

Out of the comfort zone and into the Peace Corps

RYAN LAWLER '03

Ryan Lawler has been tending his vegetable garden during the summer.

That's because he'll soon be involved in the Peace Corps' agriculture program and is required to have some sort of agricultural experience.

"I'll be starting and maintaining a vegetable garden until I ship out to Africa," says the political science graduate from Muscle Shoals.

Lawler's time at Birmingham-Southern might not seem like one leading to a stint in the Peace Corps, but upon closer inspection, it is not surprising that he's been led to a service post.

While in school, Lawler landed a job teaching tennis to underprivileged children.

"The tennis job was great. Most of the kids had never picked up a racket. Seeing their improvement from class to class still pushes me to consider teaching as a profession. However, the association lost a lot of its funding so the tennis program was among those cut. That's when I had to go back to waiting tables," he explains.

Lawler says that he wasn't as involved in service-learning projects and the like while at BSC because he had an off-campus job and because he didn't want to rely on school to be the sole source of his service and leadership activities.



Ryan Lawler

"My junior and senior years, I worked between 20 to 30 hours a week waiting tables. If you don't have to work that's great, but I recommend getting an off-campus job if you do. It's important to keep a realistic perspective of the world and not get sucked too far into the campus bubble. What's great about Birmingham-Southern is that it provides a nice safety net that makes this possible," Lawler points out.

The Peace Corps has always been an option in the back of Lawler's mind.

"As early as high school, I've thought about the Peace Corps as a possibility. But after returning from my Interim trip to the Mexico/U.S. border last January, I realized just how dire the conditions are in developing countries. Even though we were only there for two weeks, it was incredibly hard to leave behind everyone we met. You know that you are going back to a comfortable lifestyle, but they struggle everyday just to get by. That's when the Peace Corps really

entered my mind again.

"I have to thank Dr. Vince Gawronski (assistant professor of political science) for organizing such a unique and eye-opening class. It's important to venture away from the tourist-trap vacations and get out of your comfort zone. That's the best way to learn about other cultures and yourself."

LH

Preparing to bring positive leadership to tomorrow's schools

MARY BETH MALONE '03

Mary Beth Malone had always said that there was no way she would ever be a teacher. Teachers weren't appreciated enough, and the pay wasn't all that good either.

She was going to be a physical therapist. But when she realized the medical field wasn't to her liking, she switched majors until she found one she did like. She chose education at Birmingham-Southern. Today, Mary Beth Malone is a teacher.

"When I finally decided on education as a major, it was easy for me," says Malone, who graduated cum laude in May with a bachelor's degree in collaborative elementary education. "I liked it and went with it.

"No way was I ever going to be a teacher. The pay is low and I always thought teachers weren't appreciated enough. But, in a way, we are appreciated."

Malone knows firsthand that teachers are indeed appreciated. She has been a pre-school and kindergarten teacher at the Joseph Bruno Montessori Academy near Birmingham for five years. She received her Montessori teaching certificate from Seattle University in a yearlong correspondence program and over two summers at the school.

"The Bruno Academy is a great school and has been a wonderful opportunity for me," Malone says. "My experiences there continue to develop and strengthen my teaching skills."

While the Montessori certificate allows her to teach in any Montessori school in the country, Malone's BSC education has prepared her to teach in just about any other classroom setting.

Because federal law supports including special needs students into regular classroom settings, BSC's collaborative elementary education majors participate in a dual certification program that prepares them to teach in any academic setting from kindergarten through sixth grade, including

those classrooms with special needs students. Graduates from the program receive both elementary and special education certificates from the Alabama State Department of Education.

"My BSC education allows me to teach in elementary education classrooms that include special needs students, or in a classroom that is totally devoted to special education," explains Malone, who received the college's Bettye J. Poole Most Outstanding Education Senior Award this spring.

The field experience required of all BSC education majors allowed Malone to get public school teaching experience in Birmingham area elementary schools.

"It broadened my background in elementary education and will help me with my future plans," she says.

And just what are those future plans? Malone says she hopes one day to move from the classroom to the front office.

"I'm going back to get my masters in school administration in a few years," she says. "I believe that I'm good at making decisions, good at communicating with people, and have good ideas. And our education system needs positive leadership.

"The education professors at Birmingham-Southern are wonderful, and I know they will always be there for me and be a resource for me no matter where my career takes me. It's a great program." BW



Mary Beth Malone