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THE MAGAZINE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

Foreign Service Journal (ISSN 0146-3543), 2101 E Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037-2990 is published monthly with a combined July-August issue by the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), a private, nonprofit organization. Material appearing herein represents the opinions of the writers and does not necessarily represent the views of the *Journal*, the Editorial Board or AFSA. Writer queries and submissions are invited, preferably by e-mail. *Journal* subscription: AFSA members – \$13 included in annual dues; others – \$40. For foreign surface mail, add \$18 per year; foreign airmail, \$36 per year. Periodical postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Indexed by Public Affairs Information Services (PAIS). The *Journal* is not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts, photos or illustrations. Advertising inquiries are invited. The appearance of advertisements herein does not imply the endorsement of the services or goods offered.

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E-MAIL: journal@afsa.org

WEB: www.afsa.org; www.fsjournal.org

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PRESIDENT'S VIEWS

Treating Office Management Specialists As Force Multipliers

BY SUSAN R. JOHNSON

Nearly 20 years ago now, Foreign Service Secretaries were reclassified as Office Management Specialists. This change in nomenclature was intended to recognize the reality that technological advances and other factors were altering the important work these individuals were doing. It also, for the first time, attempted to treat them as professionals who deserve the same access to training and career mobility as their FS colleagues have long enjoyed.



But did we get the name right? And did we define the function clearly enough that everyone understood and respected the role office management specialists perform?

Four years ago the State Department's Bureau of Human Resources issued a Career Development Program for office management specialists. The stated goal of the new guidelines (some mandatory, others elective) was to define the OMS function in a way that maximizes its potential contributions to the Foreign Service's operational effectiveness while creating a more satisfying professional path for its members (currently more than 800). But in practice, the training opportunities called for in the CDP have often not materialized.

It is time to consult office manage-

ment specialists themselves about the professional development and in-service training they need to meet the CDP requirements. The goal should be a clear definition of the function, in sync with current needs and realities, and reflecting recognition that flexibility and agility are critical requirements for all effective institutions in today's fast-moving, complex world. That will equip us to deal sensibly with the numerous issues that OMSs have consistently raised:

- Defining OMS career paths that include a range of options to provide greater career mobility for those who want it and adjusting the Career Development Program accordingly;
- Providing adequate funding for mandatory training;
- Reviewing the current FP-3 grade cap and the number of FP-3 OMS positions; and
- Increasing language training opportunities for OMSs.

Addressing these concerns will give office management specialists a range of options for career development, which is an important goal in its own right. But the compelling reason for doing so is that OMSs are force multipliers for the State Department and the Foreign Service. So affording them opportunities for professional development and in-service training benefits all of us.

The mandatory training identified by flexible career development programs must be adequately funded — centrally, if need be. The current OMS grade cap at FP-3 and the number of positions at that level both merit thoughtful review, especially as the Foreign Service undergoes what amounts to a reorganization involving a 25-percent increase in personnel and exponentially more complicated missions.

Some senior OMS positions clearly require highly developed and experienced executive assistant skills. The effective office management specialist is like an air traffic controller, juggling multiple tasks and issues, setting priorities, anticipating needs, taking today's accelerated operational tempo in stride and making the office run smoothly — and making all this look as if it is happening on its own. Yet this level of performance is all too often taken for granted within the Foreign Service.

The highly competent, experienced "executive assistant" enables the fortunate principal to get much more done and to focus energy and thought on the issues that need his/her attention. So is the FP-3 level really the right cap for OMS professionals? Or should we make it possible for these force multipliers to spend more of their careers at senior levels?

As always, I invite you to comment on these issues by writing me at President@afsa.org. ■

Susan R. Johnson is the president of the American Foreign Service Association.



LETTERS

Apples and Oranges

I appreciate Susan Johnson's request in her January President's Views column ("The State-USAID Relationship: Measure Twice, Cut Once") for recommendations on how the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development might work together more efficiently.

I served with USAID from 1966 until 1994, in Afghanistan, Rwanda and Zambia. Back in Washington, I was also the USAID AFSA vice president twice, in the 1970s and again in the 1990s.

When we talk about development and diplomacy we also need to include defense, because security is vital in hot spots like Iraq and Afghanistan. The three agencies have specific roles to play — the Department of Defense for security, State for diplomacy and USAID for development.

Defense, State and USAID should remain separate and distinct. Coordination is crucial to be sure, but we're talking about apples, oranges and turnips. The missions and roles of each organization are different.

Recruiting is also different and should remain that way. USAID should be looking for specific development and program skills, not diplomatic talents. Development strategies should be set by USAID in consultation with State and, when appropriate, DOD.

When territory is relatively safe, it

should be USAID that takes the lead when it comes to development implementation. Turf always looms large, but with a new administrator in place, perhaps now is the time to set things right.

John A. Patterson
USAID FSO Minister
Counselor, retired
North Kingstown, R.I.

Blatant Bias

I just received the April issue of the *Foreign Service Journal* and was shocked by the evident bias toward the Foreign Service shown in the article "Remembering Those We Have Lost." Most of the piece was devoted to Victoria DeLong, whose family clearly merits our thoughts and prayers.

But your failure even to name the locally engaged staff who died, never mind noting their contributions over the years, is shameful. Also, I'm sure there was much more to be said about Mrs. Wyllie and her contributions.

The article perpetuates the stereotype of AFSA being a group that only cares about Foreign Service officers. Our other colleagues and the family members who died deserve better.

Judith Kaufmann
FSO, retired
Arlington, Va.

A Terrific Issue

I just finished the March *Journal* and must congratulate you on a terrific issue. It was nice to see Tom Buchanan

spread some common sense through his Speaking Out column ("A Real Reset Button for U.S.-Russian Relations"). And the focus section articles by Charlie Duelfer ("Achieving Closure on Iraq's Prewar WMD") and Chas Freeman ("The Middle East: Forks in the Way Forward") were gems.

I really think both of the latter should receive wider exposure, and would encourage you to invite other journals to reprint them. The *Foreign Service Journal* deserves the recognition of other media.

Dean Howells
FSO, retired
Kittery Point, Maine

What Might Have Been

It may have been easier to achieve closure on Iraq's prewar weapons of mass destruction if Charlie Duelfer's revelation in his March *FSJ* article that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq had denied President George W. Bush a second term in office.

Charlie Duelfer spent almost two years in Iraq looking for WMD, and survived an attack that killed two of his bodyguards. He made his report to Congress in September 2004, in the midst of the presidential campaign and at a time when the war had gone sour.

Yet a January 2005 *New York Times* editorial stated that 40 percent of Americans still believed there were WMD in Iraq. That same month Mark

Calling All Foreign Service Authors!

The November 2010 issue of the *Foreign Service Journal* will include a list of recently published books written by Foreign Service-affiliated authors.

FS authors whose books have been published in 2009 or 2010, and have not been featured in the roundup, are invited to send a copy of the book, along with a press release or backgrounder on the book and author to:

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LETTERS

Danner reported in *The New York Review of Books* that 73 percent of Republicans believed they were there.

George Bush's second term produced much of the disaster we are now working our way through. Had Duelfer's message been absorbed by the electorate in 2004, perhaps many of our difficulties would have been averted.

Unfortunately, there is a lesson here for those of us in the foreign affairs community: the American public does not pay much attention to what we do.

Alfred R. Barr
FSO, retired
Washington, D.C.

Enough with the Amateurs

Judging by the record so far, President Barack Obama may win the modern sweepstakes for naming the most political appointees to vacant embassies. Given his earlier rhetoric, this would seem a surprising outcome.

The past 30 years have clearly proven that the requirement of the 1980 Foreign Service Act that all nominees, including political appointees, bring to the job concrete qualifications like language and area skills is a dead letter. Under the circumstances, I think we should finally reconcile ourselves to the reality that our career is doomed to see the best positions, both at home and abroad, given to often-unqualified amateurs.

Sadly, diplomacy is simply not considered a profession in the U.S., and there are no signs that this will soon change. I'm not serious about this idea, but wouldn't it be nice if someone could sue the U.S. government over its repeated violation of the Foreign Service Act? ■

Robert F. Illing
FSO, retired
Porto, Portugal



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CYBERNOTES

State, Aspen Launch “Partners for a New Beginning”

On April 27, the State Department and the Aspen Institute (www.aspeninstitute.org) announced a joint initiative, “Partners for a New Beginning,” to realize the vision articulated by President Barack Obama in his June 4, 2009, speech in Cairo of “a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and respect.”

The announcement of the new initiative was a highlight of the April 26-27 Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship (www.state.gov). The gathering sought to identify ways to deepen ties among business leaders, foundations and entrepreneurs in the U.S. and the Muslim world, as Pres. Obama promised in the Cairo speech.

Introduced officially by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, the PNB is chaired by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, with Aspen Institute President Walter Isaacson and Coca-Cola Company Chairman Muhtar Kent as vice chairs.

“The Aspen Institute’s Middle East Programs’ achievement in facilitating public-private partnerships will push forward a new beginning for the U.S. and the Muslim world by building mutual interest and investment in entrepreneurship, science and technology, education and cultural understanding,” Isaacson stated at the launch, noting

With the first BlackBerry president, we discussed the power of new technology to empower activists and entrepreneurs across Africa, part of a new rising generation that’s boosting growth and governance and defying stereotypes.

— Bono, commenting on his April 30 meeting with President Barack Obama, www.one.org/c/us/pressrelease/3312/

that Aspen is already facilitating work in emerging markets around the world.

Waiting for the QDDR

Back in July 2009, the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development announced the launch of the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (www.state.gov). Its release, originally intended for early this year to influence the Fiscal Year 2011 budget process, is now slated for September.

Meanwhile, Presidential Study Directive 7, a review focused on “global development policy” and viewed by State as complementary to the QDDR, is under way at the National Security Council. The two groups have been holding regular consultations. The latest, on April 23, attempted to lay the

ground for finalizing both the PSD and a QDDR interim report.

Instead — according to *Foreign Policy*’s Josh Rogin, who tracks this issue in his blog, *The Cable* — substantial disagreement remained on a number of issues.

There is frustration on Capitol Hill over the delay and a perceived lack of consultation with the two teams. “What is important about this is that Congress isn’t waiting for the administration to wade through the QDDR and PSD processes and come out with its plan,” one Hill source who declined to be identified told blogger Laura Rosen (www.politico.com). “We think foreign aid reform is essential to ensure funds get to the people who need them and is done right.”

In early April, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and Senate Committee on Foreign Relations released a joint paper on “peacebuilding.” The HCFA expects to issue more concept papers in the coming weeks, followed by foreign assistance reform legislation during the summer.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has marked up the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011 containing a clause mandating a national development policy. However, it is likely that substantive reform will have to wait until the 112th Congress convenes next year.



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50 Years Ago...

Most of all, it seems to me, the Service must learn to appreciate individuality, even eccentricity, and to recognize that rewards should not be for conformity, but for gumption and creativeness. ... Conformity makes for a smooth-running, easily administered organization. But an organization of unimaginative and unassertive conformists, with all their personality corners smoothly rounded off, will never produce the diplomacy that will guide our country through the perilous times ahead. Furthermore, it will not even be permitted to try; as the recent Brookings Institution report clearly foreshadows, more and more of the leadership in foreign affairs will be taken away from our department and lodged elsewhere.



— Frank Hopkins, from “Individuality in the Foreign Service,” *FSJ*, June 1960.

That is also the conclusion of a Congressional Research Service report released in April, “Foreign Aid Reform, National Strategy and the QDDR.”

After Sudan’s Election: What’s Next?

The April 10-15 multiparty elections in Sudan, the first in 24 years, represented a landmark moment in the history of a nation torn by internal factions and civil war.

On April 26, the incumbent president of Sudan and head of the ruling National Congress Party, General Omar al-Bashir, was officially declared the winner, with 68 percent of the vote. Salva Kiir, head of the opposition Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement, was elected president of semi-autonomous South Sudan, with more than 90 percent of the vote.

Though observers such as the Carter Center and others have acknowledged that the electoral process was not up to international standards, the international community, including the U.S., appears to have accepted the results. It is now turning its attention to the critical January 2011 referendum on possible independence for South Sudan.

Washington, which leads the “Su-

dan Troika” (including the U.K. and Norway), expressed regret that the National Elections Commission did not fully implement preventive measures against voter fraud and intimidation. But it applauded the Sudanese people for an election that was “peaceful and meaningful” and urged the authorities to “build on the progress made so far to expand democratic space in Sudan and ensure full respect for human rights.”

The group added: “The Comprehensive Peace Agreement [signed in 2005 between the NCP government and the SPLM] remains essential for peace and stability in Sudan and the region. We urge all parties in Sudan to resume and accelerate work to complete its implementation” (www.state.gov).

In an April 29 interview with the Voice of America (www.voanews.com), Hagmajid Swar, head of the Political Mobilization Secretariat of Sudan’s ruling NCP, said the party had begun talks with the other political parties to resolve Sudan’s problems.

The April elections were mandated by the CPA. That agreement established a coalition government between the NCP and SPLM, ordered development of democratic governance



throughout the country and the sharing of oil resources (concentrated in the south), and also set a timetable for a referendum on possible independence for South Sudan. But relations between the partners have remained tense.

In an analysis prior to the April election, the International Crisis Group warned that the Sudanese authorities' continued intransigence on implementing the CPA was pushing the country toward violent breakup (www.crisisgroup.org).

Critics fault Washington for not following through on the CPA and for giving a pass to Pres. Bashir, who was indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity in connection with his role in the Darfur genocide.

The critics fear that the election result may embolden Bashir to subvert the upcoming referendum or even start another war, and they urge the in-

ternational community to maintain pressure on the Sudanese president and ruling party concerning the Darfur crisis and the need to mediate between the north and south.

U.S. Special Envoy Major General Scott Gration emphasized in an interview with the *New York Times* following the April poll that preparation for the January 2011 referendum in South Sudan and Abyei is critical (www.nytimes.com). Border demarcation between the north and south is incomplete; and though the south contains substantial oil reserves, it is economically and institutionally underdeveloped.

"If we don't redouble our efforts, and work hard, we know what the outcome will be: it will be violence," says Gration. ■

This edition of Cybernotes was compiled by Senior Editor Susan Brady Maitra and Editorial Intern Jennifer Thompson.

Site of the Month: Open Vault — The Vietnam Collection

The Vietnam Collection, <http://openvault.wgbh.org/collection/vietnam>, is an online video library drawn from WGBH Boston's 1983 landmark series, "Vietnam: A Television History." The collection — released on April 30, the 35th anniversary of the fall of Saigon — makes available to the public hours of rare archival footage and in-depth interviews with key decision-makers and veterans on both sides of the Vietnam conflict and other valuable resources.

Release of the Vietnam Collection also marks the relaunch of *Open Vault*, the Media Library and Archives of WGBH, America's pre-eminent public broadcasting producer. With a redesigned interface and enhanced interactive tools, the Web site affords users more and better ways to explore and interact with the media.

"This digital library of Vietnam-related material will provide an unparalleled learning opportunity to new generations of students and educators and extend the educational use of primary-source materials," says Karen Cariani, director of the WGBH Media Library and Archives, who spearheaded the project.

Intended as a model for future digital media archives drawing from assets from public television and similar sources, the Vietnam Collection is the product of a two-year collaboration among WGBH, the University of Massachusetts at Boston and the Columbia University Center for New Media Teaching and Learning. The CCMNTL is partnering with Columbia faculty to integrate the Vietnam Collection into their courses.



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SPEAKING OUT

Diego Garcia: Freedom's Footprint, or Enduring Injustice?

BY GERALD LOFTUS

During the last decades of the previous century, two isolated archipelagos continued to fly the Union Jack thousands of miles from the mother country, outposts for a handful of British citizens. Located near strategic territory, these repositories of precious resources remained prized possessions even as the sun was setting on the rest of the empire.

In one of the archipelagos, the Falkland Islands, Britain went to war to eject enemy forces that claimed the territory. In the other, the Chagos Islands, the U.K. welcomed friendly foreign troops, but exiled the islands' inhabitants.

Admittedly, the foreign troops only became the enemy in 1982, when a dictatorship sent them to grab the Malvinas, as Argentina still calls the Falklands. And in the case of Diego Garcia (the principal island in the Chagos chain), the United Kingdom was a full partner in making its territory available to the forces of its closest ally, the United States.

Even so, pressing the analogy, as has been done in the British press and courts, leads one to a very disturbing kernel of truth. In the Falklands, the inhabitants are white, with implicit rights to protection as British citizens — while the inhabitants of the Chagos Islands, descendants of African slaves, were black, and weren't even told that

*The U.S. lease
of the territory is
based on a lie:
that the islands were
never inhabited.*



they were British citizens when they were summarily removed from their homeland. Why were they evicted? Because the United States wanted all the islands depopulated.

A Lie Comes to Life

We think of Diego Garcia — if we think of this remote mid-Indian Ocean outpost at all — as a reassuring sandy aircraft carrier of an archipelago, ready to launch planes on missions to the Middle East or to Southwest Asia. That role was conceived in the 1960s, when London agreed to lease Diego Garcia to Washington. And if both parties are amenable to a renewal of the lease prior to 2016, Diego Garcia might well continue to serve this strategic role for the rest of the 21st century.

But the original agreement was based on a lie that wrecked the lives of the families who had been living on the islands for generations: namely, that the islands were uninhabited. To make this fiction a reality, the inhabitants of Diego Garcia and the other Chagos Is-

lands within the British Indian Ocean Territory — known as Chagossians or Ilois — had to go.

British writer Mark Curtis devotes a chapter (“The Depopulation of the Chagos Islands, 1965-1973”) to this shameful episode in his aptly titled book, *Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World* (Vintage, 2003). Citing declassified documents in the U.S. National Archives — in which words like “sanitize,” “swept,” “sterile” and, yes, “cleansed” crop up regularly — among other sources, he details how the Chagossians were rounded up and exiled to islands over a thousand miles away. By 1973, the islands had indeed become “uninhabited,” except for U.S. Navy Seabee construction crews.

Over the years, a number of American officials — from Foreign Service officers in Mauritius and Pentagon planners to members of Congress — have been aware of this injustice, but have largely chosen to let Her Majesty's Government deal with the legal challenges by this group of people who live on society's margins in Mauritius and Seychelles. Journalist David Ottaway's reporting in the *Washington Post* did prompt the late Senator Ted Kennedy to conduct hearings in 1975. But virtually nothing has been done since then to raise awareness in the U.S. of the Chagossians' plight.

“Maintaining the fiction” of the supposedly uninhabited islands was the



title of a Foreign Office memo to Prime Minister Harold Wilson's government in the late 1960s. Ever since, governments from all major political parties on both sides of the Atlantic have upheld it.

As recently as April, the *Times of London* detailed how expert recommendations in 2002 supporting Chagosian resettlement on outer islands had been dropped from British government reports. Meanwhile, in the Indian Ocean, the Ilois have led lives of desperate poverty on the outskirts of Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius.

For another heartrending account of how the British and American governments cleansed the Chagos Islands of their population, see John Pilger's *Freedom Next Time: Resisting the Empire* (Nation Books, 2007).

Pilger, a prolific Australian documentary filmmaker, covered similar territory in his 2004 movie, "Stealing a Nation." He speaks of the "vandalized lives" of the islanders, whose extreme "sadness" has been cited as a leading cause of death after their exile to distant Mauritius.

"The Footprint of Freedom" — referring to the atoll's approximate shape — is what the U.S. Navy has dubbed its support facility at Diego Garcia. The Navy people have even included an "Island History" on their Web site, with vintage black-and-white photos of the islanders who were expelled in "Operation Stamped" to make room for the base. While there is no mention of their fate on the base Web site, a 1980s-vintage "Welcome Aboard" publication shows a photo, circa 1967, captioned "The end of an era, plantation workers ..." — backhanded recognition of a civilian presence prior to the Naval Support Facility.

For his 2007 book, Pilger tracked

Repatriating the original inhabitants of Diego Garcia would go a long way toward showing that the U.S. military can coexist with civilians.

down the late British Foreign Minister Robin Cook, who admits that "the episode was one of the most sordid and morally indefensible I have ever known." And in 1972, during the expulsions, then-U.S. Ambassador to Mauritius William Brewer wrote to Washington: "It is absurd to state that Diego Garcia has no fixed population. There is no question that the island has been inhabited since the 18th century."

Why the insistence on removing this small population? Had the American and British governments wanted to secure the Diego facilities and its outlying islands years ago, what better way than to enlist the islanders as workers and security guards? One Foreign Office functionary asked at the time, "I don't see why the Americans shouldn't allow some to stay. Could they not be useful?"

White Space and "Mini-Slaves"

I have an old diplomatic passport that was stamped "BIOT" (British Indian Ocean Territory; i.e., Diego Garcia) when I traveled there in 1989 from the U.S. embassy in Mauritius, where I served from 1987 to 1990. The trip was

related to that country's longstanding arrangement with the British authorities and the U.S. Navy to employ hundreds of civilian workers for maintenance and housekeeping chores on the base. No one from the Chagos refugee community, which from time to time delivered protest letters to Embassy Port Louis, was recruited for work on Diego Garcia. Mauritians, yes, and Filipinos, too. But no Chagosians, who might deem themselves "going home."

Mark Gillem, a professor of architecture and an Air Force reserve officer, reports in his study of overseas U.S. military bases, *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), that American planners have traditionally sought unoccupied "white space" around their perimeter maps. In the case of Diego Garcia, this quest was carried to absurd lengths: even islands more than a hundred miles away from the site were cleared of human habitation.

Despite successive rulings by British courts citing the Magna Carta and its proscription of "exile from the realm," in October 2008 the Law Lords narrowly upheld the government's exile of these forgotten "mini-slaves" — as the mixed-race descendants of African slaves, Indian indentured workers, and French and English planters mordantly call themselves.

