



**Professional Education for a Professional Foreign Service**  
AFSA 2014 QDDR Paper

## Professional Education for a Professional Foreign Service

### Summary and Recommendations

The United States has a diplomatic service composed of many capable Foreign Service Officers and Specialists. These personnel are served by commendable training programs provided largely through the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and the Diplomatic Security Training Center (DSTC). What the Foreign Service lacks, and what would make it a much more professional, effective career path, is an institutionalized professional education and training continuum that expands beyond random, just-in-time, short term skills training. Such foundational and continuing education is important not only for personal development; it is critical to making the Department of State and its Foreign Service capable executors of our national foreign policy interests. Professional education for diplomats therefore should not be a peripheral concern for the Department, FSI, and the Foreign Service; such education is a pre-requisite for the national interest.

This paper was drafted by a group of active duty and retired FSOs at the request of the American Foreign Service Association, and approved by AFSA's Governing Board as another in its series of thought papers aimed at shaping the second QDDR. It contains a number of specific recommendations that are complementary to, and build on, the recent FSI paper "**FSI Forward: A Strategic Framework.**" Our recommendations are divided into three categories: (1) professional education; (2) short-term training; and (3) aligning career development and professional education and training. In brief, these are:

#### 1. Professional Education:

- Educate, starting with A-100: Continue the transformation of the A-100 course and the equivalent entry course for Specialists from the "bureaucratic orientation model" to a "professional formation model" that both orients and gives Entry Level Officers and Specialists a firm grounding in the basics of diplomacy and diplomatic skills.
- Connect officers and specialists: Beginning with the A-100 course and the equivalent entry courses for Specialists, tailor the training of Foreign Service Officers and Foreign Service Specialists for more overlap so the two groups learn from one another and develop a greater appreciation of their mutually-supporting roles.
- Develop and implement an expanded mid-level leadership course: Develop the next generation of leaders with a revised, expanded curriculum that illustrates the relationship between foreign policy and its institutional and operational infrastructure, and integrates policy, management, and know-how while developing character and leadership traits required at the senior level.
- Enlist Foreign Service professionals to help guide FSI: Introduce innovative measures to attract and assign more FSOs and FSSs to FSI as administrators and teachers to improve education and training.

- Recruit Master Practitioners: Identify and recruit “Master Practitioners,” skilled teachers to provide professionally-relevant instruction. The title of “Master Practitioner” should be a highly selective honor earned by “the very best” of the profession.
- Grant degrees: Commit to becoming an accredited, degree-granting institution within five years, part of a move to ensure recognition of FSI's new focus on “education” as well as training.

## **2. Short-term training:**

- Give supervisors more extensive tools needed to become leaders: Supervisory courses at the Foreign Service Institute must become more rooted in the reality of diplomatic service in the field. They need to be more in-depth, and more valuable to their participants, with effective follow-on.
- Tailor leadership training to students' different learning styles and needs: Focus increasingly on executive-level functions, including awareness of legal parameters, the role of media and technology, domestic and interagency dynamics, and systemic organizational tools needed to function at the senior levels of government and policy-making, for both specialists and officers.
- Make language learning more relevant to students and more valuable to posts:
  - (1) Hire non-native instructors with professional experience in language teaching to bridge current gaps.
  - (2) Give instructors the flexibility to recognize and teach to differing language learning styles.
- Build a curriculum of important diplomatic case studies: Design a "real world" curriculum, taught by Master Practitioners, that looks at success stories and failures, primarily of U.S. and multinational diplomacy since 1900.

## **3. Alignment of career development and professional education and training:**

- Accredit Foreign Service personnel: Transform the tenuring process into a more meaningful act of professional commitment by requiring entry-level officers and specialists to pass a professional readiness exam and interview.
- Assign personnel short-term or TDY to Washington before their first overseas posting: New personnel should experience the Washington side of the Foreign Service profession early in their careers.
- Move beyond 2/2's for hard language training: Examine limitations on students attaining only “limited working proficiency” (S2/R2) and work to promote greater competency for meaningful overseas engagement by officers and specialists across the board.

## **Introduction**

Among the world's diplomatic services, the Foreign Service of the United States is unique in terms of its minimal investment in its most important resource: human capital. Other countries commit their diplomats to a career of continuing education, often at the most prestigious schools of international affairs -- to attain full command of diplomatic practice. Yet it is distinctly possible for an American Foreign Service Officer or Specialist to have a full career without acquiring fundamental knowledge about the profession of diplomacy.

