A Miracle on Ice
Kazakhstan welcomes U.S. sports envoys

Milestone Anniversary
ECA celebrates 75 years of cultural exchange

Opening Doors
Embassy Promotes Democracy in Tunisia
The Medeu sits 1,691 meters above sea level, in Kazakhstan, making it the highest skating rink in the world. It has 10,650 square meters of ice and utilizes a sophisticated freezing and watering system to ensure the quality of the ice.

Photo by Vladimir Yaitskiy
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On The Cover
An intricately-patterned doorway provides security and decoration for a residence in Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia. The town is well known for the extensive use of blue and white colors in its architecture. 

Photo by Dennis Jarvis
Department Honors Fallen LE Staff

In a February 12 ceremony, Bureau of Human Resources Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Carol Perez unveiled two additional nameplates of fallen Locally Employed Staff on the Main State plaque honoring LE Staff who died in the line of duty since 1999. The plaque, which now has 25 nameplates, was established in 2010, with funding from the Cox Foundation. Four nameplates were added in a similar ceremony in 2013.

With representatives from several bureaus in attendance, PDAS Perez extended the Department’s condolences to the families and friends of Duong Trong Han and Abdul Rahman.

Duong Trong Han was an air-conditioning and refrigerator mechanic who worked for the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City for four years, earning numerous awards for his service. On July 18, 2013, he was killed at age 33 in a warehouse accident. Consulate colleagues described him as friendly and enthusiastic and considerate of all his colleagues—local and American. Han was recently married and looking forward to starting a family. Survivors include his mother and his wife, Tran Lam Linh Chau, who was hired in 2014 by the consulate for the custodial team.

Abdul Rahman, also 33, was employed for more than four years as a surveillance detection team specialist at Embassy Kabul. On September 29, 2014, Rahman was killed in a suicide bomb attack near Kabul International Airport as he kept watch along the travel routes of visiting U.S. dignitaries and diplomats on the day of the inauguration of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. The terrorist attack also killed at least five Afghan National Directorate of Security soldiers. Ambassador McKinley and the Embassy Kabul community paid tribute to Rahman’s loyal service to the United States in a memorial ceremony at the embassy attended by Rahman’s wife, three children, father and two of his sisters.

Great Lakes to Great Lakes Initiative Launched

In February, the United States special envoy for the African Great Lakes and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Russell Feingold, in collaboration with the Lake Tanganyika Authority (LTA); the Africa Bureau’s Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs; and the Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Science, launched an initiative bringing together North American Great Lakes experts with counterparts from the African Great Lakes region to address sustainable management of these transboundary lakes.

Over three days in February in Kigoma, Tanzania, scientists, academics and policymakers from the United States and Canada engaged with colleagues from countries bordering Lake Tanganyika. The 48 participants from a range of disciplines discussed the connected nature of agriculture, fisheries, water and sanitation, and eco tourism activities to expedite environmental and economic improvements in the countries surrounding the African Great Lakes.

“This tremendous exchange is one example of the positive benefits of strengthened cooperation between the countries of the African Great Lakes region, as well as a rare opportunity to learn from each other about our respective approaches to key environmental issues,” said Special Envoy Feingold.

Attendees discussed the challenges of managing the two Great Lakes systems, including: implementing environmental protocols on lakes crossing national boundaries, climate change, stresses on fisheries, controlling invasive species, protecting watershed and catchment areas, and land-use planning to deter pollution. Susan Hedman, Great Lakes national manager for the Environmental Protection Agency, spoke of the scale of the management challenges in the North American and African Lakes systems, which together hold almost half of the earth’s surface freshwater resources. Session topics, selected through consultation with the LTA, addressed areas where the most benefit could be realized through the information exchange. Participants expressed enthusiasm for continued collaboration at future sessions.

Jean-Marie Nibirantije, LTA executive director, emphasized information exchange to confront threats to biodiversity and encourage sustainable use of the lakes’ resources: “Discussions with experts from the North American Great Lakes allowed us to understand that many of the problems we are facing are shared by our colleagues,” she said. “This initiative has given new hope for a sustainable partnership to find new solutions.”
Gardens Enliven Kabul Compound

Employees of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul who wanted to create gardens on the embassy compound—even during a massive construction project—have put to use the post’s “HESCO barriers,” which provide blast protection. Now, tomatoes, lettuce and marigolds grow in the barriers, which are wire baskets lined with a sturdy, felt-like fabric and filled with Afghan soil.

The post’s Green Team asked the general services office to enrich the soil with compost, making it suitable for gardening in a locale where employees have limited ability to leave the compound. Last summer, employees grew tomatoes, lettuce, zucchini and scores of flowers. An entire office may now take on a Hesco garden, sharing its watering and weeding. Gardens are labeled to show the owner and some have signs with sayings such as “A weed is but an unloved flower.” The low-maintenance Mexican Garden consists of cacti in clay pots buried into the soil.

Newcomers interested in starting a garden in a HESCO barrier turn to one of the Green Team’s “garden gurus,” Alexandra Tenny. “What drew me to the Hesco garden idea was less about saving the earth and more about the idea of making something so ugly and intended for a rather ugly purpose into something rather beautiful,” Tenny said. “I love the symbolism of beauty out of conflict.”

Cheri Vaughan, a Community Liaison Officer coordinator, said she includes the gardens on her weekly compound tour for new arrivals, who are often surprised “to see sunflowers, tomatoes, marigolds, pumpkins, cactus and wildflowers popping out the tops of their square Hesco containers.” She finds the gardens “bring a cheerful presence” to an otherwise bleak and colorless construction walkway.

Posts Celebrate MLK Day

At U.S. diplomatic posts in Abidjan and São Paulo, among other locations, employees celebrated the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Day of Service in January. At the U.S. Consulate General in São Paulo members of consulate community spent Jan. 24 painting Casa Elohim, a local facility that shelters street and at-risk children and works to reconcile them with their families or place them for adoption. Under the project, organized by the Community Liaison Office (CLO) in partnership with the American Society of São Paulo, the consulate community and American Society raised funds to procure the paint and other supplies to improve the facility’s living conditions. Consulate volunteers, working with child residents, painted the compound’s exterior, as well as several bedrooms and the dining area of the children’s living quarters, in vibrant colors.

“It was fun meeting the children, painting alongside them, and learning more about the organization,” said volunteer Ayaana Antoine.

The staff at Casa Elohim thanked the volunteers for making a difference in the children’s lives.

The consulate also has a mentoring program that provides regular interaction between consulate community members and children living at a local orphanage founded in 1957 by an American missionary. This outreach is supplemented by ongoing in-kind donations from the consulate community. A painting project was completed last year.

Philanthropy is an important part of outreach programs organized by the consulate. “Local community outreach is a win-win situation,” observed CLO Coordinator Sharon Knode. “Consulate family members are searching for ways to connect with their new environment, officers are hoping to make an impact both personally and professionally, and the mission benefits from these visible efforts to exemplify American values of volunteerism, equality and hope.”