As Pilger explains, both London and Washington have long played "pingpong" over responsibility for the plight of the Chagossians, pointing to respective concerns over British sovereignty and American security requirements. Writing the minority opinion in the Law Lords' judgment, Lord Bingham cited "highly imaginative letters written by American officials," which



brandished fears of terrorism as a reason to continue the exclusion of the islanders from their homes.

Serious people understand that a critically important naval and air facility in the middle of the Indian Ocean might create legitimate security concerns. But even a glimpse of the elderly community leaders of the Chagossians should allay any fears about their being anything other than a harmless, displaced people. And if U.S. and U.K. officials are so worried about incursions by unauthorized personnel, why — as Simon Winchester describes in *The Sun Never Sets: Travels to the Remaining Outposts of the British Empire* (Prentice Hall, 1985) — do they tolerate the regular presence of “yachties” from the international leisure sailing crowd?

The Quest for Justice

What's next? The Chagossians and their supporters speak of an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, possibly this summer. In London and Washington, officials who cannot countenance the notion of a “native” presence on the islands no doubt will take comfort in this actuarial fact: by the time the current lease comes up for renewal in 2016, many of the surviving exiled Chagossians will be in their 80s. HMG and the U.S. government have stalled for this long; what's another few years?

Meanwhile, from out of left field comes another threat in the form of an ambitious plan to turn the Chagos/BIOT waters into the world's largest marine nature sanctuary. In April, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband announced the creation of a 250,000-square mile sanctuary, which presumably would also protect the status of the only current human residents of the islands — those at the U.S.

Both London and Washington continue to play pingpong over responsibility for the plight of the Chagossians.

Naval Facility — while putting yet another obstacle in the path of the Chagossians' return home.

As important as protecting the coconut crab and the masked booby (a seabird) might be, it should not be allowed to prejudice the case for that endangered two-legged species, the Chagossians. In the words of the U.K.'s Chagos Islands All-Party Parliamentary Group, which sees a role for repatriated islanders in protecting the environment, “conservation and human rights must go hand in hand.”

The Obama campaign put “human security” and human rights at the forefront of its change agenda, and since January 2009 the administration has shown concern for other downtrodden peoples, from Haiti to Tibet. The plight of the Chagos Islanders also cries out for justice, especially from the country that insisted on their removal.

On a continent that increasingly equates U.S. interests in Africa with the existence of the U.S. Africa Command, a humanitarian gesture to repatriate the Chagossians would go a long way toward showing that the U.S. military can coexist with civilians — in this

case Anglo-Africans, British citizens all.

All it would take would be an American admission that a few hundred former copra workers and their dependents on islands 100 miles away from Diego Garcia would not jeopardize the security of the West. One word from Washington would let the British government off the hook, putting an end to its excruciatingly long, rear-guard legal action.

As Olivier Bancoult, the leader of the Chagos community-in-exile said to *The Guardian* after the disappointing October 2008 verdict: “How can we be expected to live outside our birthplace when there are other people living there now?”

Don't expect the octogenarians — or their children and grandchildren — to give up. These “Palestinians of the Indian Ocean,” as they've been called (though their sole weapons have been the law and appeals to conscience), are not quitters.

In the United States and Great Britain, we might ask ourselves if this sorry saga is worthy of the world's two oldest democracies. And if this were unfolding today — if we had to do it over again — would we dare treat the Chagossians as they were treated in the 1960s and 1970s? I would hope not. So I also hope that justice can finally be done, as befits the birthplaces of the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights. ■

Gerald Loftus served in Port Louis, Mauritius, from 1987 to 1990, as embassy action officer for military flights from Diego Garcia and made arrangements for civilian contract workers for the U.S. naval facility there. A retired FSO, he lives in Brussels, where he publishes the blog, “Avuncular American” (<http://AvuncularAmerican.typepad.com/blog>).



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THE CONSULAR REVOLUTION



THE BASIC QUALITIES GOOD CONSULAR OFFICERS POSSESS — INTEGRITY AND SOUND JUDGMENT — HAVEN'T CHANGED. BUT THE TOOLS THEY USE HAVE.

BY ANN B. SIDES

If a consular officer from 1980 could be teleported through time to a 2010 consular section, about the only item he or she might know how to use would be the desktop impression seal. A 1980 consular officer certainly would not know what to make of the barcode readers used to capture data from non-immigrant visa applications today. Thirty years ago, the consular section was a clutter of rubber stamps and inkpads, adding machines, cashboxes, four-ply fee receipts and reams of assorted forms, as well as now-obsolete items like green passport typewriter ribbons and trays

of index cards for immigrant visa cases and American citizen registrations. There were no computers. Security was the mallet kept within easy reach for emergency destruction of the visa printing plates.

In the consular sections of a generation ago phones rang constantly, and the Foreign Service Nationals (now known as locally employed staff) spent much of their time answering inquiries and processing mail-in visa and passport cases.

Citizens of France, Britain and other prosperous European countries still required visas to visit the United States; there was no formal visa waiver program until 1986. In that era, however, many consular sections interviewed only visa applicants considered high risk for illegal immigration. Lookout systems were primitive. A few large posts used teletypes to do visa applicant name checks. Most consular sections relied on microfiche sheets or rarely updated lists kept in ring binders.

A Focus on Security

Many factors contributed to the transition in consular work, but four essential forces drove forward the consular revolution: visionary leadership on the part of Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Mary Ryan and her successor, Maura Harty; an IT technological boom that offered powerful new tools; the Bureau of Consular Affairs' success in being able to use a portion of visa fees to pay for the new technology; and the challenge posed by international terrorism, which led to greater interagency information-sharing.

Although the era of heightened security after 9/11 certainly spurred major changes in consular work, such as centralized passport issuance and biometric data collec-

*The machine-readable visa,
first introduced in 1989
and modified in 1993
and again in 2002, ended
the era of stamped,
easily forged visas.*

tion, many technological advances and process reforms actually began in the 1980s and early 1990s. For example, the Wang computer system installed worldwide in the early 1980s provided the first relatively timely and reliable visa application record and lookout list. Attacks on the U.S. embassies in Tehran and Islamabad in 1979, and against our embassies in Kuwait City and Beirut in 1983, accelerated the process (begun in the late 1970s) of installing hardlines and other security features now in place at all consular sections worldwide. And the escalation of illegal immigration into the United States led the State Department to begin developing a more assertive strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the visa process to fraud.

The machine-readable visa, first introduced in 1989 and modified to improve its security features in 1993 and again in 2002, ended the era of stamped, easily forged visas. The MRV also, for the first time, linked non-immigrant visa applications directly with an automated lookout system. The early automated lookout systems were painfully slow and inefficient, but they got better through the use of algorithms.

At the same time, the telecommunications revolution offered CA an extraordinary opportunity to modernize both its technical procedures and its administrative process. Under Assistant Secretary Ryan, the bureau began identifying "best practices" at its more than 200 consular operations abroad and encouraging efficiencies like offsite fee payment, call centers and Web-based appointment systems. Commonly used forms and basic guidance material like cables and the Foreign Affairs Manual became available online at every desktop.

The introduction of a non-immigrant visa application fee, and CA's success in securing partial retention of those fees in 1994 in the wake of the World Trade Center bombing, finally provided a stable revenue source to finance the development and implementation of a series of powerful automated tools to protect U.S. citizens and borders. By 1996 every consular section, however small, was using the same technology. Equipment was replaced and staff retrained at two- to three-year intervals, ensuring that consular services stayed close to state-of-the-art in a rapidly advancing technological environment.

Ann B. Sides is a 27-year veteran of the Foreign Service. Her consular assignments include Niamey, Dakar, Oran, Belgrade (twice), Zagreb, Dublin, Sarajevo and Athens, where she served as consul general from 2004 to 2008. She is currently a grievance analyst in the Bureau of Human Resources and looks forward to retirement in 2011. "The Foreign Service has provided a rich vein of material for the fiction I hope to write when I hand in my building pass," she says.

25 Years Ago: A Day in the Life of a Consular Officer

By Ann B. Sides

The visa applicant at the counter glanced anxiously over his shoulder at the crowd in the waiting room. He leaned toward me, his face so close to mine that I could smell his cigarette breath.

"I am Jesus Christ, the son of God," he whispered. "I must go to America."

Behind me, I heard a click as Sarah, my senior FSN, quietly picked up the phone, prepared to dial the guards outside.

"Why must you go to America?" I asked, although I knew the answer. The Savior, as we called him, came to us most Wednesdays. That was the day the local mental institution allowed some of its patients out on furlough. They were supposed to be harmless. I hoped so; in 1985 our tiny North African post had no hard-line, no blast-proof glass service windows and no Marines.

"I must be about my father's business, Madame," the Savior responded, predictably. He had a little forked beard and wore a long djellaba. He actually looked like the holy picture on my grandmother's bedroom wall.

"Do you have an invitation? Traveler's checks? Round-trip ticket? Sorry, you don't fulfill the conditions for a visa ..." The practiced phrases fell from my lips.

"God will provide," the Savior replied serenely, and departed. It cost nothing to submit a visa application, and people like the Savior kept coming back.

Behind me, Sarah resumed stamping visas. She fitted each passport into an adapted Burroughs check-writing machine, and slammed down the crank handle. The metal visa plate in the machine slapped against a wide silk ribbon inked in a pattern of red, green and blue stripes, printing the visa onto the passport page. I noticed the colors of the stamped visas were losing their brightness and sighed. I would soon have to dismantle the machine and change the ribbon. I had no talent for mechanics, but only commissioned consular officers were allowed into the guts of the visa machine. I seldom tackled the ribbon without getting ink all over myself. I decided to come in over the weekend in jeans and T-shirt and do it then.



I was in my office, winding up an interview with an immigrant visa applicant, when Bob and Debbie Smith strolled in with their new baby. They both worked for an oil-drilling outfit. I'd performed my first official act as vice consul a year earlier when I attended their wedding and issued the Consular Certificate of Witness to a Marriage. Now they'd come to register their new baby.

While they filled out the paperwork, I opened the safe and got

out a blank passport and the engraved Consular Report of Birth Abroad certificate. I recorded the passport and CRBA numbers in a grubby green ledger. I remembered, guiltily, that I had not yet done the required monthly inventory of controlled items. It took hours to count all the unissued passports, all the soon-to-be-phased-out American Citizen ID cards, the consular birth certificates, immigrant visa blank forms, passport and visa ribbons, rubber stamps, notarial seals, visa plates, and the wax seal with its sticks of red wax. I decided to save that chore, too, for the weekend.

While Sarah rolled a blank passport into the typewriter, I invited the Smiths into the consulate kitchen for coffee. After typing in the baby's data, Sarah heated up our steam iron, put a few drops of white Elmer's Glue-All on the back of the baby's photo, placed it in the passport, spread a sheet of tissue paper over the picture, and bonded photo to passport page with a quick sweep of the iron. She sealed the picture with the consulate seal and the embossed Department of State legend. Sarah was good: she could do a complete passport in 15 minutes. We then added the baby's name to the couple's registration file card, and stapled his photo on the back of the card next to those of his parents.

After the Smiths left, I ate a late lunch at my desk. Intending to spend my afternoon balancing the consular fee collection, I had the handwritten receipts piled on my desk and the adding machine set up, but I kept getting interrupted. Earlier in the day I'd interviewed a French visa applicant with what appeared to be impeccable qualifications — until I noticed a recently dated "Application Received AmEmbassy Paris" stamp in the back of his passport. I'd told him to come back in two weeks. Now I turned on the microfiche reader, and tried to find the applicant's name among the many similar ones on the lookout list. The tiny, blurry print made my eyes water. The microfiche was over two months out of date; useless. I sighed. I'd have to draft a cable to Paris, asking details of the visa refusal.

At the service counter, a visitor claiming to be a naturalized U.S. citizen was applying for a replacement of what he claimed was a lost passport. The story sounded fishy; I'd have to do a cable on that one, too, and wait for Washington's response.



As the afternoon wore on, I checked the issued visas against the application forms to make sure I'd authorized all of them. Then I went through the mail from Washington, including a dozen newly revised Foreign Affairs Manual pages and the transmittal letter that

F O C U S

went with them. I gave them to Sarah, whose job it was to remove the old pages from the big blue FAM binder, and replace them with the updates.

Toward closing time, I heard a wail of dismay. I rushed out of my office and found Sarah kneeling on the floor, weeping over a box of spilled index cards. The box was our sole way of tracking our pending IV cases. They'd been meticulously arranged by category and priority date, the family cases on blue cards and the employment-based on white. Now they were strewn across the tile floor.

"Sarah, we can do this together," I said soothingly, but I knew it would take us several hours to get the cards back in place. The fee collection reconciliation, like the passport ribbon replacement and the controlled supplies inventory, would have to wait till the weekend. As we gathered up the cards, I heard a polite cough at the service counter. The Savior was back, smiling benignly. He held his hand up in what looked like a gesture of blessing. He was holding an airline ticket and a little wad of traveler's checks.

Going Digital

As late as the 1990s, however, many consular sections still produced passports the way they were done a half-century before: with a gluepot and a typewriter. So the department's 2001 announcement that overseas passport issuance was being phased out in favor of photo-digitized travel documents, produced only by passport centers in the United States, was received with widespread skepticism in consular sections abroad. However, by the time the program began in 2002, the 9/11 attacks had made Americans residing overseas much more willing to accept inconvenience for the sake of greater border security. By 2004, the centrally produced passports incorporated a biometric chip and met the most stringent international standards.

Automation advances and, crucially, the interagency information-sharing agreements made possible by the Border Security Act of 2002 now make much more data available to consular officers almost instantly when they are reviewing a visa application. Likewise, the Customs

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and Border Protection inspectors at U.S. ports of entry can see the information submitted at the consular window by visa applicants.

A new Web-based visa application system will soon eliminate the old paper application form, and enable the adjudicating consular officer to review the data before the applicant physically appears for the interview. Consular officers abroad now also have electronic access to the department's digitized passport records, virtually eliminating many previously successful fraudulent schemes for obtaining U.S. travel documents. American citizen registration lists and welfare-and-whereabouts records, now also digitized, make it possible for CA and its overseas posts to better coordinate assistance to Americans abroad, particularly in emergencies.

In addition, automated programs that track fee collec-

Automation advances and interagency information-sharing agreements now ensure that much more information is available to consular officers.

tions, and controlled items like passports and visa blanks, have brought about better accountability and a degree of labor-saving that the harried accountable consular officer of the 1970s could hardly have imagined.

Not all the innovations of the last quarter-century have brought about greater efficiencies, to be sure. For example, the current requirement that almost all visa applicants appear in person and submit to finger-scanning has created real workload

and space problems for many posts. Nor have the basic qualities of a good consular officer — integrity and sound judgment — changed in generations. But the tools that support the decision-making process now assure a far higher level of security for America's borders and citizens than even the most imaginative consular officer could have foreseen in 1980. ■



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AN INTERVIEW WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY JANICE L. JACOBS

A/S JACOBS PROVIDES A CANDID LOOK AT
THE CHANGES CA HAS MADE SINCE 9/11
AND ITS PLANNING FOR FUTURE CHALLENGES.

BY ROSEMARY MACRAY

Janice L. Jacobs was appointed assistant secretary of State for consular affairs in June 2008, her second tour in the bureau's front office. Following the 9/11 attacks, she had served as deputy assistant secretary for visa services, defending the Department of State's visa issuing authority and leading a series of changes in security procedures.

In the following interview, conducted by CA's Rosemary Macray, Asst. Sec. Jacobs talks about the bureau's post-9/11 growing pains, describes how that experience eased the interagency response after the attempted Christmas Day bombing, and explains how the bureau is rising to meet its other challenges.

RM: *The Bureau of Consular Affairs has undergone a dramatic transformation since Sept. 11, 2001. What was your role during this period and what were the bureau's greatest challenges throughout the period?*

A/S Jacobs: Not too long after 9/11, Assistant Secretary Maura Harty called me in Santo Domingo to ask if I would come back to Washington to be the deputy assistant sec-

retary for visa services.

I very quickly said yes, and I remember Maura saying, "Don't you want to take some time to think about this? Have you been reading the newspapers?" Secretary [of State Colin] Powell had been defending the State Department's handling of the visa function against those who wanted to hand it over to the new Department of Homeland Security. I told her that I knew it would be very challenging, but I accepted that challenge.

It was a very difficult time for the Bureau of Consular Affairs. The changes that we had started to make in the visa process represented a totally new way of doing business, and I was surprised that a lot of people in the building did not realize that. They didn't understand that we were having to interview every visa applicant and that we were going to start including biometrics with our visas. So there was a lot of questioning within the building and within Consular Affairs about what we were doing on visas.

There had been about a 40-percent drop in the number of visitors coming to the United States in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Some people were afraid of flying, some thought that the U.S. was less welcoming, and some may have even thought we weren't issuing visas anymore. There was also a global downturn in the economy.

Within the building, our colleagues didn't realize that the visa changes were based on laws, as well as Govern-

Rosemary Macray is chief of the Media Unit in the Consular Bureau's Office of Policy Coordination and Public Affairs. Her previous Foreign Service postings include Mexico City, Quito and Buenos Aires.

ment Accountability Office investigations and recommendations. People blamed us for students not coming, for the drop in the number of visitors and for business travelers not being able to get their visas.

In 2002 and 2003, we had markedly expanded the requirement to obtain security advisory opinions, and the State Department and our other agency partners were not resourced well enough to keep up. Some categories of security checks were taking seven to nine months to complete. Students were missing not just a semester but the entire academic year. So we were really under fire. There was a feeling among some members of Congress and in the press that the Department of Homeland Security should have assumed the visa function.

When Maura began as assistant secretary, about a month after I started as visa DAS, we launched an extensive outreach plan — starting with other offices in the State Department — to explain the changes, clarify that you could still get a visa and to confirm that we still welcomed people to the United States, especially students.

All of us in the front office started engaging in outreach. We traveled around the country visiting campuses to talk about student visas; whenever we traveled overseas we met with student and business groups. I held a town-hall meeting at the deputy assistant secretary level with desk officers to talk about what we were doing to eliminate delays in visa issuance. Gradually, things started to turn around. People realized that we were really making an effort to make this work.

There were so many changes — not just in our procedures, but in our interaction with the new Homeland Security Council, which was made up primarily of DHS and law enforcement agency representatives. In those days we were spending more time with the HSC than the National Security Council.

In this gathering of law enforcement offices, the State Department was sometimes the odd man out. Because there was still a lot of interest in further tightening border security, we constantly had to walk that fine line of showing that we understood security while trying to gently tell people that we can't shut down the borders. We had to

“[After 9/11], we constantly had to walk that fine line of showing that we understood security while trying to gently tell people that we can't shut down the borders.”

— CA Assistant Secretary
Janice L. Jacobs

continue being the open, welcoming country that we've always been. Sometimes we were the only ones at the table saying this, so it was a very difficult time.

RM: *While you were attending the meetings, it was the folks in the field who were having to actually implement changes in their visa issuing processes. How did that go?*

A/S Jacobs: Overseas, as always, the consular officers stepped up. We were sending cable after cable with one change after the

other. I'm sure they were thinking, "What are they doing back there? Where is this coming from?" For example, a law passed in May 2002 required collecting biometrics for visas. We knew that we would soon be collecting fingerprints from every applicant, so we instructed posts to start interviewing nearly every applicant. We figured by the time the biometrics collection was set up, they would have already worked managing the physical flow of applicants through their sections.

Officers came back with very legitimate, logical questions about how they were supposed to accomplish this. For years we were understaffed. State hadn't been hiring in sufficient numbers in the 1990s. A lot of smart people out there were saying, "Wow, do you know what this means? Have you really thought this through?" But again, it showed the sort of can-do attitude of consular officers. We completely transformed the visa process.

Staffs were working hard and the consular managers were having to get buy-in for all these changes. They had Foreign Service Nationals with 15, 20, 25 years of experience doing things a certain way who suddenly had to learn new procedures. We also had a few outstanding veteran officers who weren't thrilled with a lot of these changes and were not shy about speaking out. So we did a lot of training in change management. But everyone came around, realizing that they had to set the example.

Although the government is known for its inertia and moving slowly, we did all of this in just a few months. It was amazing. We deployed and started using all of our biometric equipment within a year. It was just unheard of how quickly we moved on this. And after a while, of course, people began to wonder how we had ever done

visas any other way.

Through our rapid transformation, we showed not only that we understood our role in border security as the first line of defense, but we showed other agencies that we knew what we were doing and that they could build on what we had done and use that information to perform checks at the ports of entry. So it wasn't just within CA. Other agencies recognized very quickly that the State Department gets it done.

RM: *And the changes continue. How did the Dec. 25 bombing attempt affect bureau operations?*

A/S Jacobs: After that incident, I saw a lot of the same things that happened after 9/11. Of course, people want to rush to do something immediately to ensure this can't happen again. The benefit of our 9/11 experience is that we have tried a lot of the things being suggested now and over time realized that they didn't work.

For example, for a while we had a very expansive list of names on the no-fly list. We wound up with so many false positives, so many people being stopped at ports of entry and so many complaints from travelers, that in 2008 the interagency community had to take another look at the standards and shorten the list. We learned it didn't make us more secure to spend all of our time checking to see if it's the right person.

I think the good news after the Christmas Day bombing has been that people are remembering what we did after 9/11. We are doing things in a smarter way this time. This time the interagency community has come together as a whole to look at our procedures in tandem. Operationally, everyone has a much better understanding now of what each agency does and how we need to work together.

RM: *There are some who say that Consular Affairs is still struggling to find the proper balance between maintaining an adequate security posture and welcoming visitors to the United States.*

A/S Jacobs: Whenever there is any kind of disaster or crisis, or something happens with visas, like what happened on Christmas Day, we can expect that our work will be scrutinized. We're always in the spotlight.

