



## AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION

### **AFSA Speakers Bureau Talking Points for Student Audiences**

- The men and women of the U.S. Foreign Service are proud to *serve the American people*, promoting our country's security and prosperity. We are deployed worldwide to protect and serve America's people, interests and values. Our work not only helps to prevent war, but allows us to confront our adversaries and collaborate with our allies with a smarter, better-informed strategy.
- We are forward-deployed, everywhere. The U.S. is the only country that sends its Foreign Service to all but three nations in the world. We thus have a unique ability to gain understanding of the world's events and pass that knowledge back to policymakers in Washington. We also have a unique ability to explain the U.S. and its policies to people worldwide, which is vital to our security in a post-9/11 world.
- We are proud to serve our country, including putting ourselves in harm's way when necessary. 89 percent of current Foreign Service members have served in a hardship posting, and 10 percent of positions are unaccompanied, meaning they are in war zones and you can't take your family with you. If you come to the State Department or USAID in Washington, you will see carved into the walls the names of the hundreds of brave men and women who gave their lives overseas in service of their country.
- The Foreign Service is often a challenging and rewarding career choice for its approximately 13,000 employees. However, it's a difficult process and it's not right for everyone. Of the more than 100,000 applicants for State Department Foreign Service positions between 2001 and 2006, only 2,100

became members of the Foreign Service.

- The Foreign Service application process includes taking the Foreign Service Officer Test. Once you've passed the exam, you must submit two personal narratives before taking the FS Oral Assessment. If/when a candidate has completed the application process, received a top secret security clearance, been medically cleared for worldwide deployment, and passed a final suitability review, they receive a score and are placed on a hiring register for their career tracks.
- Knowing a foreign language is not a requirement to be considered for the Foreign Service, but it certainly doesn't hurt. Proficiency in a language will enhance a candidate's competitiveness on the Register by giving a slight increase in points. Candidates can receive "bump-up points" if they pass a telephone language test after passing the Oral Assessment.
- As part of the application process, the State Department also asks you to select your career track or cone very early in the process, which can be stressful for applicants. It is an important decision and State makes it clear it is not possible to change your mind after submitting your paperwork. While it is possible to change cones later in your career, it is challenging and not guaranteed.
- There are 5 different career tracks within the Foreign Service:
  - a) Consular Officers – adjudicate non-immigrant and immigrant visa applications from foreign publics, including U.S. adoptions; protect the interests and welfare of Americans traveling and resident overseas, including evacuation after a natural disaster.
  - b) Economic Officers – promote U.S. economic, commercial, environmental and scientific interests, including assisting U.S. business sales, negotiating trade agreements, and encouraging climate change cooperation.
  - c) Management Officers – manage the operations of the Embassy, including personnel, budgets, real estate, and housing; ensure compliance with local laws.
  - d) Political Officers – promote U.S. political interests, including human rights and democratic governance, to host government; report on political developments.
  - e) Public Diplomacy Officers – inform foreign publics of U.S. activities and

positions in their countries, including through social media; liaison with local media; promotion of American culture; advise students on studying in the U.S.

- The Foreign Service isn't just the State Department. Our colleagues at the U.S. Agency for International Development deliver food aid and disaster assistance while advancing democracy around the world. The Foreign Commercial Service promotes American businesses and exports abroad, while the Foreign Agricultural Service develops markets for U.S. agricultural products and works on food security. The Broadcasting Board of Governors brings America's values right to your radio or wireless device, without the interference of local propaganda.
- Anyone applying to be in the Foreign Service must be willing to accept the following three commitments of Foreign Service work: flexibility in assignments, public support of U.S. Government policies, and worldwide availability.
- New candidates are placed at the top of the register. Candidates who are not appointed within 18 months are removed from the register. Candidates may decline an offer, but turning down a second offer removes them from the register. Candidates with low enough scores can simply drop off the register. This is a competitive process and less than 2% of those who take the written exam enter as Foreign Service officers.
- New FSOs begin their careers with a six-week orientation program (known as the A-100 course). The focus of the orientation is introducing new employees to the structure and functions of the State Department and its role in the development and implementation of U.S. foreign policy. At the end of orientation, FSOs receive their first assignments which will determine the type of specialized training that follows. Newly hired FSOs can expect to spend from three months to one year in training in Washington before departing for their first overseas assignment.
- You will join the Foreign Service as a commissioned officer. Once you are tenured, you will compete for promotions based on your annual employee evaluation.
- Despite picking your cone early on, FSOs can bid on out-of-cone assignments. In fact, the first two assignments are frequently outside your chosen field

and all FSOs do at least one year of consular work. However, picking the right cone is still important and the more senior you become, the less likely it will be that you will obtain an out-of-cone assignment. In addition, promotion panels look primarily at your work in your cone, as this is where presumably your best work is done.

- Twice a year list of jobs opening up for the next assignment cycle are published. One year before the end of your current assignment, you will review the list of available jobs and compile your “bid list” for your onward assignment. You will take into account several factors: is the job at your grade level, is it in your cone, and is the location one where you will require language training, or is schooling is available for your children, or employment opportunities for your spouse, for example. Then you begin the lobbying process, contacting the posts to make your case. Your corridor reputation is important as people contact your current or past supervisors and your colleagues about your performance.
- As a U.S. diplomat, your spouse/partner (including same-sex spouses), children, and in some cases, dependent parents may travel with you to your post, except to those locations designated “unaccompanied” or in cases where there is imminent danger or civil unrest. As a member of the Foreign Service, you and your family can expect government-paid housing, and at many posts, there are American-curriculum and/or international schools that your children may attend.
- The Department of State tries to assign the tandem couple to the same location. However, that is not always possible. While assignment to the same location works out in many instances, a tandem couple must also be prepared to have separate assignments.
- What I’ve told you so far applies to Foreign Service officers, but there is a separate career track in the Foreign Service – that of the Foreign Service specialist. All the same benefits and general regulations apply to specialists but the hiring process is quite different.
- So who are specialists? They are members of the Foreign Service system who provide important technical, support or administrative services in 19 career categories, including Diplomatic Security Agents, Doctors and Physician Assistants, Psychiatrists, Information Management Specialists, Office

Management Specialists, Human Resource Specialists, Librarians and English Language Officers.

- Specialist jobs are advertised via a general vacancy announcement via [usajobs.gov](https://usajobs.gov) and [state.gov](https://state.gov). Rather than an exam process, specialist positions ask you to send an application for a specific position. After the initial review stage, your application goes before a panel. If you pass the panel's examination, you will engage in an oral assessment that consists of a structured interview, writing exercise, and an exit interview. If you pass these stages, you then enter the clearance phase, a suitability review panel, and finally on to the register of cleared candidates.
- The State Department has a great website that can take you through all these steps – [careers.state.gov](https://careers.state.gov). I encourage you to visit it. You will learn everything you need about Foreign Service officer and specialist career tracks.
- Let me take this opportunity to remind all of you that while we have been sharing views, 8,000 Foreign Service officers and specialists are on watch at some 265 American Embassies and Consulates all over the world. They are our first line of defense. I hope you will think of them as they perform their duties often in dangerous and difficult places. I also hope you will urge your Senators and Representatives to also think of them and to provide the moral and financial support necessary for a successful foreign policy. Thank you.