In Abidjan, the U.S. Embassy’s Information Resource Center (IRC) marked Martin Luther King Day with a special children’s storytelling program for 40 young conflict victims. The session was led by IRC Assistant Debora Rouamba, who highlighted MLK’s “I Have a Dream” speech and stories concerning hope, nonviolence and forgiveness. Other post MLK Day activities included a day of service at the Petit Baobab school, a leadership program for primary school students, an English immersion program and a Book of the Month program, all highlighting either Dr. King’s famous speech or the day of service.

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In the News

Post Commemorates Both World Wars

Over the course of 2014, the U.S. Embassy to the Kingdom of Belgium, led by Ambassador Denise Campbell Bauer, participated in more than 50 commemorative events for World War I and World War II, culminating in December with the 70th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge.

Evidence of the U.S. sacrifices in both world wars marks the landscape throughout Belgium, including three American military cemeteries and memorials: Ardennes, Henri-Chapelle and Flanders Field. In March, President Obama participated in a remembrance for the 100th anniversary of World War I at Flanders Field with His Majesty King Philippe and then-Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo. The cemetery holds markers for 368 American soldiers, and a wall is inscribed with the names of 43 missing soldiers.

Some of the most significant battles of World War II, especially the Battle of the Bulge, were fought in Belgium and Luxembourg. The Battle of the Bulge was the bloodiest battle of World War II for American soldiers. In September, Ambassador Bauer hosted a reception honoring 93-year-old Augusta Chiwy. Known as “the Forgotten Angel of Bastogne,” Chiwy was a volunteer nurse who braved bombs and bullets to save the lives of countless American GIs at Bastogne.

Beginning Dec. 12, Belgium commemorated the 76,890 American soldiers wounded or killed on its soil with several days of events that included Belgium’s king and queen and a U.S. presidential delegation honoring those who helped liberate the Ardennes region. The embassy participated in commemorative ceremonies with nearly 40 American Battle of the Bulge veterans, including events at the chief of mission residence and throughout the Ardennes.

In Belgium, memorials display rare military artifacts. This year, the embassy worked with a local business to showcase two historic American-made Harley-Davidson motorcycles. In July, the embassy exhibited a 1942 WWII Harley Davidson from the Lend-Lease program, giving embassy personnel and guests a chance to see a piece of history mostly unknown in the United States. (After the war, the United States left most of the Army’s 70,000 Harley-Davidsons behind, and host countries repurposed the bikes into “civilian” models or used them to help with rebuilding.)

In late 2014, the embassy displayed a 1918 WWI Harley-Davidson Model J and all of the accessories a soldier would have carried at the time, along with four soldiers’ personal journals. Other artifacts included original photographs of soldiers taken while posted in Belgium, Stars and Stripes newspapers from 1918 and an original silk handkerchief that would likely have been sent home as a gift.

Department Welcomes VIP Fellows

Secretary of State John Kerry joined the Office of Global Partnerships (S/GP) Feb. 13 in welcoming the inaugural class of Veterans Innovation Partnership (VIP) fellows to the State Department.

Special Representative for Global Partnerships Andrew O’Brien opened the program, welcoming the veterans and thanking the secretary for calling for creation of the partnership. He said the Department was proud that the secretary’s priority had become a reality.

Benjamin Shoaf, one of the VIP fellows who has already started work at the Department, said “VIP is a great opportunity for veterans like me who want to put the skills we’ve acquired through our military service to continued use in advancing our country’s foreign policy goals.”

Created in 2013, VIP is a public-private partnership that aims to increase foreign affairs career opportunities for veterans by providing one-year fellowships at the Department and other U.S. foreign affairs agencies, as well as educational and employment opportunities during and after the fellowship.

To implement the program, S/GP has partnered with The Mission Continues, USAID, OPIC, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, iRobot, General Motors and MasterCard. University partners include the University of Massachusetts, Boston University and the University of Kansas.

In his address, Secretary Kerry said the partnership “isn’t just about what the State Department can do for veterans, it’s about what veterans can do for the State Department and for America’s foreign policy.”

The inaugural class of 22 fellows, selected from more than 1,200 applicants, will work in four participating Department offices. The next application process opened in March, and S/GP welcomes additional offices to join VIP and host fellows. More information on VIP is available online.
A singer in a Bourbon Street bar belts out blues classics in New Orleans' famous Latin Quarter. 

Photo by Isaac D. Pacheco
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once stated, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’

On May 8, I will have the honor of welcoming home to Foggy Bottom men and women who answered that question by choosing public service careers with the State Department. It will be my first Foreign Affairs Day as Director General, and I’m looking forward to it with great anticipation.

Foreign Affairs Day provides us with the opportunity to reconnect with former Civil Service and Foreign Service colleagues who have retired from the Department. Though we do not see them daily, they remain part of the State Department family. Our Office of Retirement provides life long post-retirement assistance to Foreign Service members and speeds the retirement packets of Civil Service employees to the Office of Personnel Management for processing. Likewise, our retirees continue to play an important role in the Department’s mission.

As DG, I ask and encourage everyone who is part of the State Department family—including those who are retired—to help us with one of our highest priorities, recruitment. You can assist by reaching out to your local communities and emphasizing the relevancy of our work, mentoring future employees and encouraging talented people from diverse backgrounds to consider foreign affairs careers.

Public service is a noble calling. When I traveled on my first visit as DG to Mexico City, Hermosillo and Ciudad Juárez in February, I was impressed by the character and dedication of our people in the field: They’re enthusiastic, courageous and hardworking. I’m enormously proud of all they’re doing on the front lines to advance U.S. interests in Mexico.

As Secretary of State John Kerry has said, “There are really few countries with which the United States enjoys as dynamic and as close a relationship as the one that we enjoy with Mexico. Our interests are obviously intertwined in many ways.” About $1 billion in goods travel daily between the United States and Mexico, and Mexican immigrants have made up the largest U.S. immigrant population for the last 50 years. The United States and Mexico work together to fight organized crime, drug trafficking, corruption, illicit arms trafficking and money laundering through the Merida Initiative.

In Mexico City, I talked with the embassy employees and thanked all of them for their sacrifice and commitment. I also let them know that we’re moving forward on the pilot test of an innovative program called Crowdwork, including at Mission Mexico. Crowdwork will allow first- and second-tour officers to work on interesting projects, including those that are in-cone, sponsored by other posts and Washington offices.

In Hermosillo and Ciudad Juárez, I saw the demanding and innovative work being done by our consular officers. Their professionalism, efficiency and friendly courtesy send a powerful message about what Americans are like. And in Mexico City, I was impressed with the home grown mid level mentoring and training, as well as the cooperation across a wide range of U.S. government agencies. In so many ways, our people and programs in Mexico are emblematic of all that we do and stand for in the State Department.