"I am always proud to lead CA, but I could not have been prouder of how proactive and responsive people were [after the Haiti earthquake]."

Our processes are never going to be static. The enemy that we are fighting is very agile, very flexible. They're very quick to pick up on whatever screening tools we put into place. So we have to operate the same way; we're always going to have to be looking.

One thing everyone can agree on is that there's no single machine or procedure that is going to protect us completely. And so what it really requires is a certain amount of risk management, not risk avoidance, paired with a layered approach so that if one part of the process fails, another part can catch somebody.

Perhaps the biggest challenge that we face is identifying people we don't know about already. We do a great job of sharing data on known or suspected terrorists. We get that information into databases. We have the biometrics. We have any number of tools available to us on people we know about. But it's the people with clean identities who have somehow become a threat. Those are the people that the U.S. has to figure out ways to identify.

One way to do that is through more data mining of the information that we get on people who apply for visas. With our all-electronic visa form there will be a wealth of potential intelligence that the State Department and other agencies can access. That's where I think the next step should be. All of the interested agencies could set up a fusion center where they could analyze our visa information and use it as a screening tool before applicants even appear in our consular sections for interviews.

RM: *What do you see as the greatest challenges facing Consular Affairs over the next few years, and how is the bureau preparing to meet them?*

A/S Jacobs: Our operation depends mostly on the fees we collect for services, so that means that we have to pay a lot of attention to demand. When demand is up, it's great, but when it's down, the way it is now, it is not so good for us. We know that within the next five, 10, 15 or 20 years there's going to be tremendous growth in demand in China, India, Brazil and Mexico. We've been working hard to figure out how to accommodate this demand.

In China, for example, our consulate in Shanghai has already had to add more cubicles for staff, because they

are running out of space. But we aren't necessarily going to be able to keep hiring more and more people and sending them off to these places.

We also have to look at issues. Do we need to assign multiple officers to one window and have them working shifts? Or in China, do we open up visa processing centers in commercial facilities rather than a new consulate? These huge issues are difficult to address given the fact that our government budget cycle requires us to plan years in advance. But we're preparing.

We know that the middle class in those countries is growing at a certain rate every year. And, of course, it's not just CA, but all of the bureaus that support us that have to be thinking about this, as well.

RM: *The Bureau of Consular Affairs' work on children's issues has also grown a lot in the past few years.*

A/S Jacobs: The Office of Children's Issues was just a handful of people back in the mid-1990s; now the office is staffed by nearly 90 people. More and more, these issues are catching the interest of Congress, the press and, certainly, the parents involved, whether they're adopting or involved in an abduction scenario. We strive to handle these emotional issues carefully and compassionately, but always keep in mind that we are the U.S. government's central authority for implementing the Hague Conventions on international child adoption and child abduction.

In every decision, we must be mindful of our responsibility in countries that are not signatories of either convention. We have to fulfill our consular role in providing services to American citizens. We have to engage in diplomatic outreach to encourage governments to sign on to these conventions. And we have to monitor whether countries have transparent and fair procedures.

In Vietnam and Guatemala, for instance, we have encountered very serious allegations of corruption and questions about the children being offered up for adoption. Sometimes people think our responsibility is rather narrow in scope, but it encompasses working with governments on creating good child welfare systems, helping them with anti-trafficking initiatives and instituting procedures to ensure transparent systems. So it's a huge re-

“We have any number of tools available to us on people we know about.

But it's the people with clean identities who have somehow become a threat.”

sponsibility, one that garners a lot of attention. We brief Capitol Hill frequently and spend a lot of time explaining our role on these issues to the media.

RM: *What are your goals for the bureau's interactions on the Hill?*

A/S Jacobs: We have had a liaison office on the House side for a few years. We just opened a new office in the Senate. Our liaison staff spends a lot of time researching individual cases involving the members' constituents. This consular presence and assistance serve us well.

That also gives us an ear up on the Hill about issues that affect our work. Right now, for example, we're very interested in immigration reform legislation. No matter what shape it takes, it will affect Consular Affairs. We want people who are proposing legislation to understand operationally and from a resource perspective what these ideas would mean for us. I don't ever want people to think that we're somehow resisting them.

Individual cases, of course, will always come up with the members, but so many of the issues that we follow — whether it is immigration reform, adoption or abduction — really catch the interest of members. Our overall relationship with the Hill is so important. We're always happy to provide briefings and talk to people. So we spend a lot of time up there.

RM: *About 1,000 employees of the Bureau of Consular Affairs were involved in various aspects of the response to the Jan. 12 earthquake in Haiti. Could you talk about that a bit?*

A/S Jacobs: Haiti was just a tremendous effort on the part of Consular Affairs. It was unique in that ordinarily, the local authorities and host government would be in the forefront of responding to a disaster. But because of the degree of destruction and the fact that government offices were destroyed, we had to find a new way of handling our issues ourselves, but also in conjunction with other agencies.

We had a tremendous interagency effort in Haiti. The departments of State, Defense, and Health and Human Services all came together to reach out, to do search and recovery, and to get remains repatriated back to the United

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States. Of course, our people on the ground in Port-au-Prince were ready to leap into action.

Houses were destroyed; people were sleeping in their offices on the floor, on cots and in tents. When you think about the amount of work they were able to do 24/7, it really was quite amazing. I am always proud to lead CA, but I could not have been prouder of how proactive and responsive people were, always thinking about others and not themselves. In less than three weeks, we evacuated over 16,000 people, which was more than we evacuated from Lebanon in 2006. It will be years before Haiti fully recovers; we are now moving into a new phase, focusing on trying to reunite families through immigrant visas.

“Many times overseas when we’ve been out there helping Americans in a crisis, diplomatic colleagues from other embassies call me to ask what we’re doing and how they should help their own nationals.”

RM: How long after the actual earthquake did you realize that the media and the American public would become fixated on the subject of orphans in Haiti?

A/S Jacobs: After any natural disaster, any time there are images of suffering children on the television screen or in newspapers, there is an outpouring of love and interest from the American public. People decide in front of their TV screens that they want to adopt.

I am especially proud of what we did to facilitate children who were in the process of being adopted. Working with U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, just days after the earthquake, we set up a humanitarian parole program to bring children into the United States who were already in the process of being

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adopted by U.S. citizens when the earthquake struck. There have been more than 1,000 children brought in under that program. Getting them documented and approved to leave the country also required quite a bit of coordination with the Haitian government.

Proper international practice after a natural disaster is to wait until family reunification efforts have taken place before deciding whether children need to be placed with adoptive families in their home country or abroad. USAID, along with UNICEF, the Red Cross, Save the Children and other groups, is working very hard on the ground to trace and reunify families. If no family-based solutions are found for the children in Haiti, I would expect that we will eventually return to seeing intercountry adoptions out of Haiti.

RM: *In the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, Americans there received a wide variety of services for which there was no charge. How does the bureau fund this critical responsibility?*


A/S Jacobs: The protection of Americans overseas is a

top priority for CA. It is something that we will fund and we will find a way to do.

One way we do this is by dedicating a portion of the passport fee to providing emergency services for American citizens overseas in crisis situations, such as the disaster in Haiti; helping Americans who have been the victims of crime while traveling or living abroad, or who have been arrested or imprisoned; and providing support to the families of American citizens who have died overseas.

We take great pride in this work. Many times overseas when we've been out there helping Americans in a crisis, diplomatic colleagues from other embassies call me to ask what we're doing and how they should help their own nationals. So I think we have a well-deserved reputation. We will always fight to get the money we need, whether it's for disaster assistance, repatriation, whatever it is. These costs are rising each year, with an estimate for this fiscal year of more than \$300 million.

RM: *Thank you very much, Assistant Secretary Jacobs.* ■



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WHY CONSULAR INTERVIEWS MATTER

W

VISA OFFICERS RARELY MEET APPLICANTS AGAIN ONCE AN INTERVIEW IS OVER. BUT SOMETIMES THEY GET TO SEE THAT THEY'VE MADE A REAL DIFFERENCE.

By RICHARD SILVER

hen adults approach the visa interview window with children that are not their own, alarm bells tend to go off in the minds of consular officers. Are the children being trafficked or smuggled? Are the parents deceased or living illegally in the United States? Do the parents even know where their children are?

I still recall the day an elderly couple approached my interview window with children who looked like their grandchildren. The couple's soft smiles and gentle manner gave the initial impression that they were happily retired professionals. Once the interview began, they claimed to be the chess coach and manager of the two small children, who were going to Chicago to participate in a chess tournament.

Analyzing the group's demeanor, I saw that the children did not look comfortable. Their story seemed a bit fantastic, as well. After all, how many subsistence farmers from faraway Gujarat would spend limited resources on chess lessons for their children and then go further into debt so that they could compete in a tournament abroad? I split the group apart and their stories could not have been further out of alignment.

Even before the 7-year-old girl confirmed that she had

just met the couple on the train from her village to the embassy in New Delhi, it was apparent that they had been paid to bring the children into the U.S. for an unknown purpose. In fact, their father and the mastermind of the plot were both waiting outside the embassy. Security personnel detained the parties, and local police later arrested all of the adults involved.

With that and similar incidents still fresh in my mind, I was immediately concerned when a tall American and his Persian-American wife approached my window on a very hot day in May 2008. Patrick Riley and Shahla Etefagh had two 14-year-old Indian girls in tow. Neighbors from a slum in the Himalayan foothills, the girls stood slightly to the side of their American escorts. I knew right away that this interview would require at least a few extra questions.

Politely but firmly, I requested that Patrick and Shahla take a seat as I turned my attention to the two young ladies in front of me. "Asha" and "Parvati" (not their real names) had excellent posture and were highly attentive. Had they been coached on how to behave at the interview?

In response to my questions, they revealed that they had only been out of their small town once before coming to the capital. They said that the adults with them were co-principals of the Mother Miracle School in Rishikesh — a holy city on the Ganges River — where the girls were studying math, English, computers, yoga and art. They re-

Richard Silver recently completed his first Foreign Service tour as a vice consul in New Delhi. A public diplomacy officer, he will soon begin a rotational tour in Bogotá.

ally came alive when describing their own role as mentors to the younger kids.

This theme of giving back to their community came up throughout the interview. They were very curious about the United States and said they wanted to share their lives with children in the U.S. and learn how children live in other countries.

“We would like to tell them how we live in joint families and about our life here,” they said. “And we want to learn about how the children live and study, what their schools are like and what kind of books they use.”

After thousands of interviews one develops a sixth sense about people, the veracity of stories and the subtlety of the emotions and facial expressions of people during interviews. The nervousness and formality that these young ladies initially displayed vanished as they expressed their enthusiasm for learning and teaching the younger kids. They seemed humble and spoke with gratitude about the opportunity to apply for a visa.

A Long Journey

By this time I felt reasonably sure that the girls were telling the truth. So I called the adults back up to get more information about the school and the purpose of going to the United States.

The story behind the request had begun about the time the girls were born, back in 1995. In that year, Shahla first traveled to India and saw a ghetto built on a garbage heap. She watched children scavenging for anything edible, anything they could sell or use in daily life. Moved to tears, she resolved then and there to dedicate her retirement years to helping such young people. But after returning to her decorative art business in San Francisco, she forgot her pledge for several years.

Then she met Patrick, an event producer who had just returned to the San Francisco Bay area from his own spiritual pilgrimage to India. He found that her vision gave form to his inner stirrings, and they jointly committed to relocate to India and found a school for the poor. His only condition was that it be situated near the Ganges River.

In 2002, the couple made their way to the ancient pilgrimage town of Rishikesh in the Himalayan foothills. They quickly set about establishing a school there, even

The events leading to my visa window had begun about the time the girls were born back in 1995.

though few residents shared their commitment. By tenaciously adhering to their vision through several false starts — becoming a bit more streetwise in the process — they finally opened a school in their home in 2003. Two years later, they expanded it, moving to a rented building.

It took years for the school to find its footing, but soon the couple had scores of young boys and girls studying there, all from poor Indian families. Then they decided to hold a competition to take two students with them on a three-month trip all over the United States. They considered each student's contributions to the school, the quality of his or her educational efforts and the student's ability to teach others. It had taken a year to hold the competition, obtain parental consent and get Indian passports. Obtaining visas to the United States was the final hurdle in realizing their dream.

While interviewing the couple I asked nonsequential questions, observed their demeanor carefully and was satisfied that they were as bighearted and dedicated as their story suggested. I was also confident that they would all return to India at the end of the trip and that the girls would share their experience with their peers, serving as effective role models and teachers to younger students. When I told Asha and Parvati that their visas had been approved, they burst into tears even as they laughed with joy.

Trip Report

I kept a brochure from the school on my desk for months afterward. Sometimes I would pick it up for a moment and recall that emotional interview. I decided to visit the school if I was ever in the area.

That opportunity came over Labor Day weekend in 2008. I was making a personal trip to Rishikesh and called the school a few days before departing. Patrick and Shahla had returned from their trip only a few weeks before, and invited me to stop by their home and visit the school.

When I arrived, the girls joined us and we discussed their experience in the U.S. Sitting comfortably in a windowed room overlooking the Ganges, Asha and Parvati began with some charming stories about New York City.

They had seen a dog in the back of a car and thought it had its own chauffeur. They wondered where all of the cows, dogs and monkeys were. And they were amazed to

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learn that many children in America have their own bedrooms, whereas at their home in India the whole family lives in one small room.

From New York they traveled to the West Coast, visiting museums and tourist attractions like Disneyland and Universal Studios, as well as enjoying the wilderness of the Sierra Mountains. These two girls from extremely poor families came back loving Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso. They spoke with equal enthusiasm about their experience cooking and serving food for the homeless people who daily crowd into San Francisco's Glide Memorial Church. This care extended to America's homeless was a strong contrast to what they have experienced in their village.

The girls also shared Indian culture with American children, performing classical and Bollywood dances, singing

When I told Asha and Parvati that their visas had been approved, they burst into tears even as they laughed with joy.

and playing the piano in several preschools in New York and California. Parvati told me that the people they met "held our hands and asked us to teach them our dances and asked where they could find our Indian clothes. They asked about our lives in India. We told them that our public schools have 100 children per class, no computers, playground, or even a ball to play with. We sit on the floor in rooms that have no doors and windows. The children welcomed us as guests and cried when we left. They did not want us to leave."

Neither girl wants to live in the U.S., for both are determined to become doctors serving their own community. Yet after a brief pause, they both agreed it would be great to go to the medical school at the University of California (Davis), a place they visited during their tour.

When asked what impressed them the most about the

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U.S., Asha said: “Before I went to America, I did not understand recycling. Seeing how clean the streets are in America, I now understand the importance of the community working together to improve the environment.” Both girls pledged to try putting garbage cans around Rishikesh and to educate people to use them.

Ripple Effects

Consular officers are often the only face-to-face contact people outside the United States have with our government or Americans generally. Over a hundred times a day, each officer must quickly make basic visa eligibility determinations. The U.S. has always welcomed visitors from overseas. However, during this time of heightened security concerns, screening visa applicants is more important than ever.

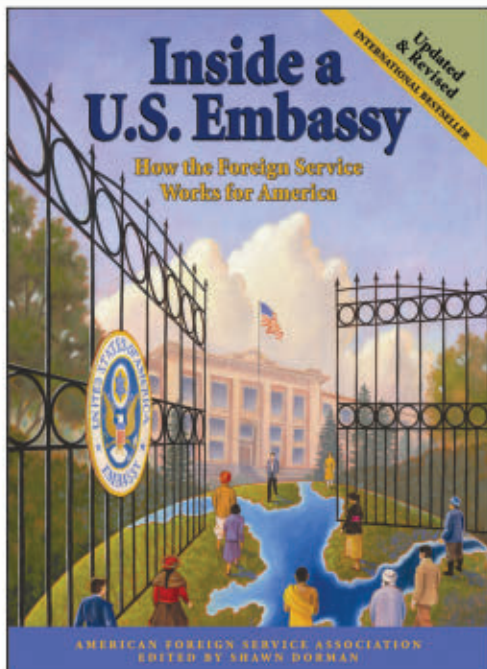
Yet beyond the individual visa decisions, the personal conduct of each consular officer dramatically influences how the U.S. is perceived by the foreign public overseas. Every interview is an opportunity to practice public diplo-

macy, to demonstrate that the U.S. is a country governed by laws, and to model American values. It is an incredible feeling to receive a sincere “thank you” from a person whose visa has been rejected, but is nonetheless grateful to have been treated with dignity.

Consular officers rarely see visa applicants once the interview is over. It is even rarer to witness the effect of an individual visa decision on the lives of the applicants and an entire community. During my stay in Rishikesh, I watched Asha and Parvati teach other children. I learned how their visit to the U.S. had changed their lives, and I met scores of children whose lives were also being changed for the better.

How different would things have turned out had the Gujarati children received visas instead of Parvati and Asha? Whether it is looking into the big, innocent eyes of a 7-year-old aspiring chess champion, or learning how a trip to the United States changed the lives of two teenage girls and their peers, there can be no doubt: consular interviews matter! ■

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WHEN GOOD OFFICERS GO BAD

THE CONSULAR INTEGRITY DIVISION USES LESSONS
LEARNED FROM PAST MALFEASANCE TO HEAD OFF
FUTURE INCIDENTS.

BY ROBERT W. THOMAS

Imagine starting a new job as chief of a consular section, only to learn that one of your predecessors was just arrested for helping young women falsify their non-immigrant visa applications. A few days later, three of your senior local employees confide that they think the guy was stealing money, too.

Or perhaps you're the new officer responsible for recording and reconciling consular fee collections. Thankfully, you see that the Consular Training Division at the Foreign Service Institute has an online training course on these duties. After completing the course, you begin to notice discrepancies in the cashier's end-of-day reports. You report your findings, provoking a major investigation that reveals the theft of more than half a million dollars from U.S. government funds over the past six years.

Or perhaps you notice one of your colleagues making inappropriate comments to visa applicants and initiating contact with them outside the office.

Robert "Robby" Thomas, a consular Foreign Service officer since 2001, is a senior watch officer in the Department of State Operations Center. Before that, he served as chief of the joint Consular Affairs-Diplomatic Security Consular Integrity Division. His overseas assignments include Nouakchott, Toronto and Abidjan.

Unfortunately, those examples are not merely hypothetical. They represent the cases of a former consular officer in Berlin, a consular cashier in Singapore, and vice consuls in Brazzaville and Sao Paulo, respectively. Their mug shots join those of others (including non-consular employees) on the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's Malfeasance Indictments intranet Web page, also known as the "Wall of Shame."

Addressing Vulnerabilities

The Consular Integrity Division, part of the Bureau of Consular Affairs' Office of Fraud Prevention Programs, is a joint collaboration with the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's Criminal Investigations Division. CID identifies vulnerabilities in our processes and systems in order to prevent their exploitation, while DS and the Office of the Inspector General investigate individual acts of employee malfeasance or lapses in professional responsibility. The jointly staffed division supports the investigation of the individual offenders.

While criminal prosecutions are typically high-profile and garner significant press attention, they are only a small part of CID's overall effort. Since 2003, CA has conducted a multifaceted strategy to prevent and mitigate vulnerabilities that may provide opportunities for malfeasance: employees providing consular services or

access to services in an illegal or improper manner.

The initial focus of the CID and its predecessor, the Vulnerability Assessment Unit, was on working with DS to support consular malfeasance casework with information and expert analysis. As this effort began to mature, a significant number of anecdotal “lessons learned” emerged. This naturally led to a push to share these lessons with the field through formal guidance and training.

In October 2008, the Bureau of Consular Affairs broadened CID’s mandate to include domestic passport operations. CA also formalized the process for incorporating the lessons learned from past incidents into policy, training, systems and oversight.

While criminal prosecutions are typically high-profile and garner significant press attention, they are only a small part of CID’s overall effort.

Today the CID team consists of 14 full-time positions, including Foreign Service consular generalists, DS special agents, and Civil Service professionals from both CA and DS.

The unit’s mission is to analyze what we need in our systems, procedures and our management; to document those requirements; and to follow through by constantly scrutinizing consular operations for vulnerabilities.

Our analysis reveals four trends that are strongly correlated to acts of malfeasance.

Ethics and Personal Conduct. In most of the cases analyzed, offenders did not appear to have had criminal intentions when they began their careers. Most of them began on the right path, only to stray later (in some

How to Model Integrity

- *Get trained.* Even if you’re a seasoned veteran who has taken the consular section chief course or the advanced consular course, served as a section chief or been a consular country coordinator, update your training regularly. Malfeasance most often occurs under the watch of managers who mean well, but do not have any recent training and have not kept up with our changing consular world. The Foreign Service Institute’s Consular Training Division offers dozens of classroom and online courses for consular employees to “learn constantly” throughout their careers.

- *Be transparent.* If there’s any room for debate at all, just say “no” to gifts or other consideration. Recuse yourself from handling matters that others might perceive as a conflict of interest. Clearly articulate this expectation to your staff, and model integrity for them daily.

- *Be consistent.* Follow proper procedures, even when they are a challenge or when there is an easier route. Waive or expedite appointments solely for reasons prescribed in a written post policy based on department priorities. Only accept proper referrals. Follow cashiering procedures to the letter. When procedures don’t make sense, or if they are impossible to meet because they are unrealistic, seek guidance from your supervisor and the department, and advocate for changes.

- *Trust, but verify.* Sometimes temptation is too great for anyone to bear. Pay attention to what is going on in your section. Conduct random spot checks. Get out of your office and talk to your team. Doing this not only shows that you care about them and their work; it shows that you are paying attention.

