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**Illinois State University Places on Peace Corps Annual  
Top Graduate School Program Rankings**

CHICAGO, February 26, 2009 – Of the more than 60 schools that participate in the Peace Corps' unique Master's International (MI) graduate program, Illinois State University (ISU) ranked sixth in the nation on this year's list of top colleges and universities partnering with the Peace Corps. The MI program allows students to combine two-year international Peace Corps service with graduate studies, for credit.

With ten Master's International graduate students currently serving in the Peace Corps as of last semester in different locations around the world including Ethiopia, Ukraine and South Africa, ISU has become one of the most robust Peace Corps graduate programs in the country. There are also a number of MI students on campus fulfilling the academic portion of their master's degree at ISU. In addition, ISU is the only university in the state to offer both Peace Corps graduate programs – the Master's International program for currently serving volunteers and the Fellows/USA program open to Volunteers who have completed their service.

The ISU Peace Corps Master's International program has been in place since 1997, with 29 ISU MI alum students. Master's International programs offered by ISU include Applied Economics, Political Science and Sociology, which is the country's only MI program in sociology. The MI program at ISU is housed under the university's Stevenson Center for Community and Economic Development and managed by Beverly A. Beyer, assistant director at the Stevenson Center, who served in Peace Corps in Bulgaria.

Master's International students help the Peace Corps meet a need for volunteers in hard-to-fill assignments. Sixty-two colleges and universities currently participate in the MI program, together offering more than 100 academic programs and 120 different degrees. More than 220 MI students are current Peace Corps volunteers.

The Fellows/USA Peace Corps partner program also offered by ISU is celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year at ISU, with 52 alumni students having completed the program. Currently, six Peace Corps Volunteers are enrolled in this graduate program at ISU. Fellows/USA is reserved exclusively for Peace Corps Volunteers who have satisfactorily completed their service abroad and allows them the lifetime opportunity to attend top graduate programs with the benefit of financial assistance. The Fellows program integrates graduate school with community service, requiring each Fellow to undertake an internship related to his or her degree that helps meet the needs of underserved American communities. More than 140 graduate and doctorate degrees are offered, and overall, 472 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers are now enrolled in

Fellows graduate programs across the country. Since the Fellows/USA program began in 1985, more than 3,000 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers have participated.

“By combining Peace Corps service with graduate studies in two distinct ways, our unique graduate school programs offer tremendous benefits to Peace Corps, the university partners, and the students who enroll,” says acting Peace Corps Director Jody Olsen. “These programs attract dynamic people who are committed to service. Their contributions to the countries in which they carry out their Peace Corps service, as well as to communities across the United States, are significant and continue long after they graduate.”

**A Peace Corps Information Session will be held on the ISU campus on March 18, 2009** for individuals interested in learning more about Peace Corps service, living abroad and the application process. The event will be held at 6:00 p.m. in room 375 of the Student Services Building.

In addition, Feb. 23 to March 2, 2009, is Peace Corps Week. To commemorate the founding of the Peace Corps on March 1, 1961, thousands of former volunteers from across the nation representing the 139 countries in which the Peace Corps has served, will share with U.S. communities their personal experiences living and working in a different culture for two years and work to carry out the important third goal of the Peace Corps – to strengthen Americans’ understanding about the world and its various peoples and cultures. Their unique volunteer service demonstrates the heart of the Peace Corps – the best of America – and it has motivated 195,000 Americans to answer President John F. Kennedy’s call to serve our country and the world.

As the Peace Corps approaches its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, its service legacy continues to promote peace and friendship around the world. Applications to serve in the Peace Corps have increased 16 percent this past year, the largest boost over the past five years. Currently, 7,876 Peace Corps Volunteers are serving in 76 countries. Peace Corps Volunteers must be U.S. citizens and at least 18 years of age. Peace Corps service is a 27-month commitment.

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