Letter to a future IYFD Student:

Congratulations on your decision to spend a year studying at the University of Montana! I believe you’ve made a great choice and you have nothing but many positive experiences coming your way.

I came to Missoula by way of Michigan, freshly graduated from Michigan State University. I was prepared to start learning, excited to start graduate school, and even more ready to head abroad and volunteer. I wish I would have known when I started that I had so much to learn. Not just from the material but also the wonderful minds that I was lucky enough to have surrounding me each time we had class. A warning of the wonderful things to come would have been welcomed but not understood just yet…

Prepare to be challenged. Prepare to think critically. Prepare to change yourself. Prepare to be open to the changes that are going to happen. I can honestly say that through all of the education and experience I have had in my life, nothing has made me think quite as hard about so many different things as being a part of the IYFD program did. Open yourself to the questions and wonderful ambiguity that is about to begin.

Perhaps the most wonderful and challenging part of IYFD program is that it doesn’t end when you leave campus. You get to experience the challenge of international service with the people you grew to trust and care deeply about during your time on campus. You have a body of people to commiserate with when needed, but also bounce ideas off of and to gain perspective at your lowest of lows (which, unfortunately, are sure to come). You get to discuss the weirdness of the reality you’re going to find yourself in, and also experience the reality of others spread throughout the globe.
Most importantly, I believe that the challenges you’re going to face will be much better understood because of the time spent and knowledge gained during your time on campus. Deciphering endless scenarios of international development work and going over the ever present “what if” scenarios while tedious at times, will give you the tools to be able to rise above your peers during your Peace Corps service (if that’s what you choose to do!) and understand in a much more educated way the impact that you’re creating in your new environment.

I wish you the best of luck on this endeavor and remember to embrace the unknown. There are a lot of questions to be answered but IYFD will do its part in helping you understand how to begin the answering. And don’t forget to indulge in the beauty that Missoula has to offer. You’re so lucky to be where you are and inshallah (God willing) this year won’t be one you’re soon forgetting.