

It's Not as Big a Leap as You Think

By LILY WHITEMAN
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Do you have an itch to ditch your predictable job in the cubicle farm for adventurous work in other countries? The federal government offers lots of possibilities far, far beyond the Beltway, so don't let myths about government work overseas dash your aspirations.

MYTH: The Foreign Service — the nation's diplomatic corps — is made up exclusively of State Department staff.

FACT: The biggest branch of the Foreign Service indeed consists of State Department staff, said Marianne Myles, director of the State Department's Office of Recruitment, Examination and Employment. But the Foreign Service also has branches with employees of the U.S. Agency for International Development and the departments of Agriculture and Commerce.

MYTH: You must have previous overseas experience to become a Foreign Service officer with the State Department. These workers advance U.S. interests abroad and manage embassies.

FACT: The State Department's screening process for Foreign Service officers has long included a knowledge test called the Foreign Service Officer Test and a day-long Foreign Service Oral Assessment. But a third hurdle was recently added, Myles said: an in-depth review of professional, academic and extracurricular credentials.

This process considers all aspects of applicants' backgrounds without requiring specific skills or types of experience, such as languages or overseas experience. Why? "Because someone with a totally different skill set can still make a successful diplomat," Myles said. "The world is a complicated place; State needs multifaceted individuals with a wide range of skill sets."

The process favors "generalists who are adaptable enough to go wide and deep," and who represent all walks of life — including recent graduates and stay-at-home parents returning to work, Myles said.



First Steps to Going Global for Uncle Sam

■ **Get more information about international careers at the State Department's Web site, www.careers.state.gov, through e-mail to careers@state.gov or through the Diplomats in Residence program, which stations recruiters on college campuses.**

■ **Internships are available with:** Foreign Service agencies, intelligence agencies, the African Development Foundation, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Federal Communications Commission, Department of Health and Human Services, the International Broadcasting Bureau, the International Trade Administration, the Millennium Challenge Corp. and the Overseas Private Investment Corp.

■ **Contract jobs,** called personal service contracts, are advertised on agency Web sites globalcorps.com and fedbizopps.gov.

Other agencies have their own processes.

MYTH: All employees of intelligence agencies are spies; they are either spying on their families or have abandoned them.

FACT: The Central Intelligence Agency recruits about 100 types of non-spy pro-

fessionals, ranging from Hollywood makeup artists who design disguises to Wall Street wizards who analyze financial information, said Betsy Davis, chief of the agency's Recruitment and Retention Center. Some work in the United States; some work overseas.

"If you join the CIA, your family and

friends will still be part of your life," Davis said. And you won't have to spy on them.

MYTH: Only the Foreign Service has non-intelligence overseas jobs.

FACT: Dozens of agencies have overseas positions, federal recruiters say. In addition, most agencies employ U.S.-based professionals to address international issues.

Among these U.S.-based professionals is Isabel Otero, an international programs officer at the National Cancer Institute. Otero's recent globe-trotting activities have included organizing a conference on tobacco control and lung cancer management in India, and delivering speeches to cancer researchers and public health professionals at conferences around the world.

MYTH: All federal international jobs are filled by current feds — never by outsiders.

FACT: Federal recruiters say that outsiders regularly fill mid-level jobs as well as contract positions that may lead to permanent overseas work. In addition, outsiders fill recruitment programs for young professionals, including the Presidential Management Fellows Program, which places recent grads in two-year government assignments.

"A [fellow] may conduct a temporary duty assignment overseas at USAID as part of their training plans," said Tom Davis, chief of outreach and marketing in USAID's human resources office. "If they finish their fellowship satisfactorily, we will hire them into a permanent job."

Myth: You must be a language virtuoso to work overseas.

Fact: Foreign language fluency is a plus but not a necessity. English is spoken in many countries, and many jobs provide language training, said James Ham, the Peace Corps country director for Cameroon. With 12 years of experience working in 11 French-speaking countries, Ham's career has not been slowed by his accented French, despite his admitted tendency to elicit the response, "Votre Francais est tres American, monsieur."

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