- *Call home, early and often.* If you have questions about policy or procedures, or if you observe a problem or encounter unexplained computer issues, seek guidance from CA. If you have concerns about employee misconduct or malfeasance, you must both report it up your chain of command and make sure that CA is looped in right away.

- *Manage relationships.* While strict adherence to policy and procedure is vital, it’s not a license to disregard the rest of the mission. The visa process is, after all, a “foreign policy tool.” Reconcile this by reaching out to colleagues early and often, educating them about what your team does, the visa referral system, and why transparency is so very important in our work.

- *Be a good example.* Remember that consular work is the training ground of the Foreign Service. All State generalists enter the department through a consular assignment. The examples they see from consular managers will shape the type of managers — and the type of officers — they will become. Maximize use of CA’s Leadership Initiatives, including the Consular Leadership Tenets.

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cases, much later). The single factor that appears to link them all is a pattern of questionable ethical choices. The earliest of these poor ethical choices typically played out in two distinct areas:

1) *Gifts*. Whether in the form of chocolates from an immigration firm at the holidays, a cake baked by a grateful immigrant visa recipient, or a free hotel room on the coast, presents are generally inappropriate and should be politely declined with a brief reference to the strict legal guidelines under which we operate.

That said, sometimes accepting a gift is not only appropriate but essential. All officers should refer to the ethics guidelines available from L/Ethics on iNet for any clarification of what is and is not acceptable under the gift regulations. Any specific questions should be referred to L/Ethics by submitting a question on the L intranet site:

*In reality,
management controls
and appropriate oversight
help create a situation
where trust is possible.*

<http://l.s.state.sbu/sites/emp/pages/askquestion.aspx>.

2) *Conflicts of Interest*. CID has noted that malfeasant employees often did not recuse themselves from cases involving their neighbors, business associates, relatives or others to whom there was a perceived connection.

While an actual conflict of interest is clearly a problem, even a perceived one can be harmful. Again,

transparency is key.

Lax Management. In nearly every case analyzed, managers failed to ensure that procedures were properly taught and followed, personnel were adequately supervised, or appropriate management controls were in place. Instead, they appeared to confuse the existence of management controls with a lack of trust in employees.

In reality, management controls and appropriate over-

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sight help *create* a situation where trust is possible. There is no better way to show your employees and colleagues that you care than by protecting them from accusations of misconduct.

In most instances, it appears that very early in the offenders' careers, when they first started down the slippery slope of poor ethical choices, they were not called out on their poor judgment. With that in mind, CID's current focus is on training consular leaders to learn the lessons of the past — to recognize warning signs and act to prevent minor lapses from becoming major violations.

Lack of Managerial Training. Another strong correlation was found between instances of malfeasance and the number of consular sections led by managers without recent training — particularly among those who had taken no major consular tradecraft courses since 9/11.

Demands and problems in consular work continue to change, and managers must keep up with and embrace

Recent improvements to oversight of DNA testing and clearer guidelines on visa referrals can close significant gaps in our management controls.

those changes. In light of the reality that new officers generally have the most up-to-date training on current processes and procedures, consular managers should seek opportunities to learn, as well as teach.

Failure or Absence of Procedural/Systems Safeguards. In nearly all cases of malfeasance, loopholes in policies, computer systems or post procedures were contributing factors. For example, longstanding management controls could have

helped prevent or detect the above-mentioned cashier malfeasance case, if only the accountable control officer had implemented them properly and consistently.

In the course of supporting this investigation, CID also found that our electronic cashiering system was in need of an update. A relatively minor change to workflow and computer software now effectively mitigates a risk that cost us at least half a million dollars.

Future overhauls of our cashiering systems should automate many of the clerical reconciliation functions that now burden our managers and are so highly prone to human error. FSI's online training courses for accountable consular officers, consular cashiers and consular agents help address another great vulnerability, providing much-needed training on a vital managerial control mechanism.

Prevention Is the Watchword

New projects under development in CA's Office of Consular Systems and Technology will help to further automate management controls, making the work of our managers simpler, easier to implement and less time-consuming.

Recent improvements to oversight of DNA testing, the worldwide standardization of the visa referral policy and forthcoming clarification on the assignment of consular systems roles are other examples of how policy refinement can close significant gaps in our management controls.

While any organization may experience malfeasance, we can prevent future incidents by applying the lessons of the past and making continual improvements to policy and procedures, automated systems, training and oversight. ■

What Non-Consular Officers Can Do to Model Integrity

- *Support transparency and equal treatment in the visa process.* Make judicious use of the referral system, using it only where essential. When people approach you for favors or special treatment that does not qualify for a referral, use it as an opportunity to explain American culture and values. It's a great moment to drive home our values of transparency, equal treatment under the law and good governance.

- *Ensure consular perspectives are reflected in post reporting.* The consular section at each post has a wealth of experience and direct interaction with the public that can provide useful reporting perspectives.

- *Enlist the consular section in public diplomacy efforts.* This is a natural way to interact directly with a large subset of the public. Public diplomacy efforts are also key to combating fraud from outside groups that seek to manipulate the process.

“WE’RE ON FACEBOOK”

AS THE FACE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE FOR COUNTLESS PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD, CONSULAR STAFF USE SOCIAL MEDIA IN NOVEL WAYS.

BY WILLIAM BENT

After comparing the Department of State’s technological expertise with that of the now-defunct United States Information Agency on their weblog, “Whirled View” (<http://whirledview.typepad.com/whirledview/>), former FSOs Patricia Kushlis and Patricia Lee Sharpe offer the following comment: “It often seems as if the State Department is trying to make up for lost time, positioning itself precariously on the other extreme of the spectrum, as current public diplomacy recruits fall all over themselves to prove they can out-Facebook, out-tweet and out-text the most desperate friend-seeker on the block.”

It does seem these days that we are stumbling over each other as we “friend,” “poke” and “tweet” our way around the Web. “Social media” is the buzzword of the day, and the State Department has jumped on the bandwagon, utilizing such tools as Facebook, Twitter and

YouTube to reach our audiences. We have embraced the new technologies, with active public blogs like DipNote and countless internal blogs and forum discussions. The department also operates nearly 200 Facebook pages, 50 Twitter sites and 42 YouTube sites.

Consular officers are often the literal face of the Department of State, touching the lives of thousands of American citizens and visa applicants around the world each day. So it should come as no surprise that the Bureau of Consular Affairs is using social media in novel ways.

Embassy London, for example, has a YouTube channel with interesting and informative “how to” videos concerning consular matters. My favorite is “Melissa Gets a Passport,” in the style of those goofy public service films from the 1950s, in which the cheerfully inquisitive title character is a U.S. expatriate who navigates the passport application process. (The embassy’s “Scamnet” video is pretty darn good, too, with apologies to Joe Friday.)

Another example comes from Mission Mexico, whose YouTube videos include one discussing how to stay safe during spring break. And the consular section in Tel Aviv has developed an excellent video warning applicants of the consequences of engaging in fraud.

CA also utilizes Twitter to disseminate travel alerts and updates on country-specific information notices. The TravelGov account boasts over 25,000 followers, includ-

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ing some of our main stakeholders: U.S. government offices, foreign embassies, travel agencies and university study-abroad offices. Other governments are also using Twitter to keep in touch with their citizens: the British have a main Foreign Office account and numerous additional Twitter pages managed by individual embassies, consulates and missions.

Of the State Department's nearly 200 Facebook pages, many have thousands of followers, and a growing number of them have more than 10,000 fans. Most of the pages are not focused exclusively on consular matters, but certainly visa, passport and overseas citizens services issues are prominent on the sites.

One Facebook page that seems to work well is that of Embassy Podgorica. This relatively small post has somehow managed to attract over 3,000 fans to its site, which not only covers the busy schedule of its ambassador but also publishes items on the Diversity Visa Lottery and offers a "how to" video on the visa process. Other noteworthy Facebook pages in terms of number of "fans" are our embassies in La Paz and Pretoria. The granddaddy of them all, however, is Embassy Jakarta, which boasts at least 124,000 fans.

The www.travel.state.gov Web site, which scores approximately 300 million visits annually, and its sister sites in embassies and consulates abroad remain the main tools for disseminating information to our citizens about travel-related conditions.

The Value of Feedback

So why use social media? The short answer is that one should engage the public where they are. According to Walter Braunohler of State's Office of eDiplomacy, "If we engage people where they are going naturally, we will have much better success in reaching them and getting them the information they need."

People around the world are certainly flocking to social media Web sites, with an estimated 350 million people currently on Facebook and more than 105 million users worldwide on Twitter.

Another reason to utilize social media is the potential to engage the public in conversation, the characteristic that sets it apart from traditional Web sites. Bill May of the Office of Innovative Engagement in the Bureau of Interna-

*Embassies should not
just post information,
but also respond to
comments and inquiries.*

tional Information Programs emphasizes that this two-way communication is the most important aspect of social media. With the typical "flat" Web page, May explains, "eyeballs may be looking at it, but that doesn't mean anything happened. What is important is how much real engagement you have."

John Echard of CA's Office of Public Affairs and Policy Coordination agrees. When he set up the bureau's Twitter accounts, he realized from the outset the importance of having two-way communication. "Twitter should not be used only as a way to disseminate information — it's a conversation, and posts should also correspond with people tweeting at them."

I first became aware of the power of social media during a recent consular tour in the Dominican Republic, where I monitored a local Web site, www.dominicans.totheusa.com. This is a forum for immigration and visa issues specifically focused on visa operations at Embassy Santo Domingo. Founded several years ago at a time when there was a huge backlog of immigrant visa applications, the site spotlighted a perceived lack of transparency in the process.

As I read the entries on the site's forum, I was struck by how confused and angry many forum members were. Much of their frustration was over appointment wait times (which happily are now dramatically reduced). But some of it came from misunderstandings that could be bridged through better communication.

Upon receiving approval for the initiative from CA, I began a monthly "Ask the Expert" column on the site in 2007, and posted periodic updates on the forum. We invited the site's founder in for a "behind the scenes" tour of the consular section. The results were impressive: On the rare occasion when a forum member posted something negative, 10 others would "gang up" on him, noting how hard embassy employees were working to end the backlog.

This dynamic interaction can also be extremely valuable for feedback. In monitoring the site, I often discovered problems and was then able to adjust my outreach accordingly. Many times members would post comments about their interview experiences, thus providing immediate feedback about the consular section's customer service. We even adopted some suggestions for procedural changes proposed by forum members. This engagement

F O C U S

created a dialogue that allowed us to address the needs of our customers and give them a sense of “ownership” that significantly enhanced our public image.

The most successful State Department Facebook pages recognize the importance of this two-way conversation. Embassies Jakarta and Podgorica engage their audiences by answering their “mail.”

Unfortunately, many current consular Facebook and Twitter sites are ill-conceived or poorly managed and fall into the “We’re on Facebook!” trap. It is essential to ponder the purpose, audience and message of your page and your commitment to it.

Success on Facebook pages should be defined by how many interactions the site has with its followers. Consider how lonely one’s personal Facebook page would be if no “friends” ever posted anything on it.

*The most powerful
example of social media’s
potential for consular
outreach is its use
during crises.*

Social Media During Crises

The greatest potential of social media for consular outreach comes from their use during a crisis. When the ability to reach large audiences in the fastest way possible is paramount, Web 2.0 technologies, such as Twitter, have already proven themselves effective.

During the Mumbai terrorist attacks of November 2008, for instance, Daniel Schaub, a Web publishing specialist in the Bureau of Public Affairs, recalls: “We always monitor Operations Center releases, major news media stories and the latest trending terms on Twitter.

“In the case of the Mumbai attacks, we noticed major news coverage and immediately coordinated with CA and others to stand up the emergency hot line for U.S. citizens worried about their relatives. Within a few minutes, we tweeted the hot line number, posted it to the Dip-

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Note blog and featured it on the www.state.gov Web site. The line began receiving calls moments later.” Similarly, in the aftermath of the Air France Flight 447 crash in June 2009, PA immediately tweeted the latest developments as they were reported.

“Tweeting is extremely valuable, particularly given the fact that the main means of accessing the Internet worldwide is via mobile phone,” says Schaub. “Twitter is ideal for that platform and allows us to quickly reach and engage the widest possible audience.”

State has even used social media to avert a potential crisis. During the March 2009 Madagascar coup, PA staff monitoring Twitter noticed rumors that the country’s president had taken refuge in the U.S. embassy. The bureau responded to the tweets immediately after confirming this was false. Those who were calling for protests in front of the embassy noticed the tweets and thanked the depart-

CA uses Twitter to disseminate travel alerts and updates on country-specific information notices.

ment for setting the record straight. No crowd gathered, averting a potential crisis.

The Jan. 12 earthquake in Haiti clearly demonstrated Facebook’s potential in the aftermath of a disaster. Within hours of the quake, a Haitian-Canadian created an “Earthquake Haiti” Facebook page

to help those seeking information on loved ones.

CA monitored the site and posted contact information on how to reach our task force. It was fascinating to see the number of fans grow exponentially as the crisis continued (the site currently has more than 300,000 followers) and to watch people learn via Facebook that their relatives were safe.

I saw a posting from someone searching for her brother, who works at the U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince. After scanning the e-mail directory, I located the brother and sent him a note informing him that his sister was looking for him. Although it took a few days to receive a reply from the employee, the example illustrates the potential of social networking in welfare-and-whereabouts cases.

Embassy Santiago utilized Facebook following the Jan. 28 earthquake in Chile, posting updates for U.S. citizens and answering inquiries from its fans. Once again, the key element that Facebook brought to the equation was interaction via a two-way conversation. The embassy did not just post information, but also responded to comments and inquiries.

Friend Us!

The Department of State has many resources available for posts who are considering the use of social media. The bureaus of International Information Programs and Information Resource Management have developed a “Social Media Hub” site on the Communities at State Forum intranet site. The hub provides practical training manuals, best practices, a discussion forum and a section on resources and research. It is important, for example, to make sure that privacy rules are always followed when putting information in the public domain.

Folks in the Office of Public Affairs and Policy Coordination are always prepared to give advice and guidance for those interested in using social media for consular outreach. E-mail us at CA-P-Outreach@state.gov. Or become friends with CA on Facebook! ■

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REMEMBERING MARY RYAN

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THE LATE CA ASSISTANT SECRETARY'S 2002
DISMISSAL WAS A TRANSFORMING EVENT IN THE
MODERN HISTORY OF THE CONSULAR SERVICE.

BY EDWARD ALDEN

o part of the U.S. government — not the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency or the National Security Council — was more shaken by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 than the consular corps of the State Department. When the late Mary Ryan, then the assistant secretary of consular affairs, went before a hostile Senate committee in October 2001 to try to explain how visas had been issued to the 19 hijackers, she pleaded for some understanding of the impact. “I have visa officers all over the world who are devastated by the fact that they issued to these people. One of them told me, ‘You can tell me it’s not my fault because we didn’t have the information, but it is just as if a child ran in front of my car and I killed the child and everyone said it wasn’t my fault. I have to live with that for the rest of my life.’”

Eight months later, with opposition building in Congress, a shrill media campaign and faltering support from her political masters, Ryan would pay for those mistakes with her career, becoming the only U.S. government offi-

cial to be fired as a consequence of the worst attack ever on U.S. soil. Nearly a decade later, the consular service is still feeling the reverberations.

Ryan’s dismissal by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell was a transforming event in the modern history of the consular service. The Bureau of Consular Affairs had long been a backwater in the department, but the 9/11 attacks thrust it into the agonizing public debate over the government’s failure to thwart the plot. Ryan and her staff were accused by some in the press of almost traitorous irresponsibility, of having an “open-door policy for terrorists.” Some in Congress wanted to strip the State Department of the authority to issue visas and hand it over to the new Department of Homeland Security. For a corps that had long seen itself on the front lines of public diplomacy, serving U.S. interests by permitting students, tourists and other visitors to experience the United States for themselves, it forced a fundamental re-evaluation of the balance between security and openness.

CA is still struggling to find that balance. It has again been forced to defend its professionalism in the wake of the Dec. 25, 2009, incident in which a young Nigerian radical tried to blow up a Detroit-bound trans-Atlantic airliner by igniting plastic explosives he had successfully concealed in his underwear. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab had been issued a multiple-entry, two-year tourist visa,

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which the State Department did not revoke even after his father presented himself at the U.S. embassy in Abuja to warn that his son had fallen in with Yemeni radicals. Once again the consular service finds itself in the crosshairs of some in Congress who question its ability to keep out those who might harm the United States (see p. 42).

Consular work is not what most people have in mind when they sign on for a State Department career. Stamping visas is the traditional first job for entry-level Foreign Service generalists, after which most non-consular officers escape to more rewarding economic or political work. Larry Wilkerson, who was Sec. Powell's chief of staff, calls the mandatory consular service "a colossal drain on morale. We lose a lot of Foreign Service officers in their first two or three years because they can't stand it."

A Commitment to Service

But for some officers, consular work becomes a calling. And none had dedicated themselves more fully than Mary Ryan. Friends said Ryan devoted her life to two things: God and the State Department. She studied theology at Trinity University and attended church every day of her working life in Washington.

On the morning of the 9/11 attacks, she was in Charleston, S.C., with Frank Moss, one of her deputies, for a conference on passport management. They rented a car for the 450-mile drive back to Washington because U.S. airspace had been closed to commercial traffic. Ryan was especially worried about a nephew who regularly rode the PATH train that ran under the World Trade Center towers. "I swear she reduced a set of rosary beads to dust," Moss said.

If God was her touchstone, the State Department was her life. At the time of the terrorist attacks, she was the longest-serving official in the department, and only the second woman in its history to be named a career ambassador. For many young consular officers, she was a role model. "If you were in the service a minute less time than Mary, she was your mentor," said Maura Harty, who would replace her as assistant secretary.

Ryan had joined the Foreign Service with a posting in Naples in 1966, and from there she rotated assignments in Washington, D.C., Honduras, Mexico and several

*Friends said Mary Ryan
devoted her life to two things:*

*God and the State
Department.*

African countries, finally being named ambassador to Swaziland in 1988. She was tapped by President Bill Clinton as assistant secretary for consular services in 1993.

Ryan inherited responsibility for CA at one of the most challenging junctures in its history. From 1993 to 2001, the number of non-immi-

grant visa applications grew from seven million each year to more than 10 million, and the demand for U.S. passports doubled. Yet budget constraints cut staffing sharply. "The motto in the department in the 1990s was 'Do more with less', to the extent that it seemed to me we were expected to do everything with nothing," Ryan would later tell the 9/11 Commission.

At the same time, some officials were awakening to the growing threat posed by Islamic extremists. In February 1993, just three months before Ryan took up her posting, a huge truck bomb was detonated beneath the World Trade Center towers, killing six people, injuring a thousand more and ripping a massive seven-story hole in the buildings.

For the State Department, the attack revealed serious weaknesses in its visa-granting procedures. The spiritual leader of the bombers, the "blind sheik" Omar Abdel-Rahman, had obtained a visa from the U.S. embassy in Sudan, a country which at the time was harboring al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden.

Rahman was known to U.S. intelligence for radical activities in Egypt, and his name had been placed on State's terrorist watch list. But when Rahman applied for a visa in 1990, a local hire in Khartoum failed to check the microfiche watch list, and then lied to the consular officer by telling him the check had been done. The embassy in Sudan was further unaware that its counterpart in Egypt had just issued a warning regarding Rahman's intention to try to enter the United States. It was an appalling failure all around.

Troubled by such mistakes, Ryan made it one of her primary goals to build a computerized name check system whose integrity would not be subject to the whims of local officials. In doing so, she and her officials were far ahead of their time. While State would later be pilloried as soft on terrorism, the department had actually created the government's first terrorist watch list in 1987, known as TIPOFF. It was designed by a career employee at the Bu-

reau of Intelligence and Research, John Arriza, who then became a passionate advocate for the system. It required difficult negotiations with the intelligence agencies to persuade them to declassify basic data such as the names, nationalities, birth dates and passport numbers of suspected terrorists so these could be added to the list.

Thanks to Ryan's initiative, by September 1995 every visa applicant was checked against that list through a secure broadband connection back to Washington. At a time when the FBI had no internal e-mail and was still using paper case management files, it was, as the 9/11 Commission would later conclude, an "impressive" accomplishment. And the system worked. Ramzi bin al-Shibh, a senior al-Qaida leader and roommate of the 9/11 plot's ringleader, Mohammed Atta, tried four times in 2000 to get a visa to come to the United States. Each time he was rejected because his name was in TIPOFF.

To Ryan and her colleagues in consular affairs, the story of what had gone wrong before 9/11 was a simple one: the intelligence agencies were either unaware or had failed to share what they knew about the hijackers, so there was no information about any of them in TIPOFF. Former colleagues of Ryan say she was enraged when she learned after the attacks that the CIA knew that two of the hijackers had met with known al-Qaida operatives in Malaysia in January 2000. That information was never given to the State Department, which granted visas to both men. In a testy exchange before the Senate Judiciary subcommittee in October 2001, Ryan made headlines by charging that either there had been "a colossal intelligence failure ... or there was information that was not shared with us who are the outer ring of border security."

A Failure of Imagination?

For all the progress Ryan had made, however, and her justified anger at the CIA for hoarding intelligence, the 9/11 attacks had, in fact, exposed serious weaknesses in the visa system. They were not technological, but came instead, in a phrase that would be used many times during the investigation of the attacks, from a "failure of imagination."

Organizations, governmental or otherwise, have a hard

*For all the progress
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visa system.*

time doing more than one or two big things well. For the consular service in the 1990s, the big thing was managing the enormous growth of travel to the United States. The Iron Curtain had been torn down in Europe, and strong economic growth in Asia had created a huge new middle class with global aspirations. The result was a boom in travel to the United States.

