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### Fall 2012, UNH and the Peace Corps: Alumna Brittany Hill Is Building Bonds of Culture and Friendship as a Volunteer in Moldova

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#### Recommended Citation

Center for International Education and Maddocks, William, "Fall 2012, UNH and the Peace Corps: Alumna Brittany Hill Is Building Bonds of Culture and Friendship as a Volunteer in Moldova" (2012). *International Educator: the Newsletter of the UNH Global Engagement Editorial Board*. 146.

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# International Educator

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The UNH Center for International Education Newsletter

Fall 2012

## *UNH AND THE PEACE CORPS* ALUMNA BRITTANY HILL IS BUILDING BONDS OF CULTURE AND FRIENDSHIP AS A VOLUNTEER IN MOLDOVA

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While attending the Carsey Institute's Sustainable Microenterprise and Development Program during spring break of 2011, Brittany Hill (Economics major, class of 2011) visited women's savings groups in Ghana. She was excited to see how the collective energy of the group members mobilized hundreds of Ghana Cedis (the local currency), which the women then leveraged into loans and prosperity for their families. After her experience in Ghana, Hill got the international development bug and volunteered for a two-year stint in the Peace Corps. Little did she know that she would have an opportunity to try to organize savings groups among the low-income entrepreneurs of Moldova, a tiny landlocked nation of

3.5 million. The former Soviet Republic, squeezed in between Romania and the Ukraine, ranks at the bottom of most European economic metrics.

When the young volunteer arrived in the village of Nisporeni, Moldova, she was eager to roll up her sleeves and introduce what she had learned about organizing savings groups in Ghana to the struggling microbusinesses of Nisporeni. That was when she learned the first of many lessons that her Peace Corps experience would offer. The reaction of the Moldovan villagers to her description of the savings groups methodology was an immediate and emphatic "Nu" from the District Council, the local government office at which Hill was posted. The long, dark shadow of the Soviet era still influences life in Moldova and, as she discovered, anything that sounds like collectivism or working in groups is strictly taboo among Moldovans.



She soon started working on Plan B, which was focused on the immediate needs of the Nisporeni community. The first project was to deepen the village well—a task accomplished in a short amount of time. Other projects were slow to take off. Adjusting to the slower pace of life after four years as a double economics and finance major at UNH was a challenge for Hill.

"I was really getting kind of bored and not feeling too useful, so I joined a local needlepoint group to pass the time," she admitted.

Soon Hill's skill with the local Romanian language improved. After becoming friendly with her needlepoint group, she learned that the center's director and others had longstanding hopes to open a community dance center. So, the Peace Corps volunteer got to work and was able to write and win a small grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to support the project. The opening of a dance space will occur in a few weeks, and there is an excited buzz in Nisporeni surrounding the new center.

While the tangible improvements Hill has accomplished as a Peace Corps volunteer in Moldova are fulfilling, she said the real rewards are not as concrete.

“What surprised me, what I really have to see as the biggest accomplishment and what I gained the most from, are the friendships and relationships I've formed with people like my host mother and my partner in the organization I work with,” Hill revealed. “The real goal of the Peace Corps is about the relationships young Americans can build with the people you work and live with in a developing country. I've learned so much from these friends, and know I will be in contact with them for many years.”

The UNH relationship with the Peace Corps is long and deep. With more than 670 UNH alumni having joined the Peace Corps since its inception, UNH now ranks 18th among medium-sized colleges and universities whose graduates go on to volunteer for the organization. The bonds of friendship exemplified by the work of dedicated young Americans like Hill go a long way toward the Peace Corps' goal to help promote a better mutual understanding between Americans and the people Peace Corps serves.

~ Contributed by Bill Maddocks, The Carsey Institute

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