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## U.S. Department of State: Foreign Service

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### General Description

Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) are the front-line professionals representing the Department of State at all U.S. embassies, consulates, and other diplomatic missions. They can be sent anywhere in the world, at any time, to serve the diplomatic needs of the United States. With representation in over 160 countries, the Department of State offers Foreign Service Officers many opportunities to serve the United States. FSOs advocate American foreign policy, protect American citizens, and promote American business interests throughout the world. FSOs staff more than 265 U.S. embassies, consulates and other diplomatic missions devoted to strengthening peace, stability, and prosperity. Their perceptiveness, dedication, and creativity drive the formulation and achievement of American foreign policy objectives. Foreign Service Officers are expected to take assignments that can involve extremely difficult work, hardship, and even danger.

### Career Paths and Salaries

#### *The FSO Selection Process*

The FSO selection process is a competitive; four stage selection process that requires a unique commitment from the candidate. These four stages include registration (online at [www.careers.state.gov](http://www.careers.state.gov)), taking the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT), participating on the Qualification Evaluation Panel (QEP) and completing the Foreign Service Oral Assessment. Once registration is complete, applicants are notified via email when they may schedule a seat to the FSOT. Applicants who pass the FSOT and who are successful during the QEP review must then successfully complete an all-day oral assessment process, undergo a background investigation, receive medical clearance and pass the final suitability review.

#### *Foreign Services Officer Test*

The FSOT is administered throughout the U.S. and abroad on specific dates throughout the year and takes approximately three hours to complete. The FSOT consists of the three multiple choice sections that include: Job Knowledge Test (assesses a range of knowledge on a range of job tasks); English Expression and Usage Test (assesses an applicant's knowledge of correct grammar, spelling and editing); and Biographic Information (assesses a candidate's prior work and education experience). In addition, the FSOT includes an Essay requirement, which is a 30 minute writing assignment on an assigned topic. For more information on the types of information assessed, for specific test dates and for practice questions, access the *Guide to the Foreign Services Officer Selection Process* booklet at [http://careers.state.gov/docs/3.0\\_FSO\\_RegGuide.pdf](http://careers.state.gov/docs/3.0_FSO_RegGuide.pdf)

#### *Career Tracks*

The Department of State requires that each applicant select a career track when registering to take the FSOT. The five Foreign Service career tracks, each of which typically employs job titles that include junior officer, mid-level officer and senior officer, are:

- **Consular:** responsible for managing resources and conducting public outreach as well as assisting Americans in distress. A consular is on the front line of defense in protecting U.S. borders from foreigners who seek to break U.S. laws.
- **Economic:** uses economic analysis skills to develop expert knowledge of the economic foreign policy issues facing the U.S. (and American companies with interests in host countries) to advance U.S. economic and commercial interests. Negotiates trade and identifies opportunities for U.S. exports.
- **Management:** utilizes solid business skills similar to those found in multinational corporations, such as maintaining U.S. government offices, procuring supplies and equipment, supervising recruitment and hiring of local staff and managing budgets with complex regulations.
- **Political:** works behind the scenes to analyze and report on local issues and events, which involves in-depth knowledge of the local culture and history. Advises U.S. policy makers of local views and their

implications and networks to develop contacts for information exchange and to promote U.S. positions.

- **Public Diplomacy:** manages U.S. image issues that may arise in country, which involves tracking local issues, gathering facts and reporting accurate findings to the media and other key constituents such as universities, Ministries of Information, think tanks, NGOs, etc. This role is the public face of the embassy, and maintains contact with key people who influence public opinion.

To perform well in any career track, candidates must have the following skills and abilities: proper use of the English language; knowledge of U.S. society, culture, economy, history, government, political systems and the Constitution; knowledge of world history, world geography, and world political systems and issues. FSOs must also hold basic skills in math, statistics, computer usage, principles of management, interpersonal communication and basic economic principles. More in-depth knowledge about areas such as international politics, NGOs, U.S. public policy or finance and commerce may be required for some roles.

Appointments are made at one of three entry levels based on the candidate's education and professional experience. Fluency in certain foreign languages may qualify candidates' for language incentive pay while serving at posts where these languages are used. For current tables of FS pay tables see <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/pay/>.

The yearly number of candidates hired varies with the needs of the Foreign Services and does not always equal the number of candidates on the registrars.

### **Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field**

In addition to career track specific qualifications mentioned above, the following qualifications or conditions apply:

- Most successful FSO candidates have at least a bachelor's degree and many have advanced degrees in international relations, economics, business administration, law, journalism and other areas.
- Many have had work experience in various fields before their appointment and have worked, attended school or traveled overseas.
- All applicants must be U.S. citizens on the date they submit their registration package.
- Applicants must be at least 20 years old and no older than 59 years of age.
- Appointed Foreign Service Officers must be at least 21 years old, and not yet 60.
- FSOs must also be available for worldwide assignments; including Washington, D.C. FSOs must also be available in cases where family members cannot go due to political instability and/or other concerns, or when family members must leave post as conditions deteriorate (evacuations).
- No specific educational level or proficiency in a foreign language is required for applicants. However, proficiency in one or more languages will enhance one's competitiveness for selection.

### **Future Challenges of the Profession**

The Department of State faces a growing and complex web of foreign policy challenges and therefore seeks not only candidates interested in political science and international relations, but also candidates who can manage programs and human resources. Transnational issues will also characterize the diplomacy of the future. Among these new priorities are counterterrorism, science and technology – including the global fight against diseases such as AIDS and efforts to save the environment – anti-narcotics efforts, and trade. The Department of State also has an increasing need for candidates with training and experience in management and administration and economic policy issues.

### **Resources for Additional Information**

- <http://careers.state.gov/officer/index.html>
- Foreign Service Officer Test information via phone: 800-205-6358

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Center for Community, N352 UCB 133 2249 Willard Loop Drive Boulder, CO 80309-0133

Phone 303-492-6541 FAX 303-492-5723 <http://careerservices.colorado.edu>

Additional guides available at: <http://careerservices.colorado.edu/students/MajorCareerInfo.aspx>