For all of us at State as we commemorate Foreign Affairs Day, I appreciate your commitment to advancing America’s values, interests and goals, and your service to our nation. It is what we do for one another and what we do for our country that makes the Department of State a great place to work.
We live in a country where the value of diversity has been studied, documented and ultimately applauded as one of our nation’s most valuable assets. However, as history tells us, arriving at this point took much effort, for diversity has not always been appreciated.

Here’s a quiz on U.S. legal history. Answer “true” or “false” as to whether the Supreme Court actually declared the following:

- Black people are so far inferior to Whites that they had no rights that Whites were bound to respect.
- People of different races should be educated separately.
- U.S. residents of Japanese national origin are ineligible for U.S. citizenship.

All three are true. The notion that Whites are racially superior to Blacks was an accepted principle during the period of slavery. In the Dred Scott decision of 1857, the Supreme Court stated that slaves are not U.S. citizens and do not have a right to sue in U.S. courts. It took a civil war and a constitutional amendment (14th) in 1868 to grant full citizenship to African-Americans and another amendment (15th) to guarantee the right to vote irrespective of race in 1870.

The case of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) established the doctrine of “separate but equal” and sustained state laws requiring separation of the races in education, thus justifying racial segregation in public schools. The doctrine was only overturned a little more than sixty years ago by Brown v. Board of Education (1954).

There are members of our workforce who well remember racial segregation and heard the words of the “I Have a Dream” speech delivered by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Lincoln Memorial. Others may have experienced forced integration of the school systems and the turmoil that followed for many years thereafter. Some employees in our workforce may have studied the Civil Rights movement in history courses, but never experienced segregation or Jim Crow laws.

Still others may have experienced or heard relatives talk about coming to the U.S. and being treated differently because of their race. The Supreme Court in Ozawa v. United States (1922) ruled that U.S. residents of Japanese national origin were ineligible for citizenship. Then, some 20 years later, more than 127,000 United States citizens of Japanese ancestry were forced out of their homes and imprisoned in internment camps because they were deemed a security risk during World War II.

Although history illustrates that our nation hasn’t always upheld the notion of equality as it does today, it is important to note the significant progress made over the years that has led us to where we are now. Last year, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the cornerstone legislation for many of today’s protections against discrimination. While we in the Office of Civil Rights focus primarily on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which protects individuals from workplace discrimination, other provisions prohibit discrimination in education, housing and in facilities that provide services to the public.

Title VII prohibits discrimination in the workplace on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex and reprisal. Additional laws and executive orders prohibit discrimination in the workplace on the basis of age, disability, genetic information and sexual orientation. Today, thanks to these advancements, our workforce enjoys greater inclusivity and better reflects the diversity of our nation; however, there is still much work to be done. Let’s continue to advance the diversity that makes our nation the epicenter of fairness, equity and inclusion.
This year, young African entrepreneurs will start local businesses, building upon ideas sparked while they were on an exchange program in the United States. Journalists in Asia will dig a little deeper to balance their stories, after exchanges in which they explored U.S. media practices. And Muslim clerics in the Middle East will tell their local communities accounts of Islam in America and of American Muslims they met in the United States.

In the United States, Secretary of State Kerry meets with African women business owners participating in the African Women's Entrepreneurship Program, which was launched by the Department in July 2010 and assists women entrepreneurs across sub-Saharan Africa.
of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world; to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world."

Exchanges promote understanding with people of other countries, share democratic values and advance conversations that can make the world safer, more secure and more prosperous.

Today, the Department’s exchange programs encompass academia, government, the arts and sciences and many leading professions. A million-plus strong, this cadre of people have returned to their countries and, sharing their American experiences, have affected millions more, reflecting how exchanges can make a difference through collective voices.

ECA’s websites chronicle hundreds of participants’ stories. For instance, one International Visitor Leadership Program participant said she leveraged her relationship with U.S. retail wholesaler Costco to support education in her Burkina Faso community. A Jordanian participant, from the TechGirl exchange, developed a robotics project to help people with hand-related disabilities control a computer and also started a volunteer organization. A new ECA website focused on the 75th anniversary lets anyone explore the history and experience of being on an exchange.

The Department has also created an “Exchanges Are…” video for use on social media. The video’s content involves the hundreds of respondents who offered opinions on what exchanges mean to them. One view: "Exchange programs are the best opportunities that any student can have to learn and develop his knowledge about other cultures.” Another participant called them “opportunities to discover yourself, your culture, as well as other people and their cultures.”

Daily, the Department’s exchange participants, alumni and supporters are blogging, sharing on social media and explaining the impact of their exchange.

Over the past 75 years, 385 alumni of Department exchange programs have become heads of state, while 63 have become Nobel laureates. Thousands more have helped effect change in their homelands in other ways. As Secretary of State John Kerry once put it: “When I travel, I am constantly running into foreign leaders who are better informed and more helpful, and they tell me so, because of the time they spent in America.”

In ways big and small, exchange programs are expanding individual worlds while shrinking the globe. ☑
TUNIS
Embassy Promotes Democracy in Tunisia

By Carina Klein, information officer, U.S. Embassy in Tunis, with Public Affairs Officer Michael Macy and Management Counselor Daniel Hirsch
U.S.–Tunisian diplomatic relations date back more than 200 years. Tunisia was one of the first countries to recognize the United States, and an American consular representative was appointed in 1795. Many historians believe Thomas Jefferson held the first Ramadan iftar at the White House, for a visiting Tunisian delegation in 1805. The United States reciprocated in 1956, becoming one of the first countries to recognize modern Tunisia as a sovereign nation when it gained independence from France.

Despite the long relationship, few Americans knew much about this small country, which has a population of just over 11 million, until the revolution of 2011. Literally overnight, Tunisia captured the imagination of the world. The years since have been challenging, as Tunisia has transitioned to democracy while dealing with an economy in crisis and the threat of terrorism.

That threat became a reality when the U.S. Embassy and American School were attacked by a mob in September 2012. Mission families and most personnel were evacuated shortly thereafter and the post became “unaccompanied,” leaving only a reduced staff to rebuild the embassy and the bilateral relationship during a tumultuous time in Tunisia’s history. The embassy has advanced programs supporting democracy, economic development and security assistance and has worked to ensure that, once a political consensus was reached, Tunisia would be prepared to launch elections and establish a truly participatory democracy. Embassy Tunis staff now can truly say they are witnessing history in the making. “This country is again writing history,” observed Community Liaison Officer Mary Beth Stock. “I really can’t imagine a better spot to stand and admire the past and feel the electric excitement of the future.”

