



GLOBAL
DIASPORA
WEEK

2015 GLOBAL DIASPORA WEEK LAUNCH EVENT

October 9, 2015

Notes

Session Title: Career and Student Opportunities in Diplomacy and Development

Speaker(s): Tabrese Venson, Thomas Davis

Session Summary: Tabrese Venson, a human resources officer with the Department of State's Office of the Executive Director, and Thomas Davis, Director of USAID's External Outreach and Strategic Management Office under Human Capital and Talent Management, provided an overview of the general structure, the recruitment process and the career paths in their respective agencies. The Department of State, the diplomatic and foreign policy arm of the US government, has embassies in about 190 countries with about 10,000 Foreign Service Officers (FSOs). FSOs spend their day-to-day in the embassies while Civil Service Officers are predominantly in Washington, DC. The Department of State also employs college students through internships and fellowships. Opportunities can be found on www.careers.state.gov. The U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) mission is to "end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies." USAID is an independent federal agency from the Department of State and only has offices in developing countries. In addition to development, USAID's portfolio includes disaster relief such as for earthquakes and tsunamis, as well as humanitarian aid such as for the Ebola crisis. USAID staff is comprised of Foreign Service Officers (FSOs), Civil Service Officers (CSOs) and Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs). FSNs are the largest part of USAID's workforce and are citizens of other countries.

Key Themes:

- Theme 1: To become a **Foreign Service Officer (FSO) with the Department of State**, a college degree is not needed but the Foreign Service Officer Test must be taken. This exam is offered three times a year and takes about three hours. Next, the applicant will submit a personal narrative and undergo a day-long oral assessment to test for 13 dimensions (<http://careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/officer/13-dimensions>). The applicant will also undergo a medical exam and background check. If the applicant passes these tests, a contingent offer will be made and the applicant will be ranked on a roster for up to 18 months. Rank depends on the applicant's score on the FSO test. If the applicant receives an offer, s/he will go through orientation and training, including on the appropriate language. Applicants get bonus points for speaking a critical foreign language, defined as languages requiring two years of training. The Department of State

also supports the Critical Languages Scholarship Program (<http://clscholarship.org/>), which promotes the study of these critical languages.

- Theme 2: **USAID's Foreign Service Officers (FSOs)** spend 75% of their careers overseas at years at a time. FSOs must have world-wide availability and, in theory, do not get to choose where they are located but in practice, bid for country assignments. Positions require specialized training and experience and a graduate degree (with exceptions); these degrees are: MBA, MPH, Masters in IR, MPA, MPP, JD, Masters in Economics or Agricultural Economics, Masters in Political Science. FSOs must be able to obtain a medical and Top Secret clearance, and therefore be US citizens. Next, applicants undergo a 1-2 day assessment, which includes demonstrating writing, group work, and leadership skills; and undergoing a one-on-one interview. There are no language requirements but being able to speak another language is valuable. Additionally, overseas experience, particularly work experience in countries where USAID has Missions, is needed to be a competitive candidate. Work in border towns and with disadvantaged communities may also help applicants. Studying abroad, however, does not count for much as integration into a different culture and community is key. Payne Fellowships (<http://www.paynefellows.org/?areaid=2&contentid=941>) are also available to support graduate education. In exchange, the fellow will work as a junior FSO for three years.
- Theme 3: **USAID Civil Service Officers (CSOs)** are based in Washington, DC and have some opportunities to travel overseas. There is no minimum education required but CSOs must be able to obtain a Secret Clearance. Presidential Management Fellows (PMFs) (<http://www.pmf.gov/becomeapmf/index.aspx>), who hold masters' degrees, are on a track to become CSOs. Additional opportunities with USAID include internships for graduate and undergraduate students. Interns are predominantly hosted in Washington, DC and are held to high expectations.

Notable Quotes/Soundbites:

- *"The most sought-after skill is the ability to communicate and interact in teams."* – Thomas Davis, USAID/HCTM
- *"The interns who tend to be successful ask, 'What else you've got? I'm ready.'"* – Thomas Davis, USAID/HCTM

Discussion Topics/Audience Questions:

- Does being born overseas provide extra points in the application process?
 - USAID – No. Work experience and being integrated in a foreign culture and community matters rather than birth affiliation.
 - Dept. of State – This can be beneficial to some degree as long as the applicant no longer has "bad ties." Note that diplomatic immunity can become complicated if the country can still claim the FSO as a citizen.
- What is the length of the contract?

- USAID - There is no contract length except for the Payne Fellowship. If the fellow chooses to leave before the term of service ends, s/he will have to pay back the fellowship costs.
 - Dept. of State – The FSO who chooses to leave will have to pay everything back.
- How do both agencies reach out to and recruit non-traditional applicants?
 - USAID – USAID explains the benefits of being overseas and is partnering with minority organizations to do outreach.
 - Dept. of State - Diplomats in Residence are in universities across the country.