Except for concerns over illegal immigration from Mexico, there was no question at the time that the United States should encourage the trend. Democrats wanted an open door for refugees and a generous policy of family reunification, while Republicans wanted a steady supply of foreign workers to keep the U.S. Chamber of Commerce happy. Both parties favored admitting more foreign students for universities, more skilled workers for Silicon Valley, more tourists to fill American hotels, and more wealthy Arabs paying for treatment at U.S. hospitals.

The State Department, quite reasonably, reflected those priorities. Nowhere was that more evident than in Saudi Arabia, where 15 of the 19 hijackers received their visas. For half a century, Saudi Arabia had been the most important U.S. ally in the most volatile region of the world. And as one consular official interviewed by the 9/11 Commission put it, "our mission in Saudi Arabia [was] to be as accommodating as we possibly could."

Under the traditional criteria used to evaluate visa applicants, that was not a particularly tough sell. The biggest hurdle for visitors to the United States has long been, and remains today, the legal presumption that anyone coming here intends to stay and immigrate. To overcome that presumption, individuals must demonstrate strong ties to their home countries — family, work, a history of travelling abroad and returning, and the finances to make the trip.

For most Saudis, this was not a problem. As George Lannon, Ryan's former deputy, later put it: "Saudis didn't come and dig ditches; they didn't go to work in McDonald's. They partied and they left." Indeed, State Department policy in the 1990s was to treat all Saudi applicants as having overcome the "intending immigrant" presumption. That meant they were often not required to fill out visa application forms completely, did not need to show proof of a home address or financial means and, in many cases, were not asked to appear for a personal interview.

Of the 15 hijackers who received visas in Saudi Arabia, only two were interviewed.

Security was a concern in Saudi Arabia, but it was the physical security of the embassy that was foremost on the mind of Thomas Furey, who took over as consul general in Riyadh in 2000 after three years of supervising the world's largest consular operation, in Mexico City. Furey inherited what he later called a "chaotic and dysfunctional" operation in Riyadh. Visa applications were growing by 5 percent a year, but Washington had refused to authorize more consular officers. Crowds would queue daily outside the embassy, raising fears that the building could become a terrorist target, as had already happened in August 1998 when al-Qaida detonated truck bombs outside U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing more than 200 people.

Furey hit upon a solution. Some U.S. embassies around the world were already permitting travel agents to handle the initial paperwork of the visa application, an innovation

Furey adopted. Under the scheme, Saudis could fill out visa applications and leave their passports with one of 10 authorized travel agencies, and the bundle of applications would be delivered daily to the U.S. embassy for processing. If the embassy wanted to interview an applicant, word would be sent back through the travel agent and an interview would be scheduled.

In the first summer of the program, in 2001, the number of people gathering outside the embassy fell to a fraction of the normal traffic. Furey loved the innovation so much that he gave it a catchy name — "Visa Express." In the three months before 9/11, three of the hijackers received their visas through the Visa Express scheme.

Following the attacks, the program became a lightning rod. Conservative activists dubbed it a "Travelocity for terrorists," and charged Mary Ryan personally with nurturing a "courtesy culture" at State that was "inherently inimical to the types of reforms necessary to keep out terrorists." Un-

What Went Wrong with the Nigerian Bomber?

Omar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the youngest of 16 children born to a wealthy Nigerian banker, had followed the path of many children of the developing world's elite. In 2005 he enrolled at University College London, where he earned a low C grade point average in engineering and finance. A devout Muslim, he was the president of the school's Islamic Society, and had shown some public sympathy with radical groups preaching violence. But that history was either not known, or did not leave a negative impression on the consular officer in London who issued him a multiple-entry tourist visa on June 12, 2008, for a trip to Houston.

That should have changed in November 2009, when the young man's father made an extraordinary visit to the U.S. embassy in Abuja. He warned State and CIA officers that his son had taken up with radical Islamists in Yemen, known as the training ground for a jihadist group called al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. The message was taken seriously enough for reporting back to Washington in a *Visas Viper* cable, a procedure set up by the department after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing attempt to ensure that a foreign individual with potential terrorist links was placed on the appropriate watch lists. The cable was shared with

the National Counterterrorism Center, which is responsible for collating and analyzing intelligence to decide which individuals should be listed on the massive terrorist watch list of some 400,000 names built out since the 9/11 attacks.

The NCTC's failure to pull together the different threads that pointed to Abdulmutallab's involvement in a terrorist plot is well-known. It did include his name in an extensive NCTC database of potential terrorists, the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment. But he was never placed on any watch lists, such as the "no fly" list that would have kept him from boarding the Dec. 25, 2009, Northwest Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit with plastic explosives strapped to his body.

What is less well known is that the State Department could easily have kept Abdulmutallab from ever boarding the plane simply by revoking his visa. Why, in the wake of his father's warning, did that not happen?

In the immediate aftermath of the failed bombing, the department's response to 12/25 looked like a rerun of 9/11. Several State Department officials pointed the finger at the intelligence community by suggesting incorrectly that State could only have revoked the visa if it had been directed to do so by the NCTC. The center's director, Michael Leiter, caustically rebutted that claim at a Senate hearing in January: "I will admit that when I was told of that authority that I don't

like her impressive performance in the 1990s, Ryan was slow to recognize the implications of the 9/11 attacks for how Consular Affairs did its business. A harsh report by the State Department's inspector general in December 2002 concluded: "The post-Sept. 11 era should have witnessed immediate and dramatic changes in CA's direction of the visa process. This has not happened. A fundamental readjustment by [State] Department leadership regarding visa issuance and denial has not taken place."

The timing of the criticisms could not have been worse for Ryan and the consular service. With the impending creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the White House planned to hand authority over visa policy to the new department. Some in Congress wanted to go much

The attempted Christmas Day bombing was a sharp reminder that the Bureau of Consular Affairs continues to face scrutiny as never before.

further, giving complete control over visas to DHS. "The State Department views the issuance of visas as a diplomatic tool," said Representative Dave Weldon, a Florida Republican who chaired one of the relevant subcommittees in the House. "The day is past when it should be viewed that way. It is now clearly a national homeland security function."

Secretary Colin Powell, however, was not going to sit back and watch the dismantling of his department. He reached out to Tom Ridge, who was in line to be appointed as the first DHS secretary, and quickly persuaded him not to take on the headache of handling visas at nearly 300 embassies and consulates overseas. The two decided to present a united front to Congress.

have, I was surprised to learn from the State Department that they thought I did have that [authority]," he said.

Susan Collins, R-Maine, the ranking minority member on the Senate Homeland Security Committee, backed him up. "The State Department has this authority. In fact, our law, the Intelligence Reform Act, protects the department from lawsuits when its officials revoke a visa overseas. But the State Department failed to act." The committee chairman, Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., warned that he might resurrect the idea of moving responsibility for visa issuance away from State to the Department of Homeland Security.

In response, State quickly changed course and acknowledged its own mistakes. For instance, there was never any doubt that State could have revoked Abdulmutallab's visa: Since 2001 it has revoked more than 57,000 visas, some 2,800 of them for suspected links to terrorism. Instead, the case revealed a remarkable hole in the department's own security systems.

Amazingly, the Visas Viper cable — which was created to prevent consular officers from inadvertently issuing a visa to a suspected terrorist — did not require any reporting on whether the individual already possessed a valid visa. That information could have been determined by a computer search, but was not required to be included in the cable. It was the sort of informational black hole that still occurs with

disturbing frequency, despite the post-9/11 mantra to "connect the dots."

In response, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has ordered that every Visas Viper cable sent back to Washington contain information on the current U.S. visa status of anyone identified. The search systems to make sure that visa holders are accurately identified have also been enhanced. And it is a safe bet that visas will now be revoked for anyone named in such a telegram.

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs David Donahue was contrite in a hearing before a March 11 House Homeland Security subcommittee, acknowledging that the failed attack "revealed systematic failures in the U.S. government's efforts to protect the people of the United States," and adding that State had responded with an overhaul of its visa revocation procedures. Critics of the department may also be assuaged by a further expansion of the visa security program, in which DHS agents are stationed in some consulates to help with the screening of visa applications that raise terrorism or security concerns.

The threat to strip the department of its visa function appears to have waned. But the attempted Christmas Day bombing was a sharp reminder that the Bureau of Consular Affairs continues to face scrutiny as never before.

— Edward Alden

“Thrown to the Wolves”

But with the integrity of his department now threatened, Powell had run out of patience with Mary Ryan. “We all loved Mary, [and] she was really beloved by the consular officers, but she was starting to cause me difficulty with the Hill,” he said later. “She really was not ... responding flexibly enough to the political and bureaucratic demands of the post-9/11 period. Changes were necessary, and we had to be a little more contrite about what we were doing in order to save it.” At the meeting with Ridge, he had ordered her to keep quiet, saying later that “she was about to have a nervous breakdown over the issue. She didn’t get the message that it was no longer business as usual.”

On July 8, 2002, Ryan’s immediate boss, Under Secretary for Management Grant Green, called her into his office and told her it was time to step aside. “Mary was very good. It’s just that at a time when everyone in town was trying to point a finger and level blame, consular affairs was very susceptible to taking that blame,” Green said.

Later that month, the new U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia shut down the Visa Express program, writing in a cable back to Washington: “I am deeply troubled about the prevailing perception in the media and within Congress, and possibly the American public at large, that our current practices represent a shameful and inadequate effort on our part.” The next year State would end the practice of waiving personal interviews for low-risk visa applicants, and Congress followed by enshrining mandatory interviews in law.

Ryan’s dismissal outraged her friends and colleagues in the department, who fired off a series of e-mails accusing Powell of cowardice in the face of McCarthyite tactics. At her retirement ceremony, “Powell never acknowledged Mary at all,” complained George Lannon, her deputy. “His presentation was basically, ‘Well, old Mary’s decided to hang it up,’ as opposed to ‘We’ve thrown her off the sled to get the wolves off us,’ which is what it was. He would never acknowledge that she took the hit. I was livid. I was appalled.”

Powell, too, has nursed a grudge. While he didn’t save Ryan’s job, he bucked the White House and won Senate confirmation for Maura Harty, a Ryan protégé and among her closest friends and allies in the department. “Whether they liked it or not,” he said, firing Ryan “was necessary to

*Some in Congress still
want to strip the State
Department of the authority
to issue visas and hand it
over to the new Department
of Homeland Security.*

... save the consular corps. And I have always had a little bitterness that I had to get that kind of abuse when, in fact, I kept the consular corps from going to DHS.”

Mary Ryan died of bone cancer in 2006, four years after leaving the State Department, and her saga has left lasting scars on the consular service. In the aftermath of the attacks, as all agencies of the government embraced the new mission of protecting the United States from

another terrorist attack, the number of visas issued plummeted. In 2003 the State Department issued fewer than five million visas, down from more than 7.5 million in the year before the 9/11 attacks.

By 2008 that number had climbed back to more than 6.5 million, before falling again during the deep recession of 2009. But even before the economy faltered, overseas travel to the United States had never quite recovered, even as it was booming in the rest of the world.

The consular service continues to struggle to marry the need for security with its traditional mission of encouraging visitors to the United States. It has poured resources into the timely processing of student visas, fixing one of the biggest problems of the 9/11 aftermath. More recently, significant changes were made to the background checks required for foreign scientists and engineers, a procedure that had created delays of many months for Indians and Chinese working for American universities or companies. The new procedures should speed up approvals without diminishing security. But the department has been reluctant to advertise those accomplishments too loudly, afraid that critics will again accuse it of being soft on security despite the much tougher procedures — such as mandatory fingerprinting of all visa applicants — in place today.

As Dianne Andruch, one of Ryan’s former senior aides, puts it: “Prior to 9/11, we were under a lot of pressure to have people processed for visas in an expeditious manner. The basic attitude was that these countries were our friends and the United States should do everything possible to facilitate travel. That’s what Mary Ryan was trying to do, and that’s what she was under pressure to do — until something happened, and then everybody ran away from that position.”

Nearly nine years later, the consular service is still trying to find solid ground on which to stand. ■

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And Save Some Green



Please make sure we have
your e-mail address!

As AFSA prepares to institute more environmentally friendly practices, reducing our consumption of paper significantly, we are asking our members to please ensure that we have their valid e-mail addresses on file. This will allow us to contact you by e-mail rather than cluttering up your home with paper mail, and it also leads to significant savings in postage.

We ask our active-duty members to give us their “.gov” e-mail addresses, as those are unlikely to change throughout your career. For all others, any valid e-mail address works!



American
Foreign
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WHY I CHOSE CONSULAR

SEVEN FOREIGN SERVICE EMPLOYEES OFFER INSIGHTS
INTO WHAT MAKES CONSULAR WORK REWARDING —
IF ALSO, AT TIMES, FRUSTRATING.

IF I CAN MAKE IT THERE ...

I entered the Foreign Service in 1993, unconded and unaware of the consular function. My top bid in A-100 was Lagos, Nigeria, and my assignments officer happily assigned me to a consular-economic rotation there. After enduring countless stories of visa fraud (and other hardships) prior to departing for post, I began my tour as a non-immigrant visa officer.

While there were many elements of life in Lagos that were quite difficult, consular work was not one of them. I enjoyed the camaraderie of working on the visa team, the challenge of a high-fraud visa environment, and the satisfaction of an honest day's (hard) work. My year in the economic section was also interesting, but I missed the drama of the consular world.

I found that I enjoyed the same aspects of consular work during my second tour in New Delhi. So when I was tenured halfway through that assignment, choosing a cone was a no-brainer. I reasoned that if I liked consular work in Nigeria and India, I'd probably like it anywhere. I asked to be coned consular, a decision I've never regretted.

Mark Strege
Deputy Consul General
Embassy Seoul

A HELPFUL VOICE

While my husband and I were vacationing at Lake Atitlan in Guatemala in 2006, Hurricane Stan's heavy rains devastated the region with floods and mudslides. Safe but stranded, we could sense growing panic among other tourists and local people as they realized the limited amount of food, fuel and other supplies in the area, so I called the U.S. embassy — twice. I called first during business hours, and the operator — probably overwhelmed at the time — told me to “watch the news” and promptly hung up. I remember thinking, “But I *am* the news.” So I called back a few hours later, this time on the emergency number, and reached the duty officer.

Over the next 48 hours my husband and I worked closely with the embassy to communicate evacuation plans to tourists (who were making plans to hike out on an unstable mountainside — yikes!) and to check on Americans (whose families were trying to make sure they were okay — which they were). This “American Citizen Services work” and later conversations with that duty officer persuaded me to join the Foreign Service as a consular officer.

I'll soon finish my first Foreign Service assignment (as a political officer), and look forward to beginning my consular duties so I might one day be that helpful voice at the

other end of a phone call.

*Cristin Heinbeck
Entry-Level Officer
Embassy Abuja*



INTRODUCING NEW HIRES TO THE FS

One of my first consular chiefs told me that every time we bid, we choose the Foreign Service over another, possibly simpler, lifestyle. It's not a decision that we make just once upon entry; throughout our careers, we choose our own path. And this is the wonderful thing about our Service. I get to choose the consular cone again and again. It intrigued me from the start; I loved the idea of being the friendly face behind a visa interview or a citizenship claim.

I'm in the fairly unique position of being part of a consular tandem couple; having a spouse with the same love of our work makes life so easy when the job requires strange hours or unusual assignments, like my first-tour portfolio, which included consular waiting room pest control. It does also lead to some lively debates at home over arcane sections of 9 FAM.

One of the best parts of consular work, and my favorite part of being a consular officer, is the responsibility that we have to mentor and develop not just consular officers, but all of the entry-level officers who pass through consular sections on their first or second tours, working to give them the best possible introduction to the Foreign Service.

*Meredith McEvoy
Career Development Officer
Bureau of Human Resources
(spouse of Bill Beardslee — see below)*



THE SPICE OF LIFE

Starting this job as a Foreign Service officer in another cone, I was surprised by how much I enjoyed consular work during my first tour. After a tour in my original cone, I made the switch to become a consular officer. My colleagues were surprised, as this meant working in the same cone as my tandem spouse. But she and I agreed that one needs to work in the field that most interests a person, so I made the change.

We have worked together from time to time, and I am

*A consular officer meets
more excitement in one
morning than our
colleagues upstairs
see in a month.*

afraid our children have been permanently affected by our discussions of 214(b) and the Immigration & Naturalization Act at home!

It might sound strange to many, but I really find visa work to be challenging and rewarding, both in its complexity and in the need to interact with individuals as a manager and an adjudicator. In fact, I like it enough that I recently moved to a Civil Service position

in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, again working with visa issues, so that I can devote myself full-time to this fascinating and ever-evolving field. Consular work provides such a wide range of experience for officers, and this variety helped me to find the career most rewarding to me and my family.

*Bill Beardslee
Visa Specialist
Visa Services Office
Bureau of Consular Affairs
(spouse of Meredith McEvoy — see above)*



EXCITEMENT GALORE!

I like listening to former colleagues describe their adventures in the Foreign Service, because it appears I've had a more interesting life than they have (or perhaps they are just waiting for their memoirs to be declassified). I've forgotten most of the stories, because a consular officer meets more excitement in one morning than our colleagues upstairs see in a month. I used to pity them, trudging forth in search of interlocutors. The public was desperate to talk with me. Some had a hard time attracting the attention of their office manager, while I deployed a whole shop floor.

I never lay at night wondering whether my work was relevant; indeed, I never lay awake at night — physical exhaustion will do that for you. The State Department made me trustee of documents worth a fortune and grantee of extraordinary powers, relying on consular virtue and humility to uphold the republic. I was junior partner to host-country doctors, police, morticians, caseworkers; enjoyed a field economist's panorama of the economy; and had an anthropologist's dream job.

Consular assignment choices are the widest in the Service; if the department is anywhere, it needs a consul.

There is no happiness comparable to that of a dirty, hungry FS-3, embedded in the world.

Suella Pipal
Retired Consular Officer
Pittsburgh, Pa.

≈
NOT TOO SHABBY

You were destined for unemployment in Ireland if, like me, you were an arts major who graduated during the “Hungry Eighties.” I worked as a house cleaner, a hat-check girl in a nightclub, and at a pirate radio station. Then I was offered a job as press assistant at the American embassy in Dublin. Permanent, pensionable employment. What a novelty!

So before you could say security clearance, I was persuading the Irish media to publish press releases on matters of vital national interest — corn oil production in the Midwest, for example. In time, I found I got more satisfaction out of helping folks in trouble, so I moved to the embassy’s American Citizen Services Unit. I’m still in the business of imparting information, but it tends to be a lot less palatable than corn oil.

In ACS, we spend our time notifying people that their relative has died, telling them we can’t get them out of jail, or explaining that recovering a stolen child is slow and heartbreaking. We spend a lot of time saying: “I’m sorry this has happened to you. Here’s how we can help you.” Sometimes the kindest thing we do is lower unrealistic expectations. We try to do some of the heavy lifting at a time when the burden is too much to carry.

There are days when you really know that you’ve helped someone. And there are also a lot of days when ... well ... you just send out a lot of voting forms or answer questions about immigration. ACS has given me a chance to meet a broad spectrum of people — some of whom were even in their right mind at the time (as some may know, we attract our share of the world’s colorful characters in ACS). And the job has enabled me to go experience another country: I am currently working in Embassy Baghdad.

Not too shabby for an arts major. And not a drop of corn oil in sight!

Nollaig NiMhaolain
Locally Engaged Staff Supervisor
American Citizen Services Unit
Embassy Dublin

*I look forward to beginning
my consular duties so
I might one day be that
helpful voice at the other
end of a phone call.*

**ONE MORE
HAPPY CUSTOMER**

They were right: I couldn’t miss her. At 5’10,” she towered over the Mayans who exited the bus before her. She was a big woman who had obviously seen a lot of life.

It was my first day at my first post as a consular officer at the U.S. embassy in Guatemala City. I had arrived on an early morning flight,

dropped my long-suffering wife at the hotel, and rushed to the office. The ACS unit chief had asked me to meet the distressed, easy-to-spot American woman at the bus station, put her in a hotel and tell her we would take her to the airport the next morning.

Jorge, the embassy driver, and I picked her up and took her to a dollar-a-night hotel. We had ordered a pizza and were just getting ready to leave when she stiffened and fell onto the bed. She was having a grand mal seizure. With my limited Spanish, I ordered the driver to go find a doctor while I tried to dredge up first aid memories of how to help the woman.

Fortunately, Jorge and a doctor returned within minutes. The doctor quickly pulled out a needle and filled it with a sedative. He motioned for us to pull her arm down so that he could inject it. Unfortunately, her arm was covered in track marks and collapsed veins, so the doctor couldn’t find a vein to use. Jorge and I were trying to keep her arms open while avoiding the rapidly flying needle.

Just as the doctor was about to give up, the needle hit home. We heard a loud sigh and the woman went completely limp. We thought we had killed her. The doctor scrambled to find a pulse. Finally, he looked up with a big grin. She was alive!

The three of us collapsed on the floor, leaning against a wall. Just then, there was a knock on the door. The pizza had arrived. As soon as we opened the door, the woman sat up and started eating.

When I got back to the embassy, they asked, “How’d it go?” I said, “Seemed OK.”

One more happy customer. And I was hooked. I knew I had chosen the right career!

James Herman
Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs
and Consul General
Embassy New Delhi ■

AFSA NEWS

American Foreign Service Association • June 2010

NEGROPONTE INTERVIEW LAUNCHES LOCKHEED MARTIN SERIES

Former Ambassadors Take the Stage for Discussion, Q&A

BY FRANCESCA KELLY



Amb. John Negroponte, right, and Amb. Edward W. "Skip" Gnehm, April 7, at AFSA.