New Foreign Service Officers and Specialists are broadly recruited-- in line with the 1980 Foreign Service Act's directive that members of the Foreign Service be representative of the American people -- and their list of university majors is diverse. Many have had overseas experience, including military service, but many lack a foundation in the theory, history, and practice of diplomacy. They also lack operational knowledge of the Department of State, USAID, FAS, FCS, the Foreign Service, and national security decisionmaking. Some, but by no means all, bring leadership or management experience.

The Department does not systematically provide FS personnel with individualized counseling or guidance from master practitioners. Instead, Foreign Service personnel are told upon selection that they are the "managers of their own careers." Yet only a select few benefit from senior officers who ensure they receive high visibility assignments in Washington -- the assignments that lead to advancement in responsibility and rank. FSI's "diplomacy curriculum" has improved over the years and includes orientation courses, language/area studies, security, IT, and some cone/specialty instruction, but it still leaves often leaves personnel oblivious to the shaping environment of history, policy, ethics, law, and leadership.

The result: As a nation, we rely on professionals who have forged true diplomatic skills through a series of assignments that serve as apprenticeships in narrow, specialized functions. This system leaves the U.S. sadly lagging global competitors. It also has important consequences for our national security interests.

We can compensate in part today through our comparatively easy access in foreign capitals. However that premium status may in part reflect more our residual political, economic, and military power than innate U.S. diplomatic skills. If American economic and military power becomes less predominant in a more competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century, this privilege may wane. Regardless, over time, American diplomacy will shoulder heavier burdens with greater demands on the Foreign Service. To ensure we retain influence abroad as state actor, the United States should institute a career-long, focused professional education and certification process for its corps of dedicated diplomatic personnel.

The development of an effective Foreign Service cannot be left to chance. We need to institutionalize professional education and formation. Random, just-in-time, short-term training alone will not meet the needs of a complex and unpredictable future. We must strengthen the Foreign Service personnel system so that it manages talent more effectively. Finally, a first-class Foreign Service cannot emerge without a more robust and purposeful Foreign Service Institute that truly educates and molds, rather than merely "trains" its personnel. We have read the FSI QDDR paper and support FSI's goals of improving the training offered to the FS and employees of the State Department. We hope to work with FSI to improve, expand, and implement our vision for a better, more fully educated community of foreign affairs practitioners.

## Education and Training for Professional Careers in Diplomacy

Like other professions and our armed services and intelligence services, the Foreign Service must promote lifelong learning and transition from ad hoc mentoring to structured institutional development through education. One hallmark of a profession is the requirement that its practitioners possess a common body of knowledge, often abstract, gained through education, training, and experience that they use to achieve the goals of the profession. In the case of an American diplomat, the profession's goals are the nation's foreign policy goals. American diplomats need the capacity to act with the knowledge, tact, and integrity of a representative of the United States to attain those objectives. For a diplomat to possess and maintain that body of professional knowledge, s/he must receive not only *skills training*, but career-long formal *professional education* and *purposeful formation* as well. It is the education that provides a common foundation for all members of the Service and enables the Service to become more than the sum of its parts. All new FS hires must receive it, and it must be enriched and renewed as a career progresses.

Entering Foreign Service personnel should learn about the institution of diplomacy: the Vienna conventions; treaties, alliances, negotiations, and national negotiating styles; agreements; and, of course, Diplomacy as it relates to American history, constitution, and practices. All personnel need to understand the United Nations and other multilateral institutions and roles, and many other aspects of diplomatic law and practice. Students also should be taught about strategy, grand strategy, public diplomacy, coercive diplomacy, foreign assistance programs, and the roles and authorities of the National Security Council and other actors in national security decisionmaking.

Personnel who may move into the most senior ranks will need seasoning of skills to operate in a complex multi-agency hierarchy requiring executive guidance. These senior diplomats should examine case studies of conflict management, peace initiatives, legal frameworks, negotiations, and analyze recent experience in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries, looking at successes and failures across the range of our engagements (i.e. specialists and officers). As an institution, we must begin capturing and learning from diplomatic history. We must recognize that leadership training needs evolve as careers progress. Senior officers need to be able to make the transition from department or section head to Office Director to executive decisionmaker, able to weigh not just a host-country reaction or the home bureau's concern, but to anticipate the second- and third-order effects of a decision at home and abroad. Our officers and specialists often need broader exposure to group leadership, public relations, legal and policy concerns, and community involvement. We must put a premium on mastering cross-cultural communication and negotiation skills, which are required by every member of the service to perform effectively.

