State Department 101: Preparing for a Career as a Foreign Service Officer

MARY SWANSON
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, OFFICE FOR SCHOLARSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP ADVISING
• Federal executive department responsible for the international relations of the United States
  • 270+ embassies, consulates and diplomatic missions worldwide
  • 5 career tracks
  • US State Department accept about 2% of applicants each year
• BUT you can set yourself up for success!
Setting Yourself Up for Success

1. Learn a Language
2. Build a resume that incorporates State’s 13 Dimensions
   a. scholarships, fellowships, and internships that can help
3. Choose a Career Track that fits goals and ambitions
4. Be Patient! It is rare that someone becomes a foreign service officer immediately after his or her undergraduate studies!
Knowledge of a second language is not required but increases competitiveness.

61 languages provide applicants a .17 bonus if they pass level 3 or higher of the FSI language telephone test.

Includes: French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish.

8 languages provide applicants an additional bonus if they pass level 2 or higher of the FSI language telephone test.

Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Hindi, Korean, Pashto, Persian, and Urdu.
Developing Language Proficiency

• Study Abroad!
  • CSU has 200+ Education Abroad Options
  • Choose an immersive program/program in a non-traditional location (and apply for a Boren!)

• Apply for a Critical Language Scholarship
  • Fully-funded program sponsored by the US Department of State

• International Post-Bac Opportunities
  • Fulbright, Peace Corps, JET, EPIK, French Ministry of Education, USTA Austria, Cultural Ambassadors Spain
The successful candidate will demonstrate the following dimensions that reflect the skills, abilities, and personal qualities deemed essential to the work of the Foreign Service at the United States Department of State.
13 Dimensions: Building a Resume
Scholarships, Fellowships, Internships

US Department of State Internship Program
- Unpaid program for students with 60 credit hours or more (March 1 deadline)

Pathways Internship Program
- Provides students with the opportunity to work with federal agencies; USAJobs

Presidential Management Fellows Program
- Flagship program for recent graduates with advanced degrees interested in federal service careers

Diplomacy Fellows Program: 9 scholarships and fellowships that allow recipients to bypass the FSOT:
- Boren Scholars/Fellows, Pickering Fellows, Rangel Fellows, Truman Scholars
5 Career Tracks

**Consular**: facilitate adoptions, help evacuate Americans, combat fraud to protect borders, and fight human trafficking.

**Economic**: work with foreign governments on technology, science, economic, trade, energy, and environmental issues.

**Management**: resourceful, creative, action-oriented, “go-to” leaders responsible for embassy operations from real estate to budget.

**Political**: analyze host country political and negotiate with all levels of foreign government officials.

**Public Diplomacy**: engage, inform, and influence opinion leaders, local NGOs, think tanks government officials in order to promote mutual understanding and support for U.S. policy goals.
Choosing a Graduate Degree

Consular

Political

Public Diplomacy

Management

Economic

- MA in International Studies/Affairs/Development
- MA in specific discipline: History, Economics, Sociology, etc.
- MA in Public Administration or Public Policy
- Masters of Business Administration/Finance/International Business
Graduate Programs that specialize in training FSOs

1. **Georgetown University**, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Master of Science in Foreign Service (MSFS)

2. **American University**, School of International Service

3. **The George Washington University**, Elliott School of International Affairs

4. **University of Denver**, Josef Korbel Graduate School of International Studies

5. **Johns Hopkins University**, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies

6. **John F. Kennedy School of Government**, Harvard University

7. **Boston University**, Fredrick S. Pardee School of Global Studies
FSOT—First Step in Application Process

Test is administered 3 times a year in Feb, June, and October

Sign-up for test online

Sections
1. Job Knowledge (multiple choice)
   a) General Knowledge
   b) Career track
2. Written Expression (50 min)
   a) Essay (choose 1 topic from 3)
3. Biographical Information

Passing Score: 154 on multiple choice; 6 on essay
General Knowledge Practice Questions

1. The Department of Defense, National Security Council, and Central Intelligence Agency arose as a result of conclusions drawn by policy makers in the aftermath of:
   a) WWII
   b) the Korean War
   c) Stalin’s Death
   d) the East Berlin Uprising of 1953

2. During the Clinton Administration, the Congressional Black Caucus received credit for which of the foreign policy actions?
   a) Establishing in NYC the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
   b) Blocking the President’s initiative to exclude Haiti from the North America Free Trade Agreement
   c) Pressuring the President to use force to restore the elected President of Haiti
   d) Increasing the priority assigned by the U.S. military to missions other than war
General Knowledge Practice Questions

3. In the United States, there are primarily two levels of law: 1) the Constitution and 2:
   a) Laws enacted by elected legislators
   b) presidential recess decrees
   c) Supreme Court rulings
   d) local initiatives carried out by a majority vote

4. To justify military action without congressional approval, Presidents Harry S. Truman, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton relied on a resolution from which of the following organizations?
   a) Organization of American States
   b) North Atlantic Treaty Organization
   c) United Nations Security Council
   d) European Union
Practice Essay Question

There are two words that politicians take care to avoid: foreign aid. Instead, decision makers often sidestep the issue. Many believe that it is the United States' obligation as the wealthiest nation in the world to help those who are poorer. Others feel that charity begins at home and question whether the people of those countries that receive aid actually benefit directly. Furthermore, they question whether there are any benefits for the United States. In your view, is foreign aid helpful? To whom? Carefully explain the rationale for your position.
Next Steps

1. Personal Assessment
2. Oral Examination
3. Medical and Security Clearances
4. Security Review Panel
5. Placed on the Register
Questions?

CONTACT: MARY.SWANSON@COLOSTATE.EDU