

Peace Corps Trainees Arrive at University of California, San Diego

June 30, 1966

A young man with a big handful of blond hair on his head walked quickly toward the glass doors of Urey Hall. He changed his large leather suitcase from his right hand to his left and leaned toward the sign on the door.

"Peace Corps trainees Welcome. Please check in at the south cafeteria."

He turned around, switched his suitcase back to his right hand and headed for Nigeria, by way of the south cafeteria.

This youth and nearly 100 others were coming to the University of California, San Diego campus for a 12-week training course under the direction of the University Extension. They came Wednesday and Thursday and Friday.

They came from French Creek, West Virginia and New York City. They came from Baldwin, Wisconsin and Norco, Louisiana. They came from Pomona, California and Turner, Maine.

The trainees who get through the rigid Peace Corps selection will eventually go to the hot, humid coast of Nigeria, near the middle of the globe.

But now they're busy with address forms, biographical data, bond allotments, insurance forms, loan payment forms, passport applications, statistics summaries, travel reimbursements, visa applications, waivers, medical forms and (ouch) shots.

Over the weekend they'll get their forms completed, be assigned to a trainee team and settle into their housing. Monday the work begins.

Dr. Martin Chamberlain, director of the University Extension and project director, summarized the day of a trainee.

"They will start in the classroom in the morning with cross-cultural work, human relations courses and language study--either with a native Nigerian or in the language laboratory. After lunch the entire group will go to the plot on former Camp Elliot land where the trainees are going to build their own rural training site.

This open-air training is formally labeled "technical training," but it probably won't be very technical. Trainees will erect mud huts, build bridges, fences, pig pens and rabbit hutches; herd animals, dig wells and haul water for the corn, okra and tomatoes they've planted.

Right now the four-acre plot east of U.S. 395 is dusty, rocky and hot. More than a few eucalyptus trees climb up a slope from a dried out creek bed where the trainees hope to find water.

After eight weeks of afternoon training at the village, trainees will trek into Baja California. They'll camp in the mountains and visit small villages and farms, helping the Mexican people with their recently acquired agricultural and construction skills in a dress rehearsal for Nigeria.

Chamberlain, a returnee from Tanzania, Africa, is optimistic about the success of the University Extension's first Peace Corps training project and enthusiastic about making this a permanent training center.

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