

From Wildcat to Coverdell Fellow

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Claire FitzMorris was a University of New Hampshire undergraduate student, studying abroad in Spain, when an excursion to a new location changed her life.

"Morocco was a place that was unfamiliar. It was just a weekend trip, but it caught my attention," FitzMorris says. "In Spain, I felt comfortable, but Morocco challenged me, and that visit got me interested in returning."

As a student in international affairs, FitzMorris dual-majored in linguistics. Her interest in the Middle East and her background in language intersected with her thoughts about Morocco, so she decided to learn a new skill: Arabic. Acquiring the ability to communicate in Arabic led, in part, to FitzMorris's decision to accept a Peace Corps appointment in Morocco upon graduating from UNH.

Becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer was exciting, and FitzMorris spent her years in the Peace Corps teaching English as a second language, first in a small village, and then in a small town. Once she completed her volunteer years, FitzMorris knew both that she wanted to stay in Morocco and that she was ready for city living. Upon closing her Peace Corps service, FitzMorris accepted a full-time position with a language center in Tangier that teaches English as a second language.

But for this Wildcat, working and living abroad was not enough. Soon, FitzMorris began exploring graduate programs that would allow her to further her education. Returned Peace Corps Volunteers are eligible to become [Coverdell Fellows](#) through the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows program, named after the former Peace Corps Director and U.S. Senator. The Coverdell Award provides financial assistance for graduate school, as well as a wealth of professional development opportunities for former volunteers as they launch their careers, including the potential for extending their one-year noncompetitive eligibility status to three full years.

While she was exploring options for programs and institutions that partner with the Coverdell program on the Peace Corps website, FitzMorris discovered UNH's [Global Conflict and Human Security](#) (GCHS) Master of Science program. For FitzMorris, the GCHS master's program was the perfect fit.

"I was drawn to it because I wanted to use my Coverdell award," FitzMorris says. "It also helped that the program is online, since I'm still living in Morocco."

Additionally, she was drawn to the [GCHS program](#) for the academic content.

"I enjoy teaching English, but I want to get back to issues having to do with international affairs. The GCHS program allows me to do that," she says.

As a New Hampshire native and former Wildcat, FitzMorris also felt a sense of familiarity with UNH. She is currently enrolled in the program, using her Coverdell Fellowship to study populations living in conflict-affected areas, with a special emphasis on access to education in the Middle East.

The [GCHS program](#) allows FitzMorris to dovetail her academic undergraduate experience with her Peace Corps experiential learning, creating a strong foundation for her current scholarship as she continues to grow relationships in Morocco and live the mission of the Peace Corps, "to promote world peace and friendship."

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