



Study Guide for the 2024 National High School Essay Contest

THE FUTURE OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE



Contest Deadline: April 1, 2024

Awards

First Place

- Educational Voyage with Semester at Sea
- Washington, DC visit for student and family to meet with State Department and AFSA leadership
- Cash prize of \$2,500

Second Place

- Scholarship to attend the National Student Leadership Conference's International Diplomacy Program
- Cash prize of \$1,250

Honorable Mentions

- Certificate of achievement



2023 Essay Contest Winner Justin Ahn and Secretary of State Antony Blinken

Introduction

Since 1999, AFSA has invited students in grades 9 through 12 to explore critical issues and submit essays that address the Foreign Service and the role that diplomacy plays in advancing U.S. national security and economic prosperity.

The 2024 essay topic challenges students to identify what they believe will be the biggest challenge to face the Foreign Service in the future. Their essay will describe this challenge and clearly define how American diplomats can help mitigate it.

In this guide AFSA will provide the following:

- 1.** A breakdown of this year's prompt and its relevant contextual background (p.4)
- 2.** An overview of American diplomacy, including what it aims to achieve, the various tools used by U.S. Foreign Service officers, the different forms of diplomacy that exist, and the skills (p.5)
- 3.** A brief history of the American Foreign Service and its agencies (p.8)
- 4.** A list of useful resources for students to explore (p.11)
- 5.** The contest's rules and guidelines (p.13)

2024 Essay Contest Topic

This year, AFSA celebrates the 100th anniversary of the United States Foreign Service. Over the last century, our diplomats and development professionals have been involved in groundbreaking events in history – decisions on war and peace, supporting human rights and freedom, creating joint prosperity, reacting to natural disasters and pandemics and much more. As AFSA looks back on this century-long history, we invite you to join us in also looking ahead to the future. This year students are asked to explore how diplomats can continue to evolve their craft to meet the needs of an ever-changing world that brings fresh challenges and opportunities to the global community and America’s place in it.



Over the past 100 years the Foreign Service has faced a multitude of challenges such as world war, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, humanitarian disasters, global pandemics, and economic crises. In a 1,000-1,500-word essay please identify what you believe will be the biggest challenge to face the Foreign Service in the future. The essay will describe this challenge and clearly define how American diplomats can help mitigate it.

Successful essays will use past or current diplomatic efforts to support what you believe to be the best course of action to tackle this obstacle.

With this prompt we want students to think about the role the United States Foreign Service has in an ever-changing global landscape. By asking students to identify the biggest challenge that the Foreign Service is likely to face in the future, the topic prompts a forward-looking perspective. It encourages individuals to analyze current global trends and project how these trends may shape the diplomatic landscape in the coming years.

The prompt underscores the importance of diplomacy in addressing global challenges. It acknowledges that diplomats play a crucial role in decisions on war and peace, supporting human rights, responding to disasters, and promoting joint prosperity. We want students to explore the ways that diplomats can evolve their ideas and approaches to diplomacy to enhance the effectiveness of the Foreign Service while also acknowledging the potential obstacles that diplomats may face in addresses these challenges.

As students begin this essay, they should keep in mind that there is a myriad of challenges that could impact the Foreign Service in the future. Consider the historical context of the Foreign Service and its involvement in various global events over the past century. Connect the identified challenge to historical trends and demonstrate an understanding of how the Foreign Service has adapted to changing circumstances in the past. Diplomacy has evolved and will continue to evolve in the face of new challenges. Students should consider diplomatic, economic, political, and technological approaches, and ensure that their proposals are feasible and realistic.

What is Diplomacy?

Diplomacy is a fundamental means by which a country's foreign policy is implemented. In the United States, diplomatic efforts are led by the U.S. Department of State, whose [mission](#) it is to "protect and promote U.S. security, prosperity, and democratic values and shape an international environment in which all Americans can thrive."

The policies of the State Department tend to fall into five main categories:

1. Protecting the United States and American citizens
2. Advancing democracy
3. Defending human rights
4. Encouraging economic growth and prosperity
5. Promoting international understanding of American values and policies

Diplomacy is put into practice by those working at embassies abroad — many of whom are Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) or Specialists, a professional career track. Members of the Foreign Service at the U.S. Department of State are assigned to one of five "cones": consular, economic, management, political or public diplomacy. In *Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work*, AFSA provides snapshots of the important work each of these positions plays in embassies around the world:

1. **Consular Officers** serve as the public face of the United States in an embassy, determining which foreign nationals should — and should not — receive visas for legitimate travel to the United States for business, tourism or education. They also provide support to American citizens traveling or living abroad.
2. **Economic Officers** help anticipate economic trends and new opportunities for U.S. companies abroad. Their portfolio includes environment, science, technology, health and labor issues.
3. **Management Officers** enable embassies to function, handling human resources, budget and real estate issues.
4. **Political Officers** are subject matter experts who build relationships with local governments, media, non-governmental organizations and think tanks. They report back on events happening in the country and provide analysis of how developments might impact U.S. policy objectives.
5. **Public Diplomacy Officers** serve as the public relations team, delivering the story of the United States to people around the world. They must have awareness of all aspects of the embassy's work and be prepared to advise on the best way to message it to local media, officials, educators and people.

