grad experience affect your relationships? With your partner? With your family?

How much work would be needed to gain your family's acceptance of the idea? (If family approval presents a challenge, see the Center for Service and Action's guide entitled "Helping Your Family Get on Board with Your Post-Grad Plans.")

What are your personal values? What sorts of philosophical emphases would you be excited about seeing in a program? Community? Spirituality? Social justice? Simple living? Professionalism?

How large or small would you like the program? (Programs can range from only a couple of volunteers to hundreds of volunteers placed world-wide.)

What types of service interest you? Ideas: Advocacy, Business, Community Organizing, Ecological Work, Healthcare, Homeless Services, Prison Work, Domestic Violence, Family Services, Legal Aid, Youth Work, Parish Ministries, Peace and Justice, Elderly Outreach, Teaching, Refugee Resettlement, Counseling, Volunteer Coordination, Construction, Working with a Specific Population: _____

How will a post-grad experience affect your career plans and goals? What would be some of the benefits and costs in terms of your future?

What are your strongest motivators for considering post-grad service? (Write them down! Review your list.) Do you have a genuine interest to learn? Are you trying to avoid something?

What other options are you considering regarding your time beyond LMU?

How many post-graduate programs are you considering applying to?

Where do you feel you are most needed? What are you being called to do? (An aphorism that helps many students think about this question is: "Go where your greatest gift/joy meets the world's greatest need.") What most excites you? What are your greatest concerns?

IV. Here are some questions about the programs you're considering:

Do you qualify for the program? Does the program require you to be of a certain age, education level, professional-experience level, or service-experience level?

What is the mission or philosophy of the program? For instance, if direct service is important to you, is it fundamental to the program? How well do the values of the program match your personal values? Is the program something that you can support without serious moral reservations?

What does the program require in terms of time? When would it start and end? What happens if there is a need to leave the program early? Is there time off? Is there the possibility to travel (as needs for you to do so arise), as in a family emergency, wedding, or interview for a graduate program, etc.?

Are you familiar with the events and dates that will be important in the application process? When is the orientation (if there is one)?

Where does the program operate? Where are its service placements? Do you have a choice regarding where you are placed? Is there a job description?

Where would you live? Is it an intentional community? How structured is it?

What does the program require spiritually? Are you comfortable with the requirements (retreats, spirituality nights)? Is the spiritual language of the program an obstacle for you?

How much support is offered volunteers? Is there a person on-site/in-country/in the local community who is there to support you? Are there people you would be able to turn to if you found yourself struggling? Would there be a time during your period of service when volunteers gather together, such as retreats? Would the living situation (that is, having housemates) provide key support?

How diverse is the program in terms of the (racial, national, income-oriented, etc.) makeup of its members? How committed to diversity is the program?

What kinds of precautions are taken for the safety of the volunteers? How well is the program equipped to deal with political unrest or conflict (if the site is somewhere where this is a possibility/reality)?

Would the program require you to learn a new language? Use a language that you know other than English? Does it offer language training?

If you were to join the program what would you be asked to cover financially? Would you receive a stipend? Who covers the cost of rent? Bills? Food? Any medical costs, such as health insurance? Any transportation costs, such as transportation to the placement and orientation (and back home), or daily commute to the workplace? Does the program help arrange the deferment of student loans? Do volunteers become eligible for the AmeriCorps Award? Do they typically get it? Do volunteers get an adjustment allowance upon completion of the program?

Would the program require you to be a part of its fundraising efforts?

Are there opportunities right now to attend an informational session about the program? Is there a recruiter you can get in contact with? Is there a chance to speak with former volunteers? Is there a local community you can visit (to “preview” the experience)?

What is the application process like? How long would it take? Does it require letters of recommendation? Personal interviews? Would you need to travel to your interview (or, to a discernment weekend)? Is there a deadline for applications or can you apply any time? How competitive is it to become a volunteer?

Based on work done by the Center for Service and Action, the Catholic Volunteer Network, and the post-graduate international service breakout session at the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice, 2009.

Resources:

- *Loyola Marymount University Center for Service and Action:* <http://www.lmu.edu/studentlife/csa/postgraduate.htm>
- *Catholic Volunteer Network:* <http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org>