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Millennials, take wide-angle view of world

Despite uncertainties, today's graduates can make a difference, **Luan Beaty Mendel** says

Even before the ink was dry on their college diplomas, the Class of 2013 was treated to sobering headlines like this one in *The New York Times*: "Do Millennials Stand a Chance in the Real World?"

At least one commencement speaker in North Texas set out to prove that things in the real world are considerably different than they are generally portrayed in the media. Speaking to graduates last month at Austin College, Carrie Hessler-Radelet, deputy director of the Peace Corps, drew on her experiences around the world to share updates on decreasing poverty levels and increases in life expectancy.

In the past 20 years, Hessler-Radelet informed her audience, the number of people living in extreme poverty around the world has fallen by nearly 40 percent. Globally, she pointed out, that's 700 million fewer people — twice the population of the entire United States — living in extreme poverty than there were in 1993. Said Hessler-Radelet: "We have made more progress in reducing extreme poverty around the world in the last 20 years than in the previous 500 years combined."

Hessler-Radelet's area of expertise is global health, and she shared two measures that show dramatic improvement. Life expectancy around the world is 10 years longer than it was just 50 years ago, and, at the other end of the spectrum, infant mortality rates continue to improve. In 1960, 17 of every 100 children born in developing countries died before their first birthday. Today that number is four of every 100 — still too high, she pointed out, but it's a very positive sign.

Despite improvements on many fronts, Hessler-Radelet knows, better than most, that today's college graduates are entering a world fraught with problems and uncertainties. She urged graduates to view that world

through a wide-angle lens, to see beyond their hometowns, their home states and their home country.

That's a message that resonates with Austin College students because 70 percent of them study abroad, and they are changed forever by their experiences. One of those students introduced deputy director Hessler-Radelet on graduation day. Helen Lowman, Austin College '88, began working with the Peace Corps right out of college, and today she manages programs in 20 countries. Since the Peace Corps was founded, 65 Austin College alumni have served as volunteers all over the world.

Hessler-Radelet left graduates with the message that they are living in "one of the most promising, interesting and positive times in human history." That's a remarkable statement, especially when contrasted with the grim news that greets us almost daily.

It would be easy to dismiss such optimism as graduation-day euphoria that lasts about as long as the bluebonnets by the side of the road. But a growing body of research indicates that a positive outlook is a powerful tool — every bit as powerful as the knowledge and skills students gain during their undergraduate years — and that it can be learned.

At Austin College, a liberal arts education includes a wide-angle view of the world coupled with an optimistic mind-set. That kind of education changes lives and empowers students to look far beyond their comfort zones for opportunities where they can make a difference.

Bianca Williams, Class of 2013, is already putting that lesson into practice. Bianca graduated with a major in art and art history and a minor in media studies, and she will soon join the ranks of Austin College alumni involved in the Peace Corps. As an undergraduate, she studied in Costa Rica for six months, where she interned in two different positions, one bringing native artists and children together, the other working with victims of sexual violence. Bianca says that her experiences abroad taught her that making a difference

Bikes, backcountry and global health

Later this month, *The Dallas Morning News* is hosting a first-of-its-kind evening at the George W. Bush Institute to discuss global health issues.

What: "George and Laura Bush's next chapter — bikes, backcountry pharmacies and global disease."

When: 7 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 19

Panelists:

■ Ambassador James Glassman, founding executive director of the George W. Bush Institute and former undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs.

■ Dr. Eric Bing, senior fellow and director of global health at the George W. Bush Institute and author of the new book *Pharmacy on a Bicycle*.

■ Dr. Doyin Oluwole, executive director of the George W. Bush Institute's Red Ribbon, Pink Ribbon program, a public-private initiative to curb the spread of cervical cancer in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

■ Dr. James Denison, theologian-in-residence, Texas Baptist Convention and president of the Denison Forum on Truth and Culture.

■ William McKenzie, *Dallas Morning News* editorial columnist, will moderate.

How to attend: Contact Rachel Watkins at *The Dallas Morning News* at rwatkins@dallasnews.com or 214-977-8152.

means "putting happiness and laughter back into the lives of others."

In the midst of applying for the Peace Corps, Bianca was diagnosed with lupus, but she said that didn't stop her from pursuing her goal and never will. She turns that question about millennials on its head — does the real world stand a chance against this young woman?



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