The professionals of the U.S. Foreign Service have developed a concrete set of tools that help them pursue U.S. policy objectives. The National Museum of American Diplomacy at the U.S. Department of State highlights some specific tools with definitions from the [Diplomatic Dictionary](#):

1. **Bilateral**: discussions, negotiations or treaties are between a sovereign state and one other entity, either another sovereign state or an international organization. The relationship between two nations is referred to as a bilateral relationship.
2. **Multilateral**: Involving more than two nations. International organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe are multilateral in nature.
3. **Negotiation**: Discussion between the representatives of two or more parties intended to reach a compromise on a disputed topic of interest. Governmental negotiations can be bilateral (between two states or between a state and a non-state entity, such as an international organization or nongovernmental organization) or multilateral.
4. **Treaty**: An agreement or arrangement made by negotiation; a contract in writing between two or more political authorities, such as sovereign states, formally signed by authorized representatives and usually approved by the legislature of the state.
5. **Convention**: An assembly of persons who meet for a common purpose; especially a meeting of delegates for the purpose of formulating a written agreement on specific issues. The word also refers to the written agreement itself.

The National Museum of American Diplomacy's [Diplomatic Dictionary](#) also outlines the difference between formal and informal diplomacy, which play different roles in achieving America's diplomatic objectives:

1. **Formal diplomacy**: This is government-to-government diplomacy – also called Track I Diplomacy – that goes through formal, traditional channels of communication to communicate with foreign governments (written documents, meetings, summits, diplomatic visits, etc). This type of diplomacy is conducted by diplomats of one nation with diplomats and other officials of another nation or international organization.
2. **Informal diplomacy**: Informal diplomacy includes Public Diplomacy which involves government-to-people diplomacy and reaching out to non-executive branch officials and the broader public, particularly opinion-shapers, in foreign countries, explaining both foreign policy and the national context out of which that policy arises. Public Diplomacy is carried out by both diplomats and, under their programs and auspices, non-officials such as academic scholars, journalists, experts in various fields, members of non-governmental organizations, public figures such as state and local government officials, and social activists.

What do diplomats need in order to be successful? The National Museum of American Diplomacy highlights the [nine skills](#) that diplomats must have to be effective in carrying out their duties. These skills have helped diplomats and FSOs throughout history carry out successful efforts to prevent conflict, build peace, and ensure prosperity. The skills of diplomacy are:

Informational Skills are how a diplomat studies and begins to think about how to approach a situation or crisis:

1. **Analysis:** Study and think critically about situations.
2. **Awareness:** Respect different cultures and customs. Recognize when situations and circumstances are changing and adapt to meet that change. Be aware of what they do not know or understand.
3. **Communication:** Articulate their position and listen openly to others' positions. Determine where interests overlap. Confirm positions and use clear and appropriate language to avoid misunderstandings.

Relational Skills are how a diplomat works with their team and their counterparts:

4. **Leadership:** Take action and make decisions using what information is available. Keep the big picture in mind. Take steps to improve their country or organization's overall position and fill in knowledge gaps.
5. **Collaboration:** Incorporate the ideas of others and find common ground. Take cues from others when formulating responses and making proposals.
6. **Composure:** Work with others in a professional manner and calmly deal with the range of attitudes and behaviors exhibited by counterparts, difficult partners, and adversaries.

Operational Skills are how a diplomat executes a plan:

7. **Management:** Use the skills and strengths of their team members. Know what tools and resources are available to help meet their country or organization's goals and agenda.
8. **Innovation:** Formulate alternatives and be flexible in their responses to unanticipated circumstances.
9. **Advocacy:** Speak on behalf of the country or organization which they represent and pursue the goals and missions of that organization. Advocacy is also speaking up for and with others who may not have their voices heard.

For more insights into the work of the U.S. Department of State, be sure to explore the National Museum of American Diplomacy at <https://diplomacy.state.gov/>.

Brief History of the U.S. Foreign Service and its Agencies

The U.S. State Department was founded in 1789 and has since carried out several reorganizations and created new bureaus to address evolving diplomatic challenges. More than 230 years later, the State Department and the entire U.S. Foreign Service continues to grow and develop through changing global landscapes. Below is a brief timeline of important dates and events in the history of the State Department:

Foundations and America's Expansionist Years (1775-1867):

1. 1781: Department of Foreign Affairs begins under the Articles of Confederation.
2. 1789: James Madison proposes a Department of Foreign Affairs, later renamed the Department of State in 1789.
3. 1803-1823: Plays a role in westward expansion.
4. 1833-1836: Reorganized with the introduction of bureaus.
5. 1853: Authorizes the position of Assistant Secretary of State.
6. 1860: Overseas missions increase to 33.