Former Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte opened his informal talk at AFSA on April 7 by reminiscing about the very room in which he was seated. He recalled its previous life as a "well-known watering hole" for FSOs in days gone by, and proceeded to make what he called a "more productive use" of the venue. In a congenial interview moderated by Ambassador Edward W. "Skip" Gnehm, both men spoke of the recent boost in resources to the Foreign Service — and what still needs to be done.

This program was the first event in a new lecture and discussion series AFSA is co-sponsoring with Lockheed Martin, called "Promoting Excellence and Deepening Impact: Resources and

Continued on page 52

FPA EVENT IN NYC FEATURES AFSA'S SHAWN DORMAN

FS Career Seminar Draws Full House

BY FRANCESCA KELLY

Inside a U.S. Embassy Editor Shawn Dorman, who is also associate editor of the *FSJ*, spoke to a sold-out crowd in New York City on March 29. The seminar, the first in a new series on foreign affairs careers from the Foreign Policy Association University, focused on the Foreign Service career, what it involves and how to get in. FPAU is the professional development arm of the nonprofit Foreign Policy Association, which seeks to educate the public about America's foreign policy.

Dorman reports that the audience, a mix of students and young professionals, was "enthusiastic, highly interested and engaged." One hundred people attended the talk, which was held at New York University's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute, looking out over SoHo.

Dorman devoted the first hour to an overview of the Foreign Service career

and the second hour to the hiring process, including the FS exam. A Q&A period followed each section, for which she was joined by Diplomat-in-Residence Robert Dry.

FPA Editor/Producer Robert Nolan, who organized the event, was pleased with its success. "Shawn's hands-on experience as a Foreign Service officer and insight into who is the 'total candidate' really made her the 'total instructor' for this course," he states, adding, "Students walked away with a real idea of what it takes not just to get in, but to sustain a career in the Foreign Service."

Diplomat-in-Residence Dry, who is based at the City College of New York, felt that the seminar could help the State Department "get good recruits who actually know something about the Foreign Service when they take the test."

Continued on page 53

AFSA Annual Awards Ceremony to Take Place June 24

AFSA's Awards Ceremony will take place on Thurs., June 24, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. in the Benjamin Franklin Room of the Department of State.

Ambassador L. Bruce Laingen will receive AFSA's Lifetime Contributions to American Diplomacy Award. AFSA's Constructive Dissent and Performance Awards will be presented at this event, as well. Profiles of the award winners will appear in the July-August *AFSA News*.

AFSA members and those with a valid State Department ID are welcome to attend the ceremony. Due to Secretary Clinton's tight schedule, the event will begin promptly at 4 p.m. All attendees should arrive in the Franklin Room by 3:55 p.m. at the latest.

AFSA NEWS BRIEFS



FSYF Announces New Executive Director

The Foreign Service Youth Foundation has appointed a new executive director, Bernadette Hale. Hale is a veteran of the diplomatic service in both the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the U.S. Department of State, where she has worked on issues involving consular, management, administration and overseas family and children's affairs. She is married to USAID FSO George Hale and has an 8-year-old daughter, Libby. Hale replaces outgoing Executive Director Kristen Gray, who is heading to an overseas assignment.

USAID's Global Pulse Connects Thousands

The U.S. Agency for International Development, in partnership with the departments of State, Education, Commerce, and Health and Human Services, sponsored a three-day online discussion called Global Pulse on March 29-31.

The Internet-based forum, in which anyone anywhere could participate free of charge, marks the U.S. commitment to work toward universal goals in partnership with a wide variety of stakeholders. Discussion centered on 10 designated topics, including global health, political and civil rights, and empowering women and girls.

The "global conversation" attracted more than 6,000 participants "from over 155 countries, who posted over 9,000 ideas, reactions, opinions and perspectives," said USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah.

Those on Facebook can get more information about Global Pulse at www.facebook.com/pages/Global-Pulse-2010/327872951484.

Life in the Foreign Service

BY BRIAN AGGELER



CarMax Revises Policy for FS Members

The popular auto retailer, CarMax, has developed a new policy regarding the purchase of cars by FS members for export overseas. FS members may now purchase used vehicles at CarMax locations in Maryland and Virginia (currently available in these two states only) and claim export privileges due to overseas assignment.

Buyers should be prepared to: (1) show either a copy of orders or a diplomatic passport; and (2) pay for the vehicle with cash or certified funds.

To purchase a vehicle intended for export, simply contact a sales consultant at a CarMax location most convenient to you. A full listing of CarMax's inventory of more than 20,000 vehicles and store location information can be found at www.carmax.com.

This agreement has come about because members like you lobbied AFSA leadership about CarMax's former "no-export" policy. AFSA State VP Daniel Hirsch took the lead on this issue and was able to negotiate a compromise with CarMax. As always, we welcome feedback on your transactions with CarMax and other vendors.

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Wait a Second! They Have a Band?

The Foreign Service is in many ways a unique institution. Unlike most jobs, it takes us and our families away from the people, communities and services to which most Americans return after their workdays. Like the military, it is more than a profession. It is a lifestyle, a community and, for many of us, quite simply, our home. But being smaller, less well-funded and more thinly spread out than the military, we are left far more on our own to create and manage the elements of community that most Americans take for granted.

Because we are small, we are less familiar to most Americans. Nearly every American family has some member with military experience, and a vested interest in their well-being. Our dispersal makes the kind of support the military offers harder to provide. We are also evolving. Much of the Service is new; and, in some ways, the strength and convictions of the old Foreign Service are failing.

This is a time to rally, to decide who we are and what we want to be, and to remake the community in which we live and serve in our own image. The choice is ours: to lead that process or to let decisions be made by management or, worse, by people who know little of the realities of our lives.

Federal employment regulations focus primarily on ensuring that federal workers provide fair service for fair wages, and much less on issues that, for most Americans, are addressed by communities unrelated to the workplace. The easiest path for legislators is to focus solely on dollars and cents and ignore issues more related to ethics and morale than to product-for-payment. And unfortunately, many within our own ranks fail to see the value of developing the philosophical infrastructure on which a shared sense of community and mission is built. As AFSA's State vice president, I have occasionally been appalled to learn of the pettiness with which some posts and bureaus dismiss morale-related issues, on the flimsy premise that, in essence, we knew the job was difficult when we took it.

When the Secretary of Defense notes that the Foreign Service is smaller than the U.S. military's band staff, he does

not apologize for the fact that they have bands. He does not express regret that they have movie theaters, post exchanges, sports facilities or other requirements of the "military lifestyle." He should not have to. Nor should we.

AFSA was created, years ago, to foster esprit de corps. And in some ways, we have failed miserably at that task. We (and our members) should do more than support better terms of employment, and we should do more than ensure our professional input into the foreign policy matters of the day — or even into larger issues affecting the composition or mission of the department. We should, without apology, work to provide ourselves with community essentials, much as is done for military communities and even U.S. town communities.

Issues of interest to AFSA include working with membership, management and others to:

- Develop a clear sense of shared mission and culture that accommodates and draws upon the "changing face" of the Foreign Service, promoting inclusiveness while preserving and enhancing a shared sense of teamwork and belonging by all FS members;
- Encourage traditions that enhance our sense of professional pride and community and honor those who sacrifice in the advancement of our mission;
- Improve standard procedures to assist both employees and their families in cases of divorce, crisis or death overseas;
- Regulate the department's responsibilities with regard to FS members who, well into their careers, develop physical or medical limitations that inhibit or prevent overseas service; and
- Develop public recognition of our role in making the world and our country safer, and of our right to travel comfortably, raise our children according to some semblance of American living standards, relax from our labors and play — without feeling the need to justify such human requirements.

This requires all of us to take an interest in our own community: the Foreign Service community, which we call home. □

This is a time to rally,
to decide who we are and what
we want to be, and to remake
the community in which we live
and serve in our own image.



Health Care Reform

It was a long, convoluted and confusing process, but Congress ultimately passed — and the president signed into law — new health care legislation. Not surprisingly, it was an issue that commanded the attention of our retiree community, prompting the most communications I have received since assuming office.

The large majority of the messages supported positive congressional action. Indeed, a number of my correspondents were concerned that AFSA might have opposed passage of the bill because we signed on with other employee organizations and unions in opposing the excise or “Cadillac tax” on premium health insurance plans, such as we enjoy as Foreign Service retirees.

Only time will tell what the real costs of the new legislation are.

Let me address that concern and the AFSA stand on the excise tax. First and foremost, I want to advise all readers that tracking the evolution of the bill was difficult, especially for a group as small as AFSA. We drew on the analyses of larger employee organizations, did our fact-checking and concluded that we would align with the other groups in opposing the “Cadillac tax.” That opposition was limited and specific, not a rejection of the larger legislation.

Our fundamental concern was that the excise tax would have an increasingly negative impact, specifically sharply rising premiums and fewer health services or a mixture of both. I found the tax especially onerous as it fell most keenly on low-income federal employees, retirees and survivors, as it is not adjusted for income levels. As you all should know by now, the excise tax survived in the bill the president signed, although its application has been delayed until 2018.

One distinguished colleague, a retired ambassador, thinks that AFSA should have conducted a referendum of the membership before taking a position on the excise tax. I disagree. It was a small, albeit significant part of a much larger issue, and you folks elected us to use our best judgment and exercise it on a timely basis. Furthermore, we simply cannot get into the business of expensive referendum votes whenever there is a controversial issue on which the president and Governing Board of AFSA need to make a decision.

Only time will tell what the real costs of the new legislation are. I anticipate that the equitability of the bill’s funding mechanisms, especially the excise tax, will be scrutinized, and perhaps even revisited, before the effective date of 2018. □

Negroponete • Continued from page 49

Skills for Diplomacy and Development in the Age of Smart Power.” The series brings noted professionals and leading diplomatic experts to AFSA to advance innovative ideas about the education, skills and tools that the Foreign Service needs.

The two ambassadors were seated in modern leather armchairs for a relaxed event that felt more like a Sunday talk show than a lecture. Homing in on the challenges facing today’s Foreign Service, Negroponete mentioned the continuing need, which is just now beginning to be addressed, for FSOs to be trained in the harder languages, such as Arabic — and for better and longer training for those already in the Service. “It has become a priority now to double, triple, even quadruple the number of hard-language speakers,” Negroponete pointed out. “This is a tremendous investment.”

Both ambassadors agreed that for all the strides made in global outreach through technology, face-to-face diplomacy is still invaluable. “There is no substitute for having a person in the field,” Gnehm stressed. “We really do need more people who can get on Al-Jazeera and communicate in flowing Arabic.”

Training A Top Priority

Negroponete had brought a notepad with a list of priorities for improving the Foreign Service. Priority number one: Focus on training and deploying the force actually needed. Second, provide more incentives for FS members and their families, such as making overseas comparability pay permanent, improving compensation for unaccompanied tours and finding new ways for spouses to be employed.

Negroponete lauded the fact that, almost overnight, the Foreign Service has been allocated more resources for many of the top priorities and initiatives. “In particular, our growing ‘training float’ is at least a partial step toward the gold standard of military training,” he said.

He also observed that the dynamics of world politics have changed. “It’s not a bipolar world anymore; it’s a multipolar world,” he said. “And this has hap-

pened in a very rapid time frame.”

Another priority on NegroponTE’s list is restoring USAID to the vitality it once enjoyed. “I’m delighted that the Secretary of State seems to have such a strong interest in development,” he remarked. “Let’s further increase the size of USAID ... and give it the lead in the whole area of stabilization and development.”

Both NegroponTE and Gnehm called for career-spanning training. NegroponTE recalled a time in the 1960s when he told a superior he was considering going to Stanford for a year of training there. “What’s the matter — are you ill?” asked the officer.

“That was the ethos,” pointed out NegroponTE. “You were supposed to get your training on the job. Actual training was for people who were sick and could not serve overseas!” (Some say that this attitude hasn’t changed much in 40 years.)

An extended Q&A period followed the talk. Both ambassadors concluded by urging those present to continue to push for more resources and better training. “We have an unprecedented opportunity now,” said Gnehm. “We need to take advantage of it.”

The April 7 event may be viewed at www.afsa.org/video.cfm. □

FS Career • Continued from page 49

Student response to the presentation was very positive, according to Nolan. One typical post-session review read: “Overall, an excellent and well-paced, information-packed seminar that exceeded my expectations.”

“The amount of interest we received in this course from across the U.S. was overwhelming, and we hope to make it and other courses available around the country,” reports Nolan.

Other FPAU courses in New York this spring include “How to Land a Job at the United Nations” and “How to Land a Job in Global Development.” Each seminar is facilitated by an industry insider, able to provide instruction and insight unavailable in the traditional classroom. For more information, visit www.fpa.org. □

V.P. VOICE: FCS ■ BY KEITH CURTIS



More Good News

I reported good news on the budget last month, and now there is more good news on the leadership front at the Foreign Commercial Service. We are already blessed to have a Secretary, Gary Locke, who has been willing to fight for the funding we need, as well as a deputy secretary, Dennis Hightower, who has taken a keen interest in our Service. Now we have an under secretary and a director general. Under Secretary Francisco Sanchez meets with almost every senior commercial officer who comes through D.C. As the head of the National Export Initiative, he knows that the effort focuses on the Commercial Service and our support on the ground. We have found him accessible, positive and supportive. Now that he is official, we hope he will travel more to see our operations overseas.

We are especially excited that our new assistant secretary and director general, Suresh Kumar, has been confirmed. The first real international businessman we have had at the helm in the past 20 years, he has worked at Warner Lambert/Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson and KaiZen Innovation. He has covered the globe working in India as a broadcaster, focusing on Indonesia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. He has even been a professor of international business at Rutgers University. This guy knows our business.

Our new assistant secretary and director general, Suresh Kumar, is the first real international businessman we have had at the helm in the the past 20 years.

Now — will he understand government? That is a big challenge. I have already had the chance to talk to him several times, and he is open, receptive, smart and “can-do.” I know that he puts a high value on the work we do and appreciates the conditions under which we do it. But will he fully “get” the situation we are in and how much his job must involve championing us in order to get us resources? We will find out over the course of this very important year for our Service. We had an excellent and substantive first meeting with the director general in late April. He promised to push toward expediently resolving our key issues, from senior pay to the seven-year rule. Most importantly, we agreed to work toward the common goal of strengthening the Foreign Commercial Service and increasing our resources. It was a very good start.

Finally, I am happy to report that we now have biweekly meetings with management to keep our issues on the radar screen. The administration’s Partnership Program has created a more flexible approach. We have moved forward on pay issues, and there is keen interest in addressing the sorrowful state of our training conditions. We are hiring new officers and giving them training before sending them out! We sent a survey out concerning AFSA priorities and continue to welcome your input. I know you do not see the relief in the field yet, but there are signs that the cavalry is coming. Hang on! □

The FS Pension System and Sick Leave

BY BONNIE BROWN, COORDINATOR FOR RETIREE COUNSELING AND LEGISLATION

The 2010 National Defense Authorization Act made significant changes in the rules for employees in the new retirement system, the Foreign Service Pension System. As of Oct. 28, 2009, employees in this system will receive credit for unused sick leave and can reinstate refunded FSPS service credit if they redeposit refunded retirement contributions with interest.

According to the 2010 NDAA, unused sick leave will be counted as service credit in the computation of retirement benefits under FSPS, but not for establishing eligibility for an annuity or in computing the high-three average salary. As a result, sick leave will be used in the computations in the same manner it is used in the old retirement sys-

tem, the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability System.

Employees who leave the Foreign Service, retire with a right to an immediate annuity, or die leaving a survivor eligible for a survivor annuity on or after Oct. 28, 2009, will receive credit for 50 percent of their unused sick leave. Those who leave the Foreign Service, retire or die with a survivor annuity on or after Jan. 1, 2014, will receive service credit for 100 percent of their unused sick leave. Those whose annuities have both FSRDS and FSPS components will receive service credit only for sick leave not included in the calculation of the FSRDS component.

Calculations for service credit for sick leave will be made at the time of re-

irement. The department has advised former employees who retired since Oct. 28 — and are still waiting for their calculations to be done — that they will have their annuities recomputed in the next two to three months.

Since its enactment, the FSPS law has provided that employees who leave government service and receive a refund of their FSPS retirement contributions shall lose service credit for the period of service covered by the refund. The 2010 NDAA changes that prohibition, permitting individuals who were reemployed on or after Oct. 28 to redeposit the refunded amount plus interest and receive credit for the service reinstated. Survivors entitled to survivor annuities may also make redeposits.

FSPS employees may make a redeposit of refunded retirement contributions by logging into the Employee Benefits Information System and completing a Prior Service Request under the “HR Link” module. □

Legislative Update: Health Insurance

BY CASEY FRARY, LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

In March, President Obama signed into law two major pieces of legislation that will make significant changes to the provision, availability and requirements of health insurance in America, including changes that affect the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program. These two bills are H.R. 3590, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111-148) and H.R. 4872, the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010, which made technical fixes and amended parts of P.L. 111-148.

Many AFSA members are asking questions about what exactly is in P.L. 111-148, and how it will affect them. This law will make some changes that have an impact on the FEHBP and overall health insurance regulations. Some provisions will go into place immediately, while others will be implemented over the next few years.

This law will make changes that affect the FEHBP and overall health insurance regulations. Some provisions will go into place immediately, while others will be implemented over the next few years.

Changes to the FEHBP

The bill (P.L. 111-148) introduces an excise-tax on high-value employee health insurance plans, like many of the plans offered through the FEHBP. Insurance companies will be required to pay a 40-percent tax on health care plans valued at the threshold levels of more than \$10,200 for individuals and more than \$27,500 for family coverage starting in

2018. However, the threshold levels that the plans are taxed at could rise if the cost of coverage in the standard Blue Cross Blue Shield option in FEHBP rises more quickly than projected between now and 2018.

An important change for families with older-children dependents is that the new law will require any health insurance plan that offers dependent coverage to cover unmarried children until they turn 26, and this change will go into effect in roughly six months. There was some initial concern that the legislation was vague about whether or not this extension of coverage would apply to FEHBP plans, but the insurance companies have since said that it would, and that they will not challenge this.

For a more comprehensive overview of the bill and changes, please visit www.afsa.org/congress/hcr.pdf. □

A Unique Program Allowed FS Families on Home Leave to Spread the Word — by Trailer

BY FRANCESCA KELLY

In 1967, FSO Robert Harlan, his wife Lois and two of their three children, Heidi and Steven, borrowed a car and trailer and proceeded to tour the central United States during their summer home leave, making stops along the way to talk with people about the Foreign Service.

This unique program was the brainstorm of Deputy Assistant Secretary Katie S. Loucheim, who in 1963 created the Community Advisory Services Office at the Department of State. She felt that few people at home or abroad had a positive image of American diplomats and their families. The office set about to help promote a truer, “folkier” image through several programs. One of them was “to help wives of American officials abroad set up welfare projects in countries in which they are stationed.” Another, in which the Harlans and others participated, aimed “to dispatch Foreign Service officers, when they are at home in the United States, to various communities on speaking assignments.” (*The Reading Eagle* — Reading, Pa., April 27, 1964).

At its launch, the new program got a write-up in both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, complete with captions such as “Stripping Striped



PITTSBURGH HEADLIGHT-SUN FILE PHOTO

An article from the *Pittsburg Headlight-Sun* (Pittsburg, Kan.) dated Aug. 29, 1967, features an article on the Harlan family, calling their visit a “get acquainted mission.”

Pants.” As the Oct. 30, 1963, *New York Times* reported, “The State Department is trying to wipe out the image of the American diplomat as a three-button, Ivy League snob who lives in a palace overseas, has a staff of servants and can’t speak the language.”

By the time the Harlans embarked on a home leave four years later, which they spent talking about the Foreign Service to communities across the Midwest, 45 other families had already taken part in the program. FS widow Lois Harlan recalls, “We came home after two years in Tehran, picked up the heavy-duty Ford car and the Airstream trailer in Harrisonburg, Va., and from there went by stages to Texas to visit relatives. Then we went up

along the Mississippi to Minnesota and east through Illinois (and to our hometown of Freeport), then back to Virginia.”

The family grew closer and felt as though they were part of a mission, as well. “It was a glorious time,” she adds. “We spent many nights in state parks. We stopped in small towns, where my husband had interviews with the mayor, the local paper and the radio station — if there was one.”

Mrs. Harlan has kept mementos of that trip, including a trip report set in limerick form, that her husband wrote and dispatched to Kitty Clark Gibbons, then director of the Office of Community Advisory Services. Some of those verses by Robert Harlan (with intentional misspellings) include:

*The enhancing of close family ties
Is but one of the goods that aries
From a trip such as ours
‘Mid the birds, bees and flours
As well as the gals and the gies.*

*For, our countrymen’s friendly
demeanour
Made our extreme excitement
extreamour
All the folks that we met
Were the best ever yet,
So that U.S. grass looked even greanour.*

Harlan signed off with: “Through Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Maryland (4,140 trailer miles).” The piece is dated Sept. 30, 1967.

Delighted with Harlan’s limericks, the State Dept.’s Kitty Clark Gibbons sent back some of her own, mimicking

Continued on page 56



HARLAN FAMILY PHOTO

Lois Harlan (left) and daughter Heidi with the Airstream in southern Virginia, August 1967.

Lighter Side • Continued from page 55

Harlan's creative spelling:

*The Near East from Gomorrah to
Sodom
Has more crises than people to
spodom
But these are but trifles
Small-arms fire and rifles
To the warfares that rock Foggy
Bodom.*

*Your mission is then to relate
As you travel at leisurely gate,
The yearnings of peoples
With onion-domed steeples
And hamburger eaters – with State.*

*Few Americans frequently go
To Bangui, Nouakchott or Bordo.
But tales of those needs
Can be strewn like ripe seeds
By a trailer-ensconced FSO.*

Robert Harlan passed away in 1999, but his widow Lois retains fond memo-



FSO Robert Harlan and his children, Stephen and Heidi, at the George Washington Carver National Monument in Diamond, Mo., August 1967.