This project will be complex, expensive, and time consuming, but the result will be a more capable, results-oriented, and more professional Foreign Service that better serves U.S. interests in an increasingly complex and multipolar world. To attain this vision, the Foreign Service Institute must evolve. It must update and strengthen its approach to the formation, development, and talent management of the Foreign Service. It must provide long-term education in addition to shorter-term training. In short, it must become a National Foreign Affairs University capable of graduating competent interagency practitioners of diplomacy who can help the President shape long-term strategy.

## **Foreign Service Professional Education and Formation: Recommendations**

Recommendation #1 – Educate, starting with A-100: Building on current initiatives, continue the transformation of the A-100 course and the equivalent courses for Specialists from the “bureaucratic orientation model” used since the 1970’s to a “professional formation model” that not only “orients” but also gives Entry-Level Officers and Specialists a firm grounding in the basics of diplomacy and diplomatic service, integrating introductions to all the professional subjects mentioned above. We recognize these courses have evolved – we are proposing that they evolve further.

Recommendation #2 – Connect officers and specialists: Beginning with the A-100 course, tailor the training of Foreign Service Officers and Foreign Service Specialists for more overlap. From the two groups should emerge a single corps of dedicated professionals who share a common understanding of their mission and obligation to the nation.

Recommendation #3 – Develop and implement a mid-level leadership course: Develop a required Mid-level Diplomatic Management and Leadership course for all those who aspire to senior levels. This would be different from the current required one-week leadership course – it would require more time, and have a much more extensive, expanded curriculum. It should be designed and led by Master Practitioners able to nurture the next generation. The course will utilize case studies to focus on the relationship between foreign policy and its institutional and operational infrastructure, and integrating policy and management skills to develop senior-level character, ethics, and leadership traits. It should focus on the budget process, project and program management and accountability (including security and security accountability), personnel and resource development and management, national security decision-making, the role of Congress, 3-D thinking (strategic, tactical, operational), and leading and managing change. The difference between management (doing things right) and leadership (doing the right things) should be clearly defined, along with the vision, character traits, ethics, knowledge, experience and know-how required of those who aspire to executive/senior responsibility.

Recommendation #4 – Enhance the Role of the Foreign Service at FSI: Foreign Service professionals should have the primary directive role in education and training at FSI. Currently, some FSI schools and offices have a strong Foreign Service presence; others do not. The Department should conduct a “clean sheet of paper” exercise to recommend how to add more FSOs and FSSs to FSI, from instructors through senior managers. We aspire to have FSI fully integrate the professional diplomacy ethos throughout its curriculum.

Recommendation #5 – Recruit Master Practitioners: FSI should identify and recruit “Master Practitioners” who are also skilled teachers to provide instruction that is professionally relevant. Recently retired officers may be a source, as many have had many years of experience mentoring and training and, in some cases, as professional educators. The title of “Master Practitioner” should be a highly selective honor bestowed on “the very best” from among prior members of both the officer and specialist corps.

Recommendation #6 – Grant degrees: The Foreign Service Institute commit to becoming a degree-granting institution as soon as practicable that should grant master’s degrees to graduates or have arrangements with

nearby universities to grant master's degrees. This complex process may involve the relevant regional academic accrediting authority, a program to enhance the credentials of language teaching staff, and/or a nearby university as a partner. Having FSI provide academic credit and grant degrees would benefit the entire national security architecture as it would ensure an approach to strategic decision-making that is parallel and complementary to those offered by military and intelligence agencies. Degree sequences could be developed first as a Master of Arts in Foreign Languages and Area Studies, combining credit for FSI language study, professional courses, and credit for overseas work (e.g., "Politics of China," "Managing Security in a Non-Permissive Environment," "Challenges of Contract Enforcement Overseas," "Economic Issues in Argentina," "The Importance of Agricultural Investment for Afghan Security.") Enough credits, perhaps with a thesis, could, in the future, potentially allow for the award of a one-year MA in Diplomatic Studies. This would have the additional benefit of providing a credential for work in academe after retirement – work usually unavailable to retired officers who are highly qualified regional experts.

Because the Department may well face budget constraints to accommodate increased FTE required for a professional education 'training float,' it should reach out to Congress and other national security stakeholders to urge funding for a task whose urgency should be readily apparent (i.e.. recent strategic setbacks in the Mideast) while simultaneously planning a new curriculum.

### **Short-term Training: Recommendations**

FSI already has a well-developed short-term skills and "qwik course" training model, and much of what it does is excellent. These are recommendations for further improvement.