Rise to World Power (1867-1913):

1. 1872: Consular Service problems lead to an investigation that found corruption and fraud.
2. 1893: U.S. upgraded its envoys, who were known as "ministers" to the rank of "ambassador."
3. 1898: Spanish-American War elevates the U.S. to a global power.
4. 1905: President Roosevelt introduces competitive exams and merit promotions for all diplomatic and consular positions.
5. 1909: The Department was reorganized to address policy changes and increase in U.S. international commitments. The bureau system was expanded to organize diplomacy by distinct geographic regions—Western Europe, the Near East, the Far East, and Latin America.

Challenge of Global Conflict and Institutional Reform (1913-1945):

1. 1917: U.S. enters World War I. The fundamental shift in foreign policy led to the growth of the foreign services and an increase in public attention and praise.
2. 1924: Rogers Act reforms the foreign services by establishing a career organization based on competitive examination and merit promotion. Also, the Act unified the Diplomatic and Consular Services by creating a single organization performing both functions.
3. 1932-1934: The size of the Foreign Service was reduced by 10% due to the effects of the Great Depression
4. 1941-1945: When the U.S. entered WWII, the size of the Department grew at an unprecedented rate and by 1945 its staff had more than tripled (3,767 employees).
5. 1944: Department Order 1301 concentrated similar functions in the same office and related offices under a senior official, either the Under Secretary or one of six Assistant Secretaries and created several new entities.

The Cold War and the Collision of Superpowers (1945-1981):

1. 1946: Foreign Service Act of 1946 aims to strengthen and expand the Foreign Service.
2. 1950: State Department reviews U.S. strategic and military policy.
3. 1969-1971: President Johnson pushes for diversity in the Department.
4. 1976: President Carter's term emphasizes the foreign service and human rights.

End of the Cold War and New Global Problems (1981-1992):

1. 1981-1988: The State Department faced financial strains, with budget cuts under the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act exacerbating its worst modern budget crisis.
2. Reagan's administration prioritized Soviet and European diplomacy amid strained relations, led by Secretary Schultz.
3. Despite the Foreign Service Act, Reagan appointed both political and Foreign Service ambassadors, sparking controversy.
4. 1980s Challenges Abroad: U.S. embassies experienced violence and spying, with a significant death toll and attacks such as the 1983 Beirut embassy bombing. A \$1-billion program addressed security concerns globally.
5. 1989-1992: The State Department tackled new global challenges:
 - a. 1989: The U.S. condemned the Tiananmen Square crackdown in China.
 - b. The African Bureau fought apartheid in South Africa and contributed to ending the proxy war in Angola.
 - c. 1990-1991: The First Gulf War saw U.S.-led diplomacy and "Operation Desert Storm" expelling Iraqi forces from Kuwait in a 100-hour land war."

For more information on the history of the State Department and the Foreign Service, visit the Office of the Historian's website at: <https://history.state.gov/>.

The U.S. Foreign Service is composed of six agencies:



The Department of State protects and promotes U.S. security, prosperity, and democratic values and shape an international environment in which all Americans can thrive.



The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is the world's premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results. USAID's work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity, demonstrates American generosity, and promotes a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience.



The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) links U.S. agriculture to the world to enhance export opportunities and global food security.



The Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration and serves American interests abroad by offering companies a full range of expertise in international trade.



The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) protects the health and value of America's agricultural and natural resources because healthy and profitable American agriculture provides food and clothing for countless people worldwide and is a key pillar of our economy.



The U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) aims to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy.

Useful Resources

Here are some additional resources that might be helpful as you start your research. Also, keep an eye on the AFSA social media accounts (@afsatweets on Twitter, @afsagram on Instagram, and @afsapage on Facebook) to view resources that might provide further insights. Be sure to check out [AFSA's website](#) as well for more resources and information of the U.S. Foreign Service and diplomacy.

Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work

This AFSA publication shows you what it is like to work in an embassy through profiles of actual members of the Foreign Service and their experiences around the world.

The Foreign Service Journal

This journal covers foreign affairs from an insider's perspective, providing thought-provoking articles on international issues, the practice of diplomacy, and the U.S. Foreign Service.

The National Museum of American Diplomacy

NMAD provides a variety of useful resources including online [exhibits](#) and [educational resources](#). Be sure to check out the museum's [historical diplomacy simulation program](#) to learn more about the practice of diplomacy and the contributions of the State Department and FSOs in the context of a historical event.