The Ford sedan and the Airstream trailer, Iowa, August 1967.

ries of that summer. “It was a wonderful way to spend home leave,” she recalls. In sending these limericks and reminiscences to AFSA, she wondered, “Do you suppose such levity is still, upon occasion, found at the department?”

Those working there now will have to answer that question. Some might say that, these days, there isn't much time for

levity — nor for a 4,000-mile journey in a trailer across America, sowing public diplomacy seeds. A new generation, attuned to new media, demands new methods of communication, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Still, there's something as American as apple pie in the image of a diplomatic family emerging from an Airstream, ready to tell their story to a small-town crowd. □

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BOOKS

The Value of Jaw-Jaw

Great Negotiations: Agreements that Changed the Modern World
Fredrik Stanton, Westholme Publishing, 2010, \$26, hardback, 297 pages.

REVIEWED BY PATRICIA H. KUSHLIS

To state the theme of *Great Negotiations* in one sentence, one can do no better than Winston Churchill's 1954 pronouncement: "To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war." Bearing this wisdom in mind, Fredrik Stanton documents the critical role negotiations have played in shaping America's future, as well as the world's destiny, over the past two centuries.

He does this through eight elegant, chronologically arranged chapters, beginning with Benjamin Franklin's diplomacy in Paris during the American Revolution and ending with the 1987 Reykjavik Summit. Other topics include the Louisiana Purchase and the Portsmouth Treaty, through which Theodore Roosevelt engineered an end to the 1905 Japanese Russian War as a long-distance mediator.

Each case study focuses on the context and dynamics of a negotiation and the importance of the individual participants, their connections and roles. As the book's title suggests, all but one

Stanton reminds us that diplomacy and warfare represent different tracks of dispute settlement, and often occur simultaneously.



of these episodes represents a success. The exception is the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, a multilateral extravaganza, which the United States entered totally unprepared and at far too high a level. Stanton's chapter delineates multiple reasons for this colossal failure, which helped set the stage for Hitler's rise and World War II.

Throughout *Great Negotiations*, Stanton reminds us that diplomacy and warfare represent different tracks of dispute settlement, and they often occur simultaneously on the world's chess board. He also emphasizes the need for victors and vanquished to save face.

To defuse the Cuban Missile Crisis, for instance, Washington secretly agreed to withdraw its aging arsenal of missiles based in northern Turkey and to stop threatening to invade Cuba. In return, Moscow agreed not to publicize that withdrawal, and brought its own missiles and bombers back home from Havana.

This diplomacy variety pack examines many facets of the subject that lay people may not know about or appreciate: the importance of rhythm; the use of onsite and offsite mediators; leaks to the media; the role of unofficial go-betweens (such as American journalist Charles Bartlett for President John F. Kennedy and ABC correspondent John Scali for Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev during the Cuban Missile Crisis); domestic constraints; the complexities and risks of multilateral versus bilateral negotiations; the need to explore options away from the cameras; real and self-imposed time constraints; and high-level involvement to break stalemates.

Admittedly, America's negotiating approach is usually far more pedestrian than the high-wire stories in this book, based as it is on a time-consuming committee system that involves various government agencies and, sometimes, nongovernmental organizations. Far more hours are spent negotiating across agency lines than across the negotiating table. Still, the process usually builds a stronger foundation for winning congressional approval of the treaty or agreement.

If I still taught international politics, I would assign Stanton's book to my students because it reads well and the negotiations are familiar to students of American history. And if I taught negotiating strategy, I would use it be-



cause it brings out aspects — the human factor, in particular — that too many treatises on the subject ignore. The book should also appeal beyond the classroom to history buffs and those intrigued by the negotiating strategies and tactics of great leaders.

Stanton's book humanizes a process often shrouded in secrecy — one that deserves far better understanding in a country that only imperfectly realizes that expertise at the negotiating table is as important in maintaining our peace and security, if not more so, than prowess on the battlefield.

Patricia H. Kushlis was an FSO with the U.S. Information Agency from 1970 to 1998. A longer version of this review appeared on WhirledView, the world politics, public diplomacy and national security blog she co-writes with former FSO Patricia Lee Sharpe (<http://whirledview.typepad.com>).

The German Question

The Atlantic Century: Four Generations of Extraordinary Diplomats Who Forged America's Vital Alliance with Europe

Kenneth Weisbrode, Da Capo Press, 2009, \$30.00, hardcover, 470 pages.

REVIEWED BY EDWINA S. CAMPBELL

The late Professor Ernest May made many contributions to the study of American foreign policy, but we should all be especially grateful that he encouraged his student, Kenneth Weisbrode, to write his Harvard doctoral dissertation on the role and influence of the Bureau of European Affairs. That dissertation became this book, a

thoroughly researched, elegant and insightful account of the (many) men and (few) women who shaped EUR and, through it, the policies of successive U.S. administrations toward Europe in the critical decades of the mid-20th century.

At the working level, most of those figures had served in the military during World War II, and many also worked with the Marshall Plan or in the American occupation zone of Germany. While an older generation of American diplomats had been tied more closely, culturally and linguistically, to Britain and France, by the 1970s they were passing from the scene. The relationships rooted in family ties and shared wartime experience that had linked elites in London, Paris and Washington gave way to networks created by think-tanks and exchange programs that produced an American “successor generation” focused on Germany.

Weisbrode documents the bureau's transformation from a small cadre of professionals on the eve of World War II into the powerhouse led by Arthur Hartman, in which I served in the 1970s. The sheer magnitude of EUR's reach — from the State Department and National Security Council staff to USNATO and the U.S. Mission to the European Community, bilateral embassies from Lisbon to Moscow and delegations to multilateral negotiations in Geneva, Vienna, Stockholm and elsewhere — enabled it to build up unique expertise, experience, cultural sensitivity and linguistic competence. With these tools, it shaped a confident and creative Atlanticism.

The “German question” remained central for EUR throughout the period, but it evolved from a focus on what the United States should do about West

Germany in the 1940s and 1950s to what it could do with the Federal Republic about many other things in the 1970s.

I had the pleasure and the privilege of working with, and learning from, many of the figures profiled here. For my bosses and their colleagues throughout EUR, as Weisbrode writes, “There was always another problem to manage, another aggrieved party to assuage, another job to do.” They accomplished all those things, brilliantly.

Still, I do not want to do Weisbrode a disservice by implying that this book is a hymn to the trans-Atlantic relationship and the people who managed it. He makes no secret of his admiration for their labors, but that does not color his scholarship or his judgments.

The Atlantic Century is, quite simply, the finest, most balanced work of diplomatic history that I have read in many years. Its primary and secondary sources span two continents, three languages, a 35-page bibliography and 107 pages of endnotes.

Scholars of American diplomatic history and international relations will find themselves and their students well served by this book's archival and textual richness. And practitioners of American diplomacy will have the added pleasure of reading a work that recognizes the importance of their work, not only in EUR but throughout the State Department and around the world. ■

Edwina S. Campbell, a former FSO who served in the Office of European Security and Political Affairs from 1974 to 1977, is a professor of national security studies at the Air Command and Staff College of Air University at Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base in Montgomery, Ala.

ONLINE EDUCATION: UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITIES

ONLINE EDUCATION GIVES FOREIGN SERVICE FAMILIES THE MEANS
TO TAILOR THEIR LEARNING NEEDS TO THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES.

BY KRISTI STREIFFERT

Just as today's Foreign Service families cannot imagine how their predecessors lived without the Internet, we may soon be wondering how we ever got along without online education. Distance learning, as it is sometimes called, offers an unparalleled opportunity for FS family members to target and tailor their educational needs to their circumstances.

Last year, nearly five million students took at least one online course from a degree-granting institution of higher education in the United States. The technology for delivering online courses and degree programs is rapidly growing more sophisticated. Professors are becoming more adept at teaching online. And most propitious of all, postsecondary institutions are passionate about the opportunity to present educational opportunities to a global "campus."

Universities offer online undergraduate degrees in nearly every possible topic — from interior design to accounting. Online master's degrees cover the fields of business, health care, management, government, human services, legal studies, education and information technology. Online doctorate programs include education, public policy, business administration, religion — and more. One leader in the field, University of Maryland University College, offers undergraduate programs in everything from psychology to emergency management. Another, Boston University, offers both master's degrees and doctorates in music education, among other online programs. And Stanford University offers a computer science master's degree that can be completed online.

Kristi Streiffert, a Foreign Service spouse, is a freelance writer from Durango, Colo. She writes about business, education, the environment and travel.

Initially, educators approached online education skeptically. Could students stay motivated without face-to-face contact? Would online students cheat more? How do you measure knowledge gained by students when they are not present for testing? But with millions of students now online — and with more than a decade of experience — numerous strategies have evolved to address these issues. And among those who benefit the most are Foreign Service families.

There is no one set of programs that works best for Foreign Service families — to suggest otherwise would be to ignore the wide array of circumstances of family members (age, educational level, English-language abilities, and interests and talents, to name a few). It would also ignore the fact that there are now thousands of options available to choose from.

In fact, the plethora of opportunities for online students means that the buyer must beware. The online student must identify his or her educational goals clearly — a degree? a postgraduate degree? a certificate? continuing education credits? — and then carefully choose the appropriate institution and program.

Choosing a School

It's best to begin with the basics. There are three types of accredited institutions of higher education in the United States: public, private nonprofit and private for-profit. Nearly all public institutions (from the University of Nebraska to Northern Virginia Community College) offer some form of online education, although not all lead to degrees. (Many specifically target working adults and offer "professional development" classes and certificates.) And about half of all private, nonprofit educational institutions offer online education. Examples include the Florida In-



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stitute of Technology and Carnegie Mellon University.

But it is the private, for-profit institutions that have been the most enthusiastic leaders in the world of online education. The big brand names in the field include the University of Phoenix, Strayer University and Capella University.

“My advice is to go with a nonprofit first, with a well-known name if you can, something like the University of Maryland University College or Penn State,” says Frank Mayadas, an adviser at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and founding president of the Sloan Consortium (a nonprofit organization specializing in online education research).

“In education, academic reputation built over time matters,” he says. This is particularly true when it comes to higher degrees, such as master’s degrees or doctorates.

Private, for-profit institutions have been the most enthusiastic leaders in the world of online education.

That is not to say that for-profit institutions are not a viable alternative, Mayadas adds. For many, they may be the best choice because they offer such a wide range of undergraduate programs. Most for-profit institutions are public companies and they answer to stockholders, so they have an incentive to keep growing and expand their programs.

Those who screen professional development grant applications at the Family Liaison Office note that for-profits are among the most common choices for Foreign Service family members — especially the University of Phoenix and American Military University (which is also very popular with Marines posted to embassies; see p. 70).

It is important to be aware of the criticisms of for-profit institutions, however. One Foreign Service spouse who teaches for a for-profit institution (and therefore does not wish to be quoted by name) points out that such schools may focus more on student satisfaction than on the quality of what the students are learning: “Instructors are even specifically encouraged to lower their expectations and inflate their grades. These institutions hire and fire based entirely on student feedback.” While that



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* Independent research by TRC, February, 2008

may sound like a good way to evaluate instructors, it can lead to a lowering of standards.

Although Mayadas encourages looking at nonprofit institutions first, he admits that researching their online degree programs can be a frustrating experience. The public institutions' online offerings are often a maze to navigate because, by contrast with many for-profit institutions, online programs are not the public universities' first priority.

"They are not as savvy with customer service, either," Mayadas acknowledges. "In the end," he says, "there are pros and cons either way. The most important advice is to make sure the institution is regionally accredited" (see p. 76).

Finding the Right Program

Finding a suitable program is the next step, and it also takes some

The public institutions' online offerings are often a maze to navigate.

effort. Because online education is in the "gold rush" stage right now, there are literally hundreds of schools ready to convince you they have exactly what you are looking for. Many of them are excellent, but not all will suit every circumstance.


Research into classes and programs was essential for Julie Barnes, a Foreign Service spouse who is currently enrolled in the Accelerated Online Hybrid Nursing program at Northern Virginia Community College. She completed all of the prereq-

uisite courses for the program while living in such far-flung places as Kinshasa and Kigali, thanks to distance learning. "I decided that I wanted to go to nursing school while we were living in Congo, and the only way to complete the prerequisites was through distance learning," she explains. "I did have to do a lot of research to find some of the courses, such as anatomy and physiology, to be sure that they were delivered in a completely online format."

Barnes is so delighted with online education that she plans to take more classes in the future. "We will probably be going back overseas in the next few years, and I plan to continue my online education. So I am currently looking at several bachelor's and master's programs that offer a majority of their courses online. I am also looking at the possibility of working on a mas-


Continued on p. 70

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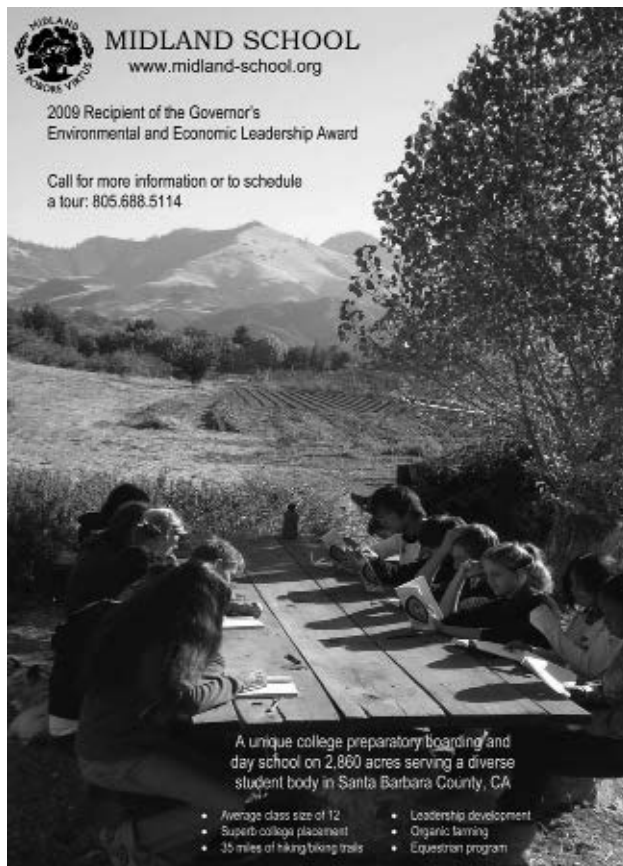


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Inside Source: If You're at an Embassy, Ask a Marine...

Thousands of members of the armed forces are working toward college degrees online. The Marines you know at post probably receive \$4,500 each in tuition assistance per fiscal year — enough, they say, for six or seven courses. Service members can choose from any college that has online classes available.

If you ask a Marine how he chose a school, one place he will often cite is the Web site of the Servicemembers Opportunity College: www.soc.aascu.org/.

At this site you'll find a list of nearly 2,000 colleges and universities that cater to service members and, therefore, are accustomed to working with distance learners. Most of these schools also award college credit through nationally recognized testing programs such as the College-Level Examination Program general and subject exams (www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/about.html).

This is a great advantage because, depending on the academic program, some students obtain up to a third of their degree through these testing programs. One of the most popular schools for service members is American Military University, which is also open to civilians.

Top tip from Marines who've been there: Don't forget to factor in slow mail service! Be sure to order your books and materials in plenty of time.

Continued from p. 66

ter's in public health down the road."

Research is vital because many Web sites have "front page" content touting numerous online programs —

but further investigation may reveal that the course offerings are limited, or they require your physical presence on a weekly basis for labs or lectures, for example. In fact, this is such a

Prospective students need to make sure they fully understand the residential requirements.

common situation that if you find a school you are interested in, the most efficient thing to do is call the admissions department and talk to them about which programs are offered completely online. The problem is especially prevalent with public universities, and undoubtedly contributes to making specialized online institutions, like the University of Phoenix, more attractive.

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you can find complete online degree programs outlined at numerous public universities. The University of Maryland University College, for example, offers more than 100 bachelor's and master's degree programs and certificates completely online. The university has approximately 90,000 students worldwide.

Even courses taught entirely online may be logistically challenging, however, depending on how they are delivered. Prospective students need to be aware of how the classes will be conducted.

Conduct of the Course

Online classes are generally either "synchronous" or "asynchronous" — meaning they either require you to be present at your computer at a specific time, or they do not.

Asynchronous courses are drop-in style. They are taught with prepack-

Besides good Internet access and strong motivation, students need to plan for the time commitment involved.

aged material and lectures, plus correspondence with the instructor and discussion boards (an instructor creates a discussion topic assignment that runs for a few days, and students are graded on their ability to post responses and further the discussion). Synchronous courses, on the other hand, are similar to a live video conference, with all the students through-

out the world sitting down together, even if it is the middle of the night for some of them.

Julie Barnes' nursing program requires "attendance" at a weekly live lecture delivered in an online format through Blackboard (a widely used Internet educational tool). Since completing her prerequisite courses overseas, Barnes now lives in Northern Virginia and attends clinical rotations at a local hospital.

"I chose NOVA because of the length of the program —15 months — and the fact that it is online, which gives me the flexibility I need since I have two small children at home. I will graduate this August, and I am so happy that these types of programs are now available."

Online learning is also steadily being integrated into mainstream higher education, and this means that

Continued on p. 76

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HPA is composed of two campuses—the Village Campus, home of our Lower and Middle Schools (grades K-8), and the Upper Campus (grades 9-12 and postgraduates). The total day and boarding student population is 570; boarding is available for grades 6-12 and postgraduates. Our students come from other Hawaiian islands, many states in the continental U.S., and more than 20 nations in North and South America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands.

ACADEMICS

At Hawai'i Preparatory Academy, we expect each student to pursue a rigorous course of studies that builds a strong foundation of essential skills while achieving a broad knowledge base in the humanities, arts, and sciences.

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MARINE SCIENCE AND SEA TURTLE RESEARCH: Since 1987, HPA has had a close working relationship with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Pacific Islands Fisheries Center, Marine Turtle Research Program, in conducting turtle research and conservation activities. Middle and Upper School students assist experts with the safe capture, measuring, health assessment, and tagging of many hundreds of sea turtles at various sites throughout Hawai'i.

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Summer at HPA offers students entering grades 6-12 a unique four-week boarding experience (late June to late July) with special courses that include marine science, SAT Prep classes, math and science courses, and a college planning class designed to offer students a head start in the college admission process. The summer program is structured primarily for academic enrichment (credit is awarded for selected academic work).

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JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH

Hawaii Preparatory Academy	72	457	50/50	50	20	6-12, PG	Y	Limited	35	Y	Y	Y ²	39,400
Queen Anne School	82	155	NA	NA	NA	6-12	N	Y	15	N	NA	N	17,500
Thomas Jefferson School	69	85	50/50	55	28	7-12, PG	Y	N	12	Y	Y	N	36,500
Southwestern Academy	70	160	70/30	60	50	6-12, PG	Y	Limited	29	Y	Y	Y	30,700

SENIOR HIGH

Foxcroft School	69	176	All girls	72	16	9-12	Y	Limited	30	Y	Y	N	43,200
Grand River Academy ³	67	120	All boys	100	15	9-12, PG	Y	Y	50	Y	Y	N	34,325
Hebron Academy	68	214	63/37	70	25	9-12, PG	Y	Y	45	Y	Y	N	46,195
Interlochen Arts Academy	66	475	40/60	89	18	9-12, PG	N	N	16	Y	Y	N	44,750
King George School	80	45	50/50	100	5	9-12	Y	Y	60	N	N	Y	7,500 ⁴
Midland School	69	90	50/50	100	10	9-12	Y	NA	138	Y	Y	Y	37,500
Olney Friends School	78	65	50/50	90	41	9-12	Y	Limited	100	Y	N	N	27,800
Purnell School	76	110	All girls	98	10	9-12	Y	Y	35	Y	Y	N	49,182
Storm King School, The	79	135	55/45	75	45	8-12	Y	Y	60	Y	Y	N	38,600
West Nottingham Academy	69	123	40/60	67	18	9-12, PG	Y	Y	50	Y	Y	N	38,500
White Mountain School	82	100	50/50	80	30	9-12, PG	Y	Y	110	Y	Y	Y	43,600

SPECIAL NEEDS

Gow School, The	77	148	All boys	100	27	7-12, PG	N	Y	20	Y	Y	N	49,825
Kildonan School, The	81	100	70/30	49	4	2-12, PG	N	Y	90	Y	Y	N	60,000
Landmark School	79	449	60/40	36	1	2-12	N	Y	25	N	Y	N	45,000-59,000
Vanguard School	68	131	70/30	85	30	5-12, PG	Y	Y	50	Y	Y	N	42,500

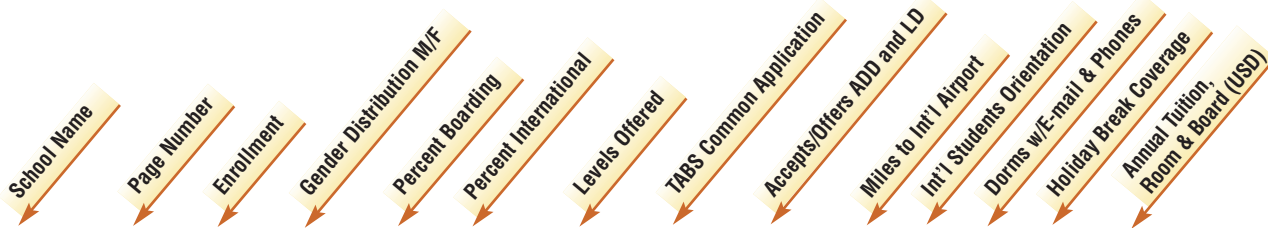
MILITARY

North Georgia College and State University	85	5,500	35/65	60	2	B.A., B.S., BBA, M.A.	Y	Y	75	Y	Y	N	15,000
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Notes: ¹Homestay Arranged. ²Thanksgiving only. ³Offers Support for ADD/LD; International Adviser; and Student may bring cell phone and PC. ⁴Monthly.

