Ben Cooper will serve humanitarian needs with Peace Corps Peru

Ben Cooper is headed to the Peace Corps.

The senior in environmental engineering from Wyandotte, Michigan, leaves April 27 to spend 27 months in Peru working as a water and sanitation engineer. His first assignment is in Lima.

“I have always had an interest in international experiences, so I think this will be a great place to start my career,” he said.

Cooper said Americans underappreciate the country’s water resources. “Here in the States, we take water for granted. We assume our water should be high quality.”

That’s not what he’s expecting to find in South America.

According to Jorge Izaguirre, program manager for the water, sanitation, and hygiene program at Peace Corps Peru, Peru is three times the size of California and home to about 29 million people of various cultures and backgrounds.

“Yet for all its unique beauty and potential, the majority of Peruvians have limited access to water and suffer from poor sanitary conditions,” Izaguirre said. “Approximately 40 percent of the country’s population live in coastal areas that receive little or no rain; 32 percent of Peruvians do not have a reliable potable water sources; and 24 percent lack latrines or other sources to properly dispose of human waste.”

Cooper, who is president of the MSU Environmental Engineering Society, came to Michigan State to study computer engineering. His study abroad experience in Italy gave him a different world viewpoint, however.

“I returned with a keen interest in humanitarian engineering, and look forward to the Peace Corps helping me find environmental solutions in Peru,” he added.

MSU and the Peace Corps

Spartans have a long tradition of serving in the Peace Corps.

For the 16th consecutive year, MSU has earned a spot on Peace Corps’ Top Volunteer-Producing Colleges and Universities list.

Since the agency was created in 1961, 2,357 alums have served overseas, making Michigan State the No. 6 all-time producer of Peace Corps volunteers.

Currently, 222 Michigan residents are serving in Peace Corps. Overall, 7,228 Michigan residents have served since the agency was created in 1961.

Portions of this story are courtesy of MSUToday.