The Office of the Historian

To learn more about the history of the U.S. Foreign Service and American foreign policy visit the Office of the Historian's website. Their website includes useful [educational resources](#) and reading material as well as a detailed [history of the State Department](#).

The Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training

ADST has the world's largest collection of U.S. diplomatic oral histories, as well as podcasts, videos, books, publications, and a "Moments in U.S. Diplomatic History" online series.

The American Academy of Diplomacy

AAD has a useful collection of materials to learn more about the practice of diplomacy, including various [publications](#) and [podcasts](#).

United States Institute of Peace

USIP's website can provide further information on peacebuilding approaches and tools and examples of international partnerships on peacebuilding initiatives around the world.

Council on Foreign Relations

CFR's [Academics Program](#) offers a wide variety of resources to learn more about U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy. Their website offers reports, publications, and discussions on global affairs, as well as podcasts and webinars.

The MLA Style Center

Per the essay contest rules, your citations and bibliography should follow the MLA Style. The Modern Language Association's website has a quick guide to works cited, guidance on using notes, and sample papers using MLA Style. This study guide follows MLA guidelines on parenthetical citations, end notes, and bibliographies.

Contest Rules

Length

Your essay should be at least 1,000 words but should not exceed 1,500 words (word count does not apply to the list of sources). The word count must be included on the document you submit.

Content and Judging

Submissions will be judged on the quality of analysis, quality of research, and form, style and mechanics. Successful entries will answer all aspects of the prompt and demonstrate an understanding of the role of the Foreign Service. Essays will be evaluated over several rounds of judging until a winner, runner-up, and eight honorable mentions are determined. All decisions of the judges are final.

Sources

Standards of content and style from the current edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers will be expected for (1) documentation of sources in the text of your essay; (2) the format of the list of works cited; and (3) margins and indentation. A bibliography following the MLA Handbook must be included. Essays should use a variety of sources—academic journals, news magazines, newspapers, books, government documents, publications from research organizations. At least three of the cited materials should be primary sources (a document, speech, or other sort of evidence written, created or otherwise produced during the time under study). General encyclopedias, including Wikipedia, are not acceptable as sources. Essays citing general encyclopedias in notes or bibliography will be disqualified. Websites should not be the only source of information for your essay; when you do use online sources, they must be properly cited.

Submission

1. Fill out the registration form. All fields on the online form are required, including uploading a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) file of your original work with a title, in English, and should include a comprehensive list of sources consulted. Entries must be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman or an equivalent font with a one-inch margin on all sides of the page.
2. Teacher or Sponsor: Student registration forms must have a teacher or sponsor name. That person may review the submitted essay and act as the key contact between participants and AFSA. It is to the student's advantage to have a coordinator review the essay to make sure it is complete, contains all the necessary forms, is free from typographical and grammatical errors, and addresses the topic.
3. **Do not place your last name or your school's name on any of the pages of the essay. Only the registration form should include this information.**
4. Faxed submissions will not be accepted.
5. Your essay will be disqualified if it does not meet the requirements or is submitted after the submission date of 11:59 p.m. EDT on April 1, 2024.

Eligibility

Students whose parents are not in the Foreign Service are eligible to participate if they are in grades nine through twelve in any of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. territories, or if they are U.S. citizens/ lawful permanent residents attending high school overseas. Students may be attending a public, private, or parochial school. Entries from home-schooled students are also accepted. Previous first-place winners and immediate relatives of directors or staff of the AFSA, the U.S. Institute of Peace, Semester at Sea, or National Student Leadership Conference are not eligible to participate. Previous honorable mention designees are eligible to enter.

Prizes

\$2,500 to the writer of the winning essay, in addition to an all-expense-paid trip to the nation's capital from anywhere in the United States for the winner and his or her parents, as well as an all-expense paid educational voyage courtesy of Semester at Sea. The runner-up receives \$1,250 and full tuition to attend a summer session of National Student Leadership Conference's International Diplomacy program. Your essay will become the property of the American Foreign Service Association once it is submitted and will not be returned.

Thank you for your essay submission and good luck!

About the Sponsors



The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), established in 1924, is the professional association and labor union of the United States Foreign Service. With close to 17,000 dues-paying members, AFSA represents more than 31,000 active and retired Foreign Service employees of the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), Foreign Commercial Service (FCS), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). Learn

more at www.afsa.org.



Semester at Sea is a multiple country study abroad program open to students of all majors emphasizing comparative academic examination, hands-on field experiences, and meaningful engagement in the global community. A wide variety of coursework from 20-25 disciplines is integrated with relevant field studies in up to a dozen countries, allowing for a comparative study abroad experience that is truly global. Colorado State University is the program's academic partner.

Learn more at www.semesteratsea.org.



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