SCHOOLS AT A GLANCE

Go to our Web page at www.fsjournal.org and click on the Marketplace tab for more information.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 73

OVERSEAS

American International School of Rotterdam	67	180	50/50	NA	90	PK-12	NA	Limited	45	Y	NA	N	12,300+
American Overseas School of Rome	64	630	50/50	NA	65	PK-PG	N	Y	30	Y	NA	N	12,200-24,000
Berlin Brandenburg International School	81	671	49/51	5	65	PK-12	N	Y	25	Y	Y	N	42,000 ¹
Country Day School, Guanacaste	63	150	50/50	15	80	PK-12	N	N	40	Y	Y	N	29,320
Escuela Campo Alegre	78	580	50/50	NA	80	N-12	NA	Limited	20	Y	NA	N	20,492
Jakarta International School	75	2,394	50/50	NA	80	K-12	NA	Limited	30	Y	N	N	6,900-20,900
John F. Kennedy International School, Switzerland	81	70	50/50	30	70	K-8	N	Limited	90	Y	Y	N	49,600
Leysin American School in Switzerland	71	385	48/52	100	75	8-12, PG	Y	Limited	75	Y	Y	N	44,000
St. Stephen's School	79	251	45/55	14	67	9-12, PG	N	N	12	NA	Y	N	40,631 ¹
TASIS The American School in England	77	700	50/50	26	41	PK-12	Y	Limited	8	Y	Y	N	45,000 ¹
Prem Tinsulanonda International School	84	452	57/43	27	71	K-12	N	N	15	Y	Y	N	25,000

POST-SECONDARY

Arcadia University	84	4,021	30/70	56	1.4	B.A., M.A.	NA	Y	25	Y	Y	N	43,870
NOVA	82	75,000	44/55	0	30	A.A.	NA	Y	17	Y	NA	N	20,000
Rutgers University	86	52,471	48/52	41	1.7	B.A., M.A., Ph.D.	NA	Y	10-25 ²	Y	Y	Y	33,172
St. Mary's University	87	3,893	40/60	55	3.1	B.A., M.A., Ph.D.	NA	Y	13	Y	Y	N	30,120
John Cabot University, Italy	83	750	60/40	66	40	B.A.	NA	Y	20	Y	Y	Limited	28,100
University of South Florida	83	47,122	41/59	14	3	B.A., M.A.	NA	NA	19	Y	Y	Y	24,140

DISTANCE LEARNING

K12 International Academy	65	877	NA	NA	60	K-12	N		NA	Y	NA	NA	4,995-6,995
Texas Tech University	86	K-12 and accredited HS diploma; Bachelor's through graduate programs. Visit www.de.ttu.edu .											
University of Missouri - Center Distance & Independent Study	87	Independent study: Grade 3 through university. Bachelor's degree completion. For more information, go to cdis.missouri.edu/go/FSJ10.aspx .											

OTHER

Foreign Service Youth Foundation	68	A support network for U.S. Foreign Service youth worldwide. Go to www.fsfy.org											
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Notes: ¹Dollar value is subject to exchange rate. ²Depends on campus.



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Continued from p. 71

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***It takes some
additional planning
to assure success as
an online student.***

many programs can end up being hybrids that require the physical presence of the student at one or more points in the process. Some Foreign Service families posted overseas view such occasional residency requirements as a great opportunity for a trip “home.” Those with jobs or other logistical issues, however, might find this a deal-breaker.

Prospective students need to look very closely to make sure they fully

understand the residential requirements. Neal Makely, a Foreign Service spouse who took online classes while posted to Monterrey and Tirana, says, “I took two semesters of rigorous biology classes. Each course required labs performed at home, as well as one lab on campus. Flying back to Virginia from Mexico for the lab added considerably to the cost of the course!”

After narrowing down programs suited to the student’s goals, another consideration is the quality of course instructors. According to the 2008 *Sloan Survey of Online Learning*, up to 20 percent of educational institutions do not provide any training or mentoring for instructors. So while the instructor may be highly qualified to teach a particular subject, he or she may or may not have mastered the technological and social skills needed to teach from a distance. It is a good idea to address questions about the

Is Your School Accredited?

Because there is no centralized accrediting system for higher education in the United States, colleges and universities are accredited regionally. Six independent regional accreditation boards evaluate for quality and conduct periodic assessments.

There are two databases online to check to see if a school you are considering has regional accreditation. Use the search pages at either the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (www.chea.org/search/) or the U.S. Department of Education (www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation/).

Keep in mind that it is entirely possible for an unaccredited institution to provide a quality postsecondary education (depending on your plans and needs). But accreditation assures that institutions of higher education meet acceptable levels of quality. This system also allows some credits to be transferred to other schools, and provides standards to qualify for admission to graduate programs.

In addition, some employers do not consider unaccredited institutions to satisfy requirements of job specifications. As a matter of fact, the state of Michigan publishes a list of many of those institutions deemed unacceptable for hiring purposes (www.michigan.gov/documents/Non-accreditedSchools_78090_7.pdf). For a list of such institutions, visit a site maintained by the state of Maine: www.state.me.us/education/highered/Non-Accredited/non-accredited.htm.

The six regional accrediting boards in the United States are:

- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- Western Association of Schools & Colleges

There are also some national accrediting agencies, but nationally accredited schools predominantly offer vocational and technical programs.



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training for instructors and the quality of the course material to the admissions personnel at each institution.

Test Drive the Course

Another way to narrow down the options is to “test drive” a course before signing up. Many institutions offer a free demo course on their Web pages (for example: www.umuc.edu/spotlight/testdrive.shtml). If not, asking for a sample course will help to show how they really work.

This also allows prospective students to make sure their computer equipment is up to date, check on software requirements and find out whether they will need to invest in specific hardware such as a webcam. Many online courses have streaming components, and some even take place via videoconferencing, which can require high-quality Internet bandwidth. While most cities around

Apart from for-profits, which are often more expensive, the cost of online classes and on-campus classes tends to be roughly the same.


the world offer good Internet service, there are still a number of posts where connections are slow or unreliable.

University and college Web sites generally provide minimum technical specifications for online courses. UCLA, for example, offers an online

certification for college counseling that is popular with Foreign Service family members. Their technical specifications Web page (www.uclaextension.edu/str/OnlineCourseTechSpecs-How-To.aspx) includes a link to a Blackboard orientation, a list of browsers compatible with the class and a list of answers to common questions.


Experienced online educators also suggest that prospective students find out what resources the school offers for student support while enrolled (tutoring, provision for family emergencies, etc.) and whether it provides help with job placement and career counseling. Students might also check on library access — most college libraries can now be accessed through virtual protocol network software that is installed on students' computers.

School Web sites usually provide



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PREPARING STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE SINCE 1867

program and course timelines, as well. Some courses are offered only during certain semesters (or on specific schedules), and all work must be com-

RESOURCES

Peterson's

www.petersons.com

One of the best search features for online and distance learning.

College Choices for Adults

www.collegechoicesforadults.org/welcome/questions

21 questions you should ask before starting a program.

The Family Liaison Office

www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c21570.htm

A link covering higher education.

Online classes are generally either “synchronous” or “asynchronous.”

pleted by strict deadlines. Others are flexible and remain open, as needed, until the student submits certain work or passes an assessment. Degree programs also vary. Some may require finishing all credits in four to five years, while others might allow you more or less time.

It takes some additional planning to assure success as an online student. Instructors say that besides good

Internet access and strong motivation, students need to plan for the time commitment involved — about 10 hours a week per course. Check out syllabi, which are commonly available at the instructor's course Web pages. The course syllabus should outline minimum expectations to help students judge if a course is demanding and of high quality. Most demanding courses require log-in time every week in order to upload papers, initiate discussions, perform lab assignments and post questions.

A good course will require a significant amount of assigned reading each week. It will require students to do active research on topics, with weekly assignments. Assessments should be scheduled once every couple of weeks. Classes usually have an element of interaction between class members in the form of online discus-

Continued on p. 85

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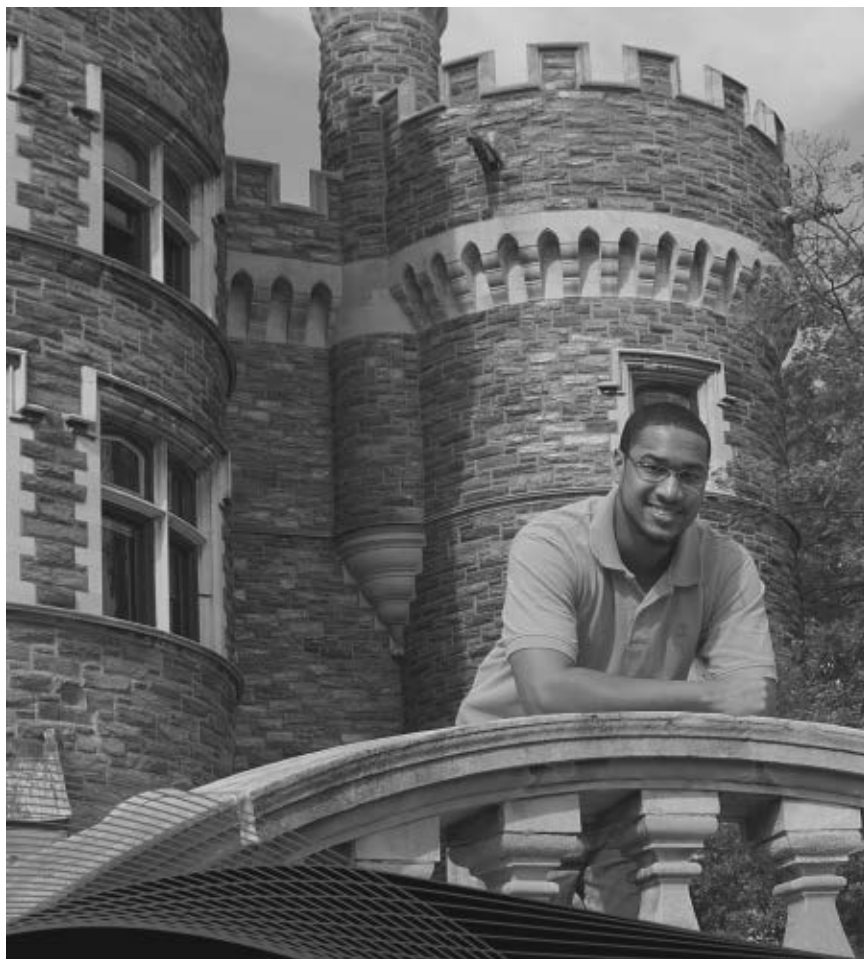


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Continued from p. 80

sions. There might also be team projects every couple of weeks.

Plan for Success

One of the success stories in online education comes from the annals of the State Department. Years ago, State worked with George Mason University to develop a distance-learning program to train Foreign Service family members (and others) as teachers for overseas schools.

FS spouse Liz Covington, for example, received her master's degree in multicultural education and a license to teach English to speakers of other languages via the FAST TRAIN program at George Mason University (<http://fasttrain.gmu.edu/>). The 13-month, intensive program also involves two summer school sessions on campus.

"I was in Monterrey during the

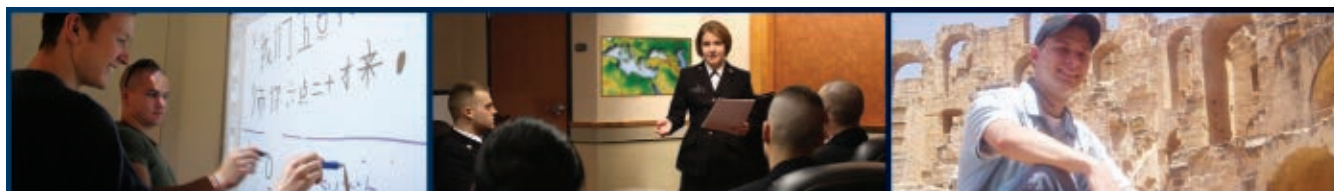
Foreign Service families, in particular, have new avenues and opportunities for learning, whether for basic education, career development or sheer pleasure.

year of online coursework," Covington says. "I was on campus for two summers during intensive five-week courses." She has now been a teacher in Mexico, China and Mongolia. "The

best part was getting a master's degree and teaching license finished in 13 months," she says, but "it was also challenging for a social person like me not to be on a traditional campus during most of the year."

Since she was not yet employed by a school, she found it difficult to do some of her required fieldwork. But displaying the resourcefulness characteristic of many Foreign Service spouses, she worked out an agreement to "borrow" students from the local international school to do her research.

Covington's advice to overseas learners? "Know what your goal is. I wanted to get a master's and a license, and this program provided both at once. I also wanted to study with a variety of classmates, and this program was about one-third foreigners teaching their native language to foreigners; one-third Americans teaching English overseas; and one-third



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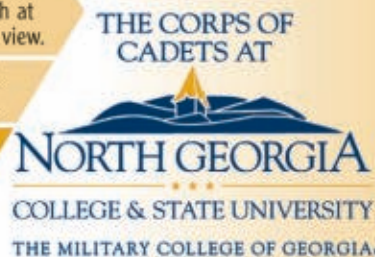
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SCHOOLS SUPPLEMENT

teachers working with immigrant communities in the U.S. So it was a good mix.”

Finally, a note on cost. We’ve all read about the high cost of higher education in the United States — and, unfortunately, it is no less true for the online variety. Do you have \$78,000 handy? That’s the cost of Thunderbird/Indiana University’s Web-based dual Master of Business Administration and Master of Global Management degree program, which takes 28 months to complete.

Although for-profits are often more expensive, some costing \$400 to \$500 or more per credit hour, the cost of online classes and on-campus classes tends to be roughly the same. Community college courses might be under \$100 per credit hour, making the cost of an associate degree (at 56 hours) just \$5,600.

Many state universities charge

around \$200 a credit hour (a bachelor’s degree requires about 120 hours, or about \$24,000). All legitimate schools will have cost details on their Web sites, as well as information about financial aid.

The demands of overseas living, combined with frequent moves, make career development difficult for Foreign Service family and household members. The good news today, however, is that educational opportunities are better than could be imagined just one decade ago. From universally offered general courses such as English literature to highly specific programs (Federal Indian Law studies at Montana State University, anyone?), the options are nearly endless.

As a result, Foreign Service families, in particular, have new avenues for learning, whether for basic education, career development or sheer pleasure. ■

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Online Offerings: A Sampler

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The **University of Illinois** (www.online.uillinois.edu/catalog/OnlineDegrees.asp) offers 104 degree programs, fully or mostly online. Example: the well-regarded library science program (www.lis.uiuc.edu/programs/leep/) includes a master's degree that requires 40 hours of graduate study, which can be completed by a full-time student in one year.

University of Nebraska at Lincoln (<http://online.unl.edu/>) offers undergraduate completion programs for those who already hold a number of college credits, plus graduate degrees. Example: Doctor of Education in Educational Administration, with courses offered both online and face-to-face. Students choose course formats that best suit their needs (<http://online.graduate.unl.edu/programs/phd/edadmin/index.shtml>).

Northeastern University (www.cps.neu.edu/online/programs) offers more than 65 online degree programs and professional certificates. Example: R.N. to B.S. in Nursing, which enables registered nurses who currently hold a diploma or associate degree to attain a baccalaureate degree in nursing completely online (www.cps.neu.edu/rnbs_nursing/).

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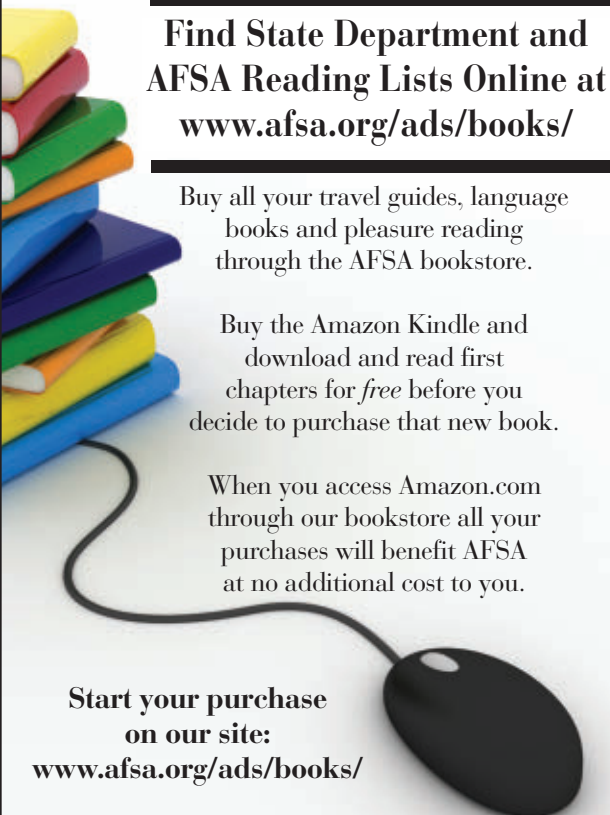
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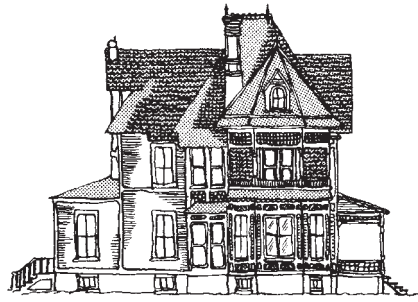
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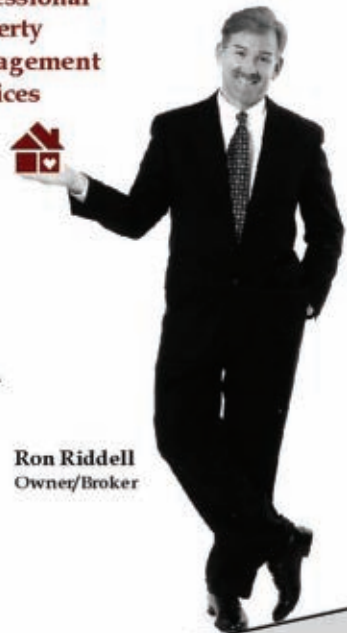


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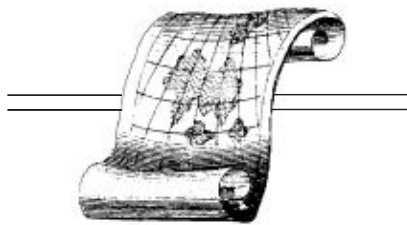


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REFLECTIONS

Where's Home?

BY CHRISTOPHER HENZE

Occasionally young people ask me about the Foreign Service as a career. Mostly they want to know what academic background I recommend, how to prepare for the entrance examination and whether foreign languages are required.

Yet the questions they don't think to ask are, to my mind, some of the most important. This has happened often enough to prompt me to jot down some reflections on diplomatic life, especially as it affects children.

The positive aspects are obvious — learning foreign languages, gaining an appreciation of other cultures and developing an international outlook.

But the negative aspects should not be underestimated. My wife and I moved 19 times during our 24-year-long career. At first that was fun and exciting. But later, when children arrived after 10 years of marriage, it became more problematic.

It's one thing for adults to uproot themselves, but quite another for children to be torn away from friends, school and home. Our children were both born in Paris, but they spent their early years in Washington. They did not want to leave D.C. for Geneva, and then did not want to leave there for Paris, although now they love France as much as we do.

The fact of our children's rootlessness hit home at a social event in Geneva when a lady asked our 6-year-old daughter where her home was. Sabrina looked up at me, not knowing what to say.

*“For you, the U.S.
will always be home.
For us, it's not.”*

That evening, we explained to our children that home for them was where they were at the moment. That's why we took all our favorite possessions with us when we moved (even at the risk of loss or breakage).

The big difference between us and them, however, is that we always had the U.S., and specifically California, where we were both born and raised, as a home reference point. As they said when they were older: “For you, the U.S. will always be home. For us, it's not.”

Except for brief visits on home leave, the children never really got to know their grandparents and vice versa, not to mention cousins and other relatives. And we parents did not enjoy the built-in babysitting often provided by grandparents at home!

Also unfortunately, during our career terrorism became a growth industry, making diplomatic service less attractive than before. An American cultural attaché, for example, is an ideal “soft target” with a fairly high profile but without protection.

Again, it's one thing to accept that sort of risk for oneself; but I had to ask myself if I had the right to subject my children to that risk. Ultimately, my answer was no.

I think the tipping point was a rather spooky telephone call received at home one night at the beginning of the Gulf War. The caller, allegedly representing the French counterintelligence service (Renseignements Généraux), wanted to know my detailed schedule for a trip to Rennes. I was due to open an exhibit there the following day titled “The American West,” something I wanted my children to see. I canceled the trip.

When I retired, it felt as if a weight had been lifted from my shoulders — a burden I didn't even realize I'd been carrying. Bureaucrats in Washington would no longer decide where my family and I would live for the next two to four years or what size living quarters we were allowed. And I wouldn't be representing the United States 24/7. I have no regrets about my career, but also no regrets about leaving it.

At age 16, with our encouragement, both children requested and obtained French citizenship, making them dual nationals. Being able to live and work in any of the expanding number of E.U. countries is potentially a great advantage for them.

Ironically, they both now work at the U.S. embassy in Paris, although in different capacities. And they both consider France their home. ■

Christopher Henze, a retired USIA Senior Foreign Service officer living in France, served in South Africa, Tanzania, Slovenia, Switzerland and France (twice).

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