Secretary of State John Kerry has called Tunisia “a shining light” in the Arab world, and with good reason. Of all the Arab countries experiencing upheaval in recent years, Tunisia alone has succeeded in establishing a functioning democracy. The Tunisian National Constituent Assembly voted to ratify a new democratic constitution in January 2014, and it was hailed as a model for the rest of the Arab world. In the last quarter of 2014, there were...
three rounds of democratic legislative and presidential elections. In January, Tunisia’s first elected president took office and a month later, the new prime minister won an overwhelming vote of confidence for his new cabinet.

It was a momentous time for embassy staff, both American and Tunisian, many of whom served as official observers during the elections. At the embassy, the day after each election, local staff excitedly displayed their left index fingers, stained deep purple, most having voted for the first time in their lives. Information Assistant Mejda Chergui expressed the feelings of many when, as she left her polling station, she said: “I am so proud to be a Tunisian!”

At the close of the first quarter of 2015, life is getting back to normal. Mission Tunis’ goals are the consolidation of Tunisian democracy, increasing sustainable economic growth and supporting Tunisia’s stability and security.

U.S. aid to Tunisia has reached $550 million since 2011, and mission programs include those to empower women, train future leaders, assist the military and police, and assist with financial sector reform. The post’s cultural section coordinates $25 million in new scholarships for Tunisian students, who Cultural Affairs Officer Kate Hall says find their time spent on U.S. campuses, transformational. Exchange program alumni return with the skills the Tunisian workforce so desperately needs and are eager to put their new skills to good use, as did Tunisia’s new prime minister, who studied in the United States under a USAID grant.

As Tunisia attracts more visitors, the embassy expects a change in its unaccompanied status and hopes adult dependents and children under five will soon be welcomed back to post. More good news for families: Mission Tunis offers a variety of job opportunities for eligible family members interested in working at the embassy. Regional Security Office (RSO) employee Salote Pierce said she appreciated the HR office’s help when her husband applied for a job at post and how it streamlined the process.

Tunis offers rich rewards for officers posted there: Political and economic officers get to report on the “growing pains” of a fledgling democracy getting its bearings. The commercial section’s upcoming investment and entrepreneurship conference will gather participants from the United States and throughout the Middle East and North Africa region to highlight new opportunities in Tunisia. USAID’s reopened office has a number of job creation projects in the works, Department of Defense staff are coordinating training and equipment for Tunisia’s military, and the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement unit helps train police and prison officials.

As the security situation continues to improve, the RSO team has minimized the restrictions on the movements of mission personnel, making it easier to engage with the public, both in the capital and beyond. The heightened interest in Tunisia has also meant the embassy is again getting a large number of congressional delegations and other VIP visitors, visits that require management officers to work out complicated logistics, even as they seek new ways to improve the life of the community and the growing mission.

“I can’t imagine more rewarding work, meeting the needs of a growing mission,” said First- and Second-Tour Officer (FAST) Program Officer Gia Hinman. She called her tour a great experience and said, “Being in a post-revolution assignment has had some real challenges but we are working towards more normal embassy operations.”

Tunisia offers those with Arabic or French language ability the opportunity to hone their skills. Outside of work, embassy employees have a plethora of enriching activities: historic Phoenician and Roman archaeological ruins; Islamic, Christian and Jewish holy sites; forts that served both armies and pirates; many miles of beautiful beaches; and the Sahara Desert, for adventures. Management Counselor Daniel Hirsch frequently takes TDY employees and others on weekend trips, noting “there are very few places on earth where so many sites from so many historical periods can be found so close to the capital city.”

Tunisia has many modern cultural sites of interest as well, ranging from music festivals,
such as the annual “Electric Dunes Festival,” to the “Djerbahood Project,” in which 150 street artists from around the world decorate the white walls of the town of Erriadh, also home to the oldest synagogue in Africa. In the early 1970s, filmmaker George Lucas was so inspired by Tunisia’s South that he incorporated many sites and aspects of Berber culture into the “Star Wars” trilogy. He even named Luke Skywalker’s home planet of Tatooine after the real-life Tunisian town of Tataouine.

Archaeological sites include the colossal amphitheater in El Jem and the ruins of Carthage, Utica, Dougga, Bulla Regia, Sufetula and Maktar. The Punic city of Kerkouane is one of several UNESCO World Heritage sites in Tunisia, and the ancient city of Kairouan is Islam’s fourth holiest site.

A number of wineries not far from Tunis offer tours, tastings and the opportunity for a picnic or restaurant lunch. Urban beaches are within walking distance of some embassy residences, and world-class beach resorts can be reached by car within an hour. Shopping opportunities include such traditional handicrafts as carpets, ceramics, brass work and leatherwork, as well as export quality clothing and leatherwork in the latest international styles.

With a new liberal constitution, democratic elections and a coalition government in place, Tunisia has earned its place in the family of democratic nations. Although challenges remain, Tunisians are justifiably proud of what they have accomplished in a remarkably short time. As Public Affairs Officer Michael Macy commented, “There is no better place to do what we do; we feel we are making a difference and you see the results every day.”

The sun sets over the Phoenician capital city of Carthage, founded in 800 B.C., which is now a suburb of Tunis where about a quarter of embassy employees reside.

Photo by Kate Hall
Demystifying 2014 FS Promotion Statistics

By Victor Villones, analyst, Bureau of Human Resources

To meet the needs of the Foreign Service, the Foreign Service Act of 1980 calls for “a regular, predictable flow of talent upward through the ranks and into the Senior Foreign Service.” With a steady progression of Foreign Service employees through the rank-in-person system, promotion rates will vary, mainly due to the number of promotion-eligible employees.

For Foreign Service promotion planning, the Bureau of Human Resources (HR) applies a computer model of the workforce that analyzes current and projected service needs, intake, career progression and attrition. The model simulates the movement of employees through the Foreign Service career system and averages promotion opportunities over multiple years to create a smoothing effect in closing projected staffing gaps.

If the Department were to promote to fill only current year gaps, promotion opportunities would vary drastically from year to year, especially for many specialist skill groups. The Director General directs the workforce planning process and authorizes the final generalist and specialist promotion opportunities. Further details on Foreign Service promotion planning and promotion trends can be found at http://intranet.hr.state.gov/Workforce/WorkforcePlanning/Pages/default.aspx.

Due to the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative (DRI) and Diplomacy 3.0 hiring efforts, Foreign Service hiring surged in the first decade of the 2000s. These employee cohorts are currently moving into the mid-ranked positions and above, intensifying the competition between employees for promotions. Although the total number of promotions increased to record levels over the past few years, the overall promotion rate decreased as the total number of promotion-eligible employees increased more rapidly. As a result, the overall 2014 promotion rate for all eligible Foreign Service employees experienced a modest decrease to 21 percent, compared with 22 percent in 2013 and 24 percent for the five-year average.

These generalist and specialist promotion trends are reflected in the 2014 Selection Board results. HR has published the data in tables that show promotion numbers, promotion rates, average time in class and average time in service for each competition group. In addition, HR has made available online the 2014 promotion results by gender and ethnicity/race along with detailed breakouts by grade level for each generalist cone and specialist skill group. They are available at http://intranet.hr.state.gov/offices/rma/Pages/DiversityStats.aspx.