#### Recommendation #1: Give supervisors the tools they need to become leaders – invest in serious diplomatic service leadership and management training with follow-up:

The Department of State has many supervisors, but is short on true leaders. To meet the challenges of the 21st century, we must teach to the dictum of former Secretary Powell, who said "Leadership is all about people – and getting the most out of our people. It is about conveying a sense of purpose in a selfless manner, and creating conditions of trust while displaying moral and physical courage." Leadership is also about vision and service to a greater mission than self. Supervisory courses at the Foreign Service Institute must become more rooted in diplomatic service reality, more in-depth, and more valuable to their participants. Professional education must be prioritized as more than just a box to check. Mid-level officers and specialists often supervise dozens of employees. They need professional management and leadership skills to do their jobs effectively. These skills must be built up over time – they cannot be acquired in a week-long seminar. Supervisors must also learn to lead in less obvious ways. Procuring needed resources and mentoring are just as important as having a strategic leadership vision.

Recommendation #2: Tailor leadership training to individuals' substantially different leadership training needs: Senior level officers need to be able to make the transition from department or section head to Office Director to Executive decision maker, able to weigh not just a host-country reaction or the home bureau's concern, but to anticipate the second-order and third-order effects of a decision. For example, the skills that advanced a reporting officer into the mid- and senior levels are not the same skills that will ensure

success overseeing a complex multi-agency hierarchy requiring executive guidance. Similarly, the skills of an RSO at a medium post do not necessarily translate into those needed for policy formulation in Washington. FSI should expand current training to provide broader exposure to issues of group leadership, public relations and community involvement.

Recommendation #3: Make language learning more relevant to students and more valuable to posts: FSI is justifiably proud of its language school, but it should reexamine some policies or practices.

(1) Hiring only native speakers as language instructors is understandable, but their ability to explain complex points of grammar in English is often limited. This proves especially frustrating for language learners, the vast majority of whom are native English speakers needing early guidance on foreign grammar. It takes months of training before a language student can converse about points of grammar in a foreign language. Hiring non-native instructors with professional experience in teaching language learners can help bridge this gap.

(2) FSI should empower instructors, training them to recognize and teach to differing learning styles. Teachers must be able to deviate from approved lesson plans and provide information requested by students. In addition, to make the language learning relevant to posts, each regional language school should have a mid-level Foreign Service position focused on curriculum improvement and operational readiness, to ensure that students are adequately prepared for their positions representing U.S. policy and carrying out specialized skills abroad.

Recommendation #4: Build a curriculum of important diplomatic case studies: FSI could develop curriculum to include examples of successful and failed diplomacy, including negotiations to conclude the Treaty of Paris; the Rush-Bagot Treaty; the Webster-Ashburton Treaty; the Russo-Japanese War; WWI; WWII; and START; and CFE arms agreements. It could teach modules on the Cuban Missile Crisis; the Paris peace talks to end the Vietnam War, the Camp David and Dayton Accords, the Montreal Protocol, and the occupation of Iraq. It should incorporate modules on specialist skills such as NEO planning, OBO building design challenges, the Blackwater incident in Nisour square, and information security vulnerabilities shown by Wikileaks. FSI should consider hiring retired officers and specialists for modest honoraria to compile the relevant case study packages for use at FSI.

### **Aligning Career Development and Professional Education and Training: Recommendations**

Three recommendations require action by both FSI and HR.

Recommendation #1: Officer Accreditation: The Department should require new officers and specialists to pass a professional readiness exam and interview, making tenure more a professional milestone than a punch card. The Department should “accredit” officers and specialists alike and require personnel to keep their status current through further course work at the mid-level and senior level.

Recommendation #2: Officers and specialists should spend time in Washington before their first overseas posting: Many new Foreign Service hires arrive with limited understanding of the Foreign Service, the



Department of State (including non-FS personnel categories and their roles), or how the Department relates to the other national security agencies. It is important for FS personnel to experience the Washington side of diplomacy early in their careers. The Department should introduce a short (3-6 months) pre-departure assignment in Washington, which could be a TDY, related to the country or function of their onward assignment, as part of its revised entry-level professional course (A-100 and Specialist orientation). This is something that almost all other diplomatic services require. This on-the-job training will require close coordination between FSI and HR.

Recommendation #3: Move beyond 2/2's for hard language training: Posts, bureaus and FSI must rethink the value of achieving “limited working proficiency” in a language (S2/R2). This is almost never sufficient for taking notes, holding an educated conversation, negotiating customs fees or a security checkpoint, or interviewing a visa candidate. No country would send a diplomat to the U.S. with such a low level of English proficiency. The Department must review which overseas positions need language designation and the appropriate skill levels for each. The result of “not quite sufficient” training is unhappy posts, demoralized employees, and embarrassed interlocutors who switch to English, losing the cultural context. We understand the cost and difficulty of getting to “3/3” in a hard or super hard language.