Overall, the generalist promotion rate decreased from 29.1 percent in 2013 to 26.3 percent in 2014. For promotions into and within the Senior Foreign Service (SFS), the number of promotion-eligible employees actually decreased from 2013 and was lower than the five-year average. Thus, the promotion rate into and within the SFS was 22.6 percent, higher than the 2013 rate of 22.1 percent and the five-year average of 17.9 percent.

Since the number of promotion-eligible generalists at the mid-ranks has increased more rapidly than in previous years due to the DRI and Diplomacy 3.0 hiring surge, the generalist promotion rates have changed and reflect a return to long-term historical trends. The 2014 promotion rate from FS-02 to FS-01 was 14 percent with 169 promotions. With fewer promotions, the 2013 promotion rate was actually higher at 14.9 percent due to the lower number of promotion-eligible employees compared with 2014. The five-year average is a 17.8 percent promotion rate and a total 172 promotions.

The 2014 promotion rate from FS-03 to FS-02 was 30.2 percent with 226 promotions, compared with 35.5 percent and 263 promotions in 2013. The 2014 results were also lower than the five-year averages of 41.7 percent and 289 promotions.

The number of FS-04 to FS-03 generalist promotions increased from 387 in 2013 to 400 in 2014, higher than the five-year average of 339 per year. Since the number of generalists eligible for promotion increased at a faster rate (from 775 in 2013 to 957 in 2014), the promotion rate decreased to 41.8 percent, lower than both the 2013 rate of 49.9 percent and the five-year average of 61 percent.

Specialists

Consistent with 2013 and the five-year average promotion rate, 16 percent of all eligible Foreign Service specialists were promoted in 2014. However, the total number of specialist promotions in 2014 was higher than the 2013 level and the five-year average. These overall results do not reflect the variations in promotion rates and promotion numbers occurring in specific specialist categories, due to their respective grade structures and workforce sizes. While the number of promotions remained steady, large specialist skill groups experienced slight decreases in overall promotion rates in 2014 compared with 2013, mainly due to an increase in promotion-eligibles.

Certain specialist skill groups actually experienced a decrease in their total of promotion-eligible employees. The number of financial management promotion-eligible employees decreased from 97 in 2013 to 91 in 2014. Even though the total of financial management promotions was the same for 2013 and 2014, the resulting 2014 promotion rate was 17.6 percent, up from 16.5 percent in 2013 and higher than the five-year average of 15.2 percent.

In 2014, 31 security engineers were promoted, two more than in 2013 and four more than the five-year average. At the same time, the total number of promotion-eligible employees decreased from 127 in 2013 to 124 in 2014. Thus, the overall promotion rate for security engineering officers was 25 percent, higher than the 2013 promotion rate of 22.8 percent and the five-year average of 23.4 percent.
## Classwide Management

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## 2014 Promotion Statistics

| Classwide Management   | 164  | 0    | 5.3  | 3.8  |
| Consular               | 227  | 17   | 7.5  | 5.5  |
| Economic               | 273  | 10   | 6.9  | 5.5  |
| Political              | 344  | 20   | 8.4  | 5.5  |
| Combined Totals        | 1164 | 120  | 10.3 | 5.5  |

## Avg Time-in-Class

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## Avg Length of Service

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## Percent Competed Promoted

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Meeting Local Needs

Mission Egypt teaches Egyptian Arabic

By Brandon Chase, U.S. Embassy in Cairo

For members of the U.S. Mission in Egypt, learning Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) is challenging, exciting and necessary. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) teaches Modern Standard Arabic, the dialect spoken throughout the majority of the Middle East, to most of those posted to the region.

But Foreign Service staff at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo quickly find ECA differs subtly yet significantly, and that they must learn lingo more attuned to the 80 million Egyptians of their host country.

Thus, the Post’s Language Program (PLP) has for more than 35 years taught ECA. Now, though, PLP has begun focusing on teaching using technology, assisted by the PLP’s fully functional audiovisual studio. The studio has a high-definition video camera, video editing software and chroma-keying capability, and can be used to produce educational items in ECA tailored to the needs of officers at post. For example, the PLP just released an 80-page ECA handbook for the consular affairs section filled with context-specific vocabulary, videos and dialogues. It also has an accompanying CD of exercises and additional information.

David Reiter, the post’s human resource officer and post language officer, said the handbook project was well received, and the PLP is now working on a similar workbook for regional security officers. It also plans ECA workbooks for the political, economic and public affairs sections. The PLP is also producing learning content with video lessons and recordings for the Marine Security Guards to assist with their work and daily interactions with locals.

Integrating technology into the PLP breathed new life and energy into it, enabling the production of relevant content quickly. For example, the PLP can create short lessons “based on suggestions from students or a section that might recognize a new need for teaching,” Reiter said.

With approximately 90 students enrolled in the program, the post needed to generate such materials in a short turnaround and has found the technology improves turnaround, compared with traditional, commercially produced tools.

The PLP’s four instructors also conduct regular classroom sessions five days per week at the chancery and USAID annex, and at three housing compounds, to accommodate family members. Students of all skill levels may participate, and sessions are held for each group.

“By integrating technology into these lessons, we hope to remind [students] that learning can be fun,” said Post Language Coordinator Aly Omar.

The PLP has also begun producing the video series “Living in Egypt,” which features students and instructors interacting in everyday situations such as grocery shopping, taking a taxi and exchanging greetings. The videos feature contextual backgrounds, dialogues spelled out in English and Arabic, and a “listen and repeat” section following each lesson.

A shorter video series is also in production. Called “Arabic Phrase of the Day,” the series introduces an Arabic idiom and compares it with its English equivalent. According to Reiter, the goal is to have a full library of interactive and educational videos, all available online for students in Cairo and abroad. The PLP has placed the videos on the post’s SharePoint site under the “Language Takeaway” section. (The PLP works closely with the Bureau of Information Resource Management on setup and maintenance of the equipment and media storage and handling.)

Because ECA is so challenging, the post’s use of new technology-based learning methods plays a large role in learning. “My ability in Egyptian Arabic has improved greatly,” said General Service Officer Chris Merriman. “When I arrived in Egypt, I could direct a taxi and order at a restaurant, but now I can communicate in more complex situations.”

The video lessons and other technology enhancements may help students improve their language scores, but instructors actually focus on tailoring lessons to student needs and providing cultural awareness and localized language improvement. As Assistant Regional Security Officer Dominic Gutierrez explained, “Instructors are invested in helping their students learn about Egyptian culture.... Every time I attend a lesson, I learn something new about the community and culture in which I am living.”

For the future, Reiter and Omar will continue producing multimedia content, including e-learning software and quizzes. Reiter said the PLP wants more ways to reach more people and to help officers prepare for the FSI test. One way it’s doing so is by offering individualized instruction via Google Hangouts and Skype for students who are on R&R or TDY assignments and don’t want to miss their classes.

Omar, meanwhile, is developing group sessions via the Internet to expand the program’s reach and connect students and instructors worldwide. Omar said he also hopes to bring back the program’s immersive field trips, which had encouraged students to explore their surroundings and participate in such activities as ordering food at a restaurant or providing directions to a taxi driver. Security issues arising in the wake of the 2011 revolution forced the program to suspend these trips, but the program’s alternate methods of instruction do mimic everyday interactions.
Advocating Equality

Embassy champions rights for Dominican Republic’s vulnerable groups

By Alexandria L. Panehal, director, USAID/Dominican Republic, U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo

In the past year, the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (DR), has undertaken an ambitious effort to promote and protect the rights of those in vulnerable groups.

Public outreach has been a key component of this effort. In December, Ambassador James “Wally” Brewster and USAID/DR commemorated International Persons with Disabilities Day by hosting the first film festival about and for persons with disabilities. At the event, where the original version of the movie “The Miracle Worker” was aired, Ambassador Brewster was joined by the Paraguayan ambassador to the Dominican Republic, Pedro Sanchez, who is blind.

The mission has also used outreach to promote the rights of the LGBT community. The Public Affairs Section (PAS), for instance, has given grants to Dominican LGBT groups for their annual Outfest Festival and shown such films as “The Laramie Project” and “It Gets Better.” A video featuring Ambassador Brewster was also placed on the embassy web page for LGBT Pride Month.

In December, the embassy provided more than 120 staff with training on how to refer to and treat persons with disabilities, and 199 embassy staff members received sensitivity training about LGBT issues, including hearing firsthand from Dominicans in the LGBT community about discrimination they had experienced.

For those with hearing limitations, last year the embassy adopted a sign language interpretation policy that requires sign language interpreters at all public events having more than 50 people and TV cameras. In October, the management office authorized sign interpretation classes for embassy staff, and more than 30 staff members have enrolled. One, Consular Officer Lanta “Lanny” Spencer, said he did so because consular officers must communicate with all visa applicants. “In the Dominican Republic, we regularly have applicants who are deaf or mute, so this training gives us the ability to communicate directly with them, whereas before we had to rely on their interpreter,” he explained.

The embassy has also allocated funds and sought funds from Washington for programs for vulnerable groups. In February, USAID/DR received $450,000 to help Dominican LGBT groups better advocate for and protect the rights of the LGBT community. USAID/DR has also dedicated $100,000 to fund the first program in the Dominican Republic to make public elementary schools more inclusive. That program financed medical, laboratory and psychosocial evaluations for 553 children identified as having learning challenges.

USAID’s local partner convinced 10 doctors to volunteer their time to diagnosing these children and six medical clinics to cut costs in treating them. The program involved 318 medical and lab exams, two surgeries and the donation of 43 pairs of eyeglasses. To address a shortage of special education teachers in the country, the program also designed a course to train 20 such teachers. The Dominican government has since provided additional scholarships to train 145 more special education teachers.

To help counter the DR’s high incidence of gender-based violence (GBV), the embassy awarded approximately $200,000 to two Dominican NGOs to help fight the problem. USAID/DR also expanded services at its community justice houses, which provide referral assistance and legal aid to victims of gender-based violence, and trained at-risk youth on preventing gender discrimination and gender-based violence. In February 2015, USAID/DR and Major League Baseball and its Players Association signed an alliance to increase public awareness to combat domestic violence and fund activities to reduce domestic violence.

Bullying and violence can affect a school’s most vulnerable students. Therefore, USAID/DR initiated a $500,000 Safe Schools program in 90 public elementary schools in the DR. The program’s 337 workshops trained 328 teachers, 2,441 students from grades 5-8, 217 community leaders and 56 school administrative staff, stressing tolerance, respect and appropriate behavior. Before the program, 64.5 percent of teachers and students surveyed in the city of Santiago said there was bad violence during the recreation period. After the program, 88.5 percent said the situation had improved.

“Before the Safe Schools program,” said one teacher, “there was a lot of violence in the schools, the kids were very aggressive, fighting all the time, principally during recess and when leaving school. After we received training in prevention of violence, there have been fewer fights, the teachers have put into practice what they learned, and they are better equipped to deal with violence.”

In his public addresses and private conversations with leaders, Ambassador Brewster regularly stresses equal protection and equal rights for vulnerable groups in the Dominican Republic. Since arriving at post, he said, “We have been working tirelessly with our Dominican partners to identify concrete ways that, together, we can better protect the human rights of all people, but especially those who are most vulnerable.” The effort has not always been easy, he admitted, but he’s not been dissuaded.

“It has only strengthened my resolve to continue to espouse the principles and human rights goals and policies of the U.S. government and President Obama.”

USAID/Dominican Republic, U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo

By Alexandria L. Panehal, director

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At an August luncheon for leaders of organizations of those with disabilities, held at the residence of USAID Mission Director Alexandria Panehal, three attendees, from left, Bernardo Montero, Cristina Francisco and Tayiry Acosta, pose with Ambassador Brewster.

Photo by Jose de Los Santos

STATE MAGAZINE // APRIL 2015
A MIRACLE ON ICE

Mile-High Stand/Sit Sled Hockey In Almaty

By Chaz Martin, public affairs officer, Consulate General Almaty, Kazakhstan

Medeu Stadium, a mile above the hot Kazakh steppe, is a skating rink seemingly cut from the Tien Shan mountains that envelop it. Looming over Almaty, the open-air arena takes in views of gondola lifts carrying skiers to the jagged slopes on the passes beyond the stadium. Since the 1950s, Kazakhstani families, athletes and young couples have made the trek up to Medeu, the pride of the former Soviet winter sports program and, at 1,691 meters above sea level, the highest-altitude skating rink in the world.

On a December afternoon in 2014, a stocky man named Rufik got out of his wheelchair at center ice. Hockey players happy to get free rink time sped past him as he lowered himself from his seat onto the cold surface of the rink. Rufik had not been on the ice in a long time—not since the car accident a decade before that took his ability to walk. He had not planned to come to Medeu, not until he met the three foreigners who would change his life and introduce a new sport to his country.
These three foreigners, U.S. Sports Envoys, made the long journey to Medeu after having faced their own personal challenges. Lonnie Hannah, a founding father of the U.S. sled hockey program, built a team that improved from last place at the 1998 Nagano Paralympics to win the gold medal four years later in Salt Lake City. Andy Yohe, the veteran team captain of the sled hockey team that took gold in Sochi, built a winning squad of U.S. Army veterans and high school phenoms to defeat both Canada and Russia on the way to the winners’ platform. Julie Chu grew up participating in a “men’s sport” to become a pioneer in women’s hockey, winning silver medals in the Olympics and establishing a women’s professional league.

Many Kazakhstanis and Americans watched sled hockey for the first time during the Sochi Paralympics. The intense, physical action of the sport—seated players propel themselves across the ice with two sticks, using either stick to hit the puck, and routinely crash metal against metal into opposing players—made it immediately popular during the games. Now, Lonnie and Andy were in Kazakhstan to introduce it to a country whose athletes with disabilities hunger for more opportunities to compete and excel.

As the day began, Medeu’s crowd of regulars gathered around the hockey rink at center ice. A local sports department official in skates glided past the crowd with a microphone, interpreting into Russian as Lonnie explained how Andy operated his sled. Julie shared tips on the basics of stick handling and described why she traded figure skating for hockey. Wearing a yellow knit toboggan, a Team USA jersey and an infectious grin, Julie slapped a puck across the rink; Andy’s sticks churned like pistons as he barreled across the ice to stop the puck and smash it back to Julie.

The coach of the Almaty youth team, a self-described “Soviet man” in a blue tracksuit, barked orders at his players as Julie and Andy led them in a scrimmage. Andy zipped through the defensive line, flipped the puck to Julie, who coasted behind the goal before making an assist to a young Kazakh boy half her height. The players quickly learned they needed to give everything they had just to keep up. Another pass from Andy to a young player and another goal. As the Sports Envoys directed the team into seamless serpentine formations, distinctions between Paralympic, Olympic and amateur hockey seemed to fade into the mountain air.

With play happening at center ice, it was Rufik’s turn to try the sled. He put his arms around two consulate staffers, who lifted him from the ice and into his sled. Lonnie lined up alongside and calmly explained his technique, pushing his sticks down into the ice to propel himself forward effortlessly. Rufik attempted to follow suit. Pushing downward, hands gripped, his sled teetered sharply as he tried to maintain balance. With the hockey game raging a few meters away, Rufik’s sled began to move uneasily forward. Wobbling to the right, he pressed to the left to steady himself. Again pushing off, the sled teetered in the other direction. Steadying himself, he paused for a moment, took a breath, pushed both sticks into the ice, and shot forward two meters. Applause erupted from the stands as spectators took their eyes off of the hockey game.

Another hour passed. As the game concluded, hockey players lined up for photos with Julie and Andy, skaters resumed their circles around the rink, and Rufik—joined by a young amputee named Serik—proved to be quick studies at sled hockey. An hour after the consulate vehicle was scheduled to depart, Serik and Rufik continued their laps across the ice with increasing confidence. As the temperature started to drop, Lonnie huddled with Rufik and Serik and told them he expected them to become the founding members of Kazakhstan’s first sled hockey team.

When a box containing two sleds arrived in Almaty a month later, Rufik and Serik realized Lonnie was serious. With Almaty a finalist city for the 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics, they hope to start training now.

The U.S. Mission to Kazakhstan, which hosted the three Sports Envoys in both Almaty and Astana, thanks ECA’s SportsUnited office and USA Hockey for their tremendous support and facilitation of this program.
Having diversified energy supply sources is important to the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations as it seeks to provide safe, secure and functional facilities around the world. Considering the variety of host nations’ electricity infrastructures and their reliability and costs, OBO finds that using renewable energy systems, particularly photovoltaics (PV), commonly known as solar power, is an increasingly attractive option.
The costs of PV power sources have decreased over time, and equipment efficiencies have increased. PV systems offer a proven renewable energy choice with the potential for impressive energy cost savings, and these systems, which can last for 20 to 30 years, have minimal maintenance needs and easy installation. “Each year, as the cost of solar declines, the world continues to open up for project possibilities,” said OBO Investment Manager and PV expert David R. Shaffer.

Before launching a potential PV project, OBO considers a post’s electricity rate, available surface area, sunlight conditions, diesel-generator dependence and the project’s economic “payback,” the time it would take to pay for itself with energy savings. PV projects typically make the most economic sense in locations where the cost of power is high, on-site generator usage can be reduced and sunshine abounds.

As of this spring, OBO has 15 completed solar power projects. Nine additional projects are slated for the Bureaus of African, European and Eurasian, and Western Hemisphere Affairs as part of new embassy and consulate construction plans and will be completed by 2018. The first three systems—in Geneva, Kigali and Abuja—have already recovered their installation costs. All planned or installed systems are projected to break even by 2026 and will continue to produce energy and generate savings for years to come.

When completed, OBO expects the projects in its PV portfolio to generate a total 6.2 megawatts (MW), enough electricity to power 668 average U.S. households for one year. They’ll also save an estimated $38 million over their combined life cycles.

The two most common PV systems for embassy and consulate facilities have been those installed on rooftops or parking canopies. Parking canopy installations, such as those at the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, and others planned in Nouakchott, also shade staff and official vehicles while producing power.

OBO continuously monitors utility costs around the world through the OBO utility cost-tracking portal (TREES), which relies on utility data provided by posts. With assistance from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory of the U.S. Department of Energy, these utility costs are evaluated, as are regional solar conditions and space availability, to determine if a photovoltaic project is worthwhile.

Energy efficiency, cost savings and carbon reduction will continue to play a significant role in the Department’s overseas operations. In addition to enabling energy independence through diversification of power sources, renewable systems allow for private-public partnerships with host countries’ local utility providers and universities. They also facilitate “eco-diplomacy” by showing other nations how the Department implements environmentally friendly systems. All of OBO’s solar installations are on its online Green Building Dashboard.

Clockwise from left: Local staff replace a photovoltaic module at the U.S. Embassy in Kigali, Rwanda. Photo by David Shaffer; A photovoltaic array provides power and shade for parking at the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo. Photo by Thomas Nave; From left, Bobbie Griffin of Lockheed Martin, Donna McIntire of OBO and Ambassador Phyllis Powers break ground for the Energy Savings Performance Contract in Managua. Photo by Gil Fiallos; A photovoltaic system was installed on the roof of the parking garage at the U.S. Consulate General in Monterrey, Mexico. Photo by Yates-Desbuild
The Internet has changed the work of diplomats and development professionals, accelerating impact and broadening reach. In developing nations, where the Internet is often available via mobile phones, it’s making voices heard, helping businesses grow and fueling GDP growth and societal change. Internet access can boost a nation’s prosperity. Thus, the U.S. sees Internet freedom and wide Internet access as foreign policy priorities.

That’s why Ambassador Daniel Sepulveda, U.S. coordinator for international communications and information policy, told the 2014 U.N. International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Plenipotentiary meeting that the U.S. aims to work collaboratively with all nations to “ensure that the digital divide is bridged,” so that the world’s people can be interconnected.

The ITU estimates that the worldwide Internet user population in 2013 was just over 2.7 billion people. That means more than 4 billion people are still offline. Furthermore, the rate of growth of Internet users is slowing, and those who still lack access are harder to reach. One consulting firm estimates that 20 countries account for 75 percent of the world’s total online population, while those left behind are disproportionately rural, low income, elderly, illiterate and female.

Barriers to digital access include high costs of connecting to the Internet, inadequate or non-existent infrastructure, lack of digital
Girls learn coding as part of TechWomen Zimbabwe’s 2014 Technovation Challenge, in which teams of middle and high school girls identified a problem, coded an app and pitched their app for funding within 12 weeks. Photo by Kathleen McGowan

A4AI global partners, government officials and stakeholders gather at the first Coalition Meeting in Maputo, Mozambique. They included the deputy chief of U.S. Mission Mozambique, Mark Cassayre, second from left, and representatives of USAID, the companies Internet Solutions Mozambique and Google Access, and members of the Mozambican Ministry of Transport and Communications. Photo by Alliance for Affordable Internet

and/or language literacy, government policies and systemic issues that reduce the value of going digital, such as the dearth of locally relevant online content and limited information security. To bridge the lack of digital access, and broaden prosperity and democratic engagement, the U.S. supports international efforts to expand access to an open and interoperable Internet that is run with input from user groups and where citizens exercise their rights online. The U.S. also works with governments and stakeholders worldwide to strengthen global cybersecurity.

The State Department, through the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs’ Office of Information and Communication Policy (CIP), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), through its U.S. Global Development Lab, work together and with global partners to enable the policy development and regulatory reforms that advance affordable and inclusive Internet access. Partnerships include the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI), which is the world’s broadest technology sector coalition of public and private sector groups and NGOs. It aims to provide billions of people access the Internet by having a nation’s entry-level broadband service cost less than 5 percent of a citizen’s per capita monthly income.

To make Internet less costly, A4AI has created a set of policy and regulatory best practices to help create open, competitive and innovative broadband markets. In Ghana, for instance, A4AI worked with the government to abolish the import duty on smartphones, effectively lowering the cost of smartphones by 35 percent.

Sonia Jorge, the Executive Director of A4AI, said Ghana should do this because when Kenya scrapped its value-added tax on handsets in 2009, devices in circulation quadrupled and overall mobile penetration rose from 50 percent to more than 70 percent. “We hope to see similar results in Ghana,” she added.

Since its launch in September 2013, the A4AI has signed agreements with Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique and the Dominican Republic. Local coalitions in these countries are meeting regularly to identify impediments to access and affordability, and draft policy and regulatory reforms.

At the Department, CIP and the Global Broadband and Innovations Program (GBI) of USAID’s Lab assist governments with developing national broadband strategies and support the transparent and comprehensive utilization of Universal Service Funds, taxes on telecom use that are used to underwrite low-income access to telecommunications. They also work with private sector firms to promote gender inclusivity on Internet access, and help NGOs to introduce cost-effective solutions to rural communities and demonstrate their economic viability for sustainable development.

GBI’s innovations include delivering solar-powered wireless broadband access to areas of rural Kenya lacking basic electricity and providing technical support to the Nigerian Universal Service Provision Fund to produce a plan for financing integrated broadband access projects. The Department and USAID also support the U.S. Telecommunications Training Institute, a public-private partnership that offers tuition-free training for qualified communication professionals, regulators and entrepreneurs from developing nations.

The spread of mobile technology creates opportunities to advance a more democratic and prosperous world. The State Department, through EB, the Secretary’s Office of the Coordinator for Cyber Issues and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, among others, champions an open, interoperable, secure and reliable Internet. Whether working with the ITU or implementing at the grassroots level, U.S. policy favors and assists the expansion of information and communication technology to boost development and inclusive economic growth.

Digital inclusion unlocks opportunities to access services from mobile money to health care, and paves the way for the marginalized and under-represented to make their voices heard.
Civil Society Roundtable Held

Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) Tom Malinowski, center, was part of President Obama’s delegation to the January inaugural ceremony for Bolivian President Evo Morales. Accompanying him were Chargé d’Affaires Peter Brennan, left, and Director of the Department of Commerce’s Minority Business Development Alejandra Castillo, right. Separately, Malinowski hosted a roundtable for civil society at Mission Bolivia where civil society attendees represented such issues as press freedom, access to justice, prison conditions, forced labor, gender-based violence, child labor, disabilities and LGBT rights. Malinowski spoke of the U.S. commitment to free civil society and was joined by Brennan and DRL Office Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs Charles Blaha. Photo by Wara Largas Lara/La Razon

12th Year of Mentoring Kicks Off

Carline Stephens, center, speaks as fellow members of her panel listen during a discussion of mentoring at the kickoff of the 12th annual mentoring program of the Department of State and USAID in February. Among the event’s speakers were Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Linda S. Tagliatela, who spoke on developing the next generation of leaders, and Under Secretary for Management Patrick M. Kennedy, who discussed how mentoring contributes to the Department’s culture of learning. The 2015 program has 128 formal mentoring partnerships. State Department photo

Retired Ambassador Speaks at FSI

FSI Director Nancy McEldowney holds a February public conversation with former Under Secretary Nicholas Burns, now a Harvard professor, as part of the Foreign Service Institute’s speaker series. A retired former ambassador, Department spokesperson and special assistant to the president, Burns discussed “The Future of American Diplomacy” with FSI students and staff, saying, “Our responsibility is to be intellectual leaders: get the language competency, think about American history, be deeply rooted in our values and have a sense of what our U.S. strategy overseas should be.” Photo by Michael Morrison

AFSA, HECFAA Welcome DG

American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) President Bob Silverman, left, and AFSA’s vice president for the Department of State, Matthew Asada, right, welcome Director General of the Foreign Service, Ambassador Arnold Chacon, at a reception held in his honor. The event was hosted by AFSA and the Hispanic Employees Council of Foreign Affairs Agencies (HECFAA) in Washington, D.C., Feb. 25. Photo by Isaac D. Pacheco

Corrections:
Office of Investment Affairs Director Michael Tracton’s title was misstated in the print version of Office of the Month (March 2015, pg. 10). He is not a deputy assistant secretary.

In Post of the Month (March 2015, pg. 22) Uzbekistan’s currency should have been identified as Uzbekistani som (UZS).
Children pet Ben, Secretary of State John Kerry’s Labrador retriever, following Kerry’s address to youths and parents at the 2014 Take Your Child to Work Day in Washington, D.C. For last year’s event, 887 children were registered and 60 different activities featured, including a mock treaty signing, a demonstration of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security’s bomb-sniffing dogs and a workshop where children turned bits of trash into figurative art. Children also learned first aid techniques from Office of Medical Services personnel and practiced being spokespersons for the Department in mock press briefings held by the Bureau of Public Affairs. Photo by Bill Palmer

Ethics Answers

Q: I’m required to file an annual public financial disclosure report (OGE 278). I filed a report last year via the Department’s online Federal Disclosure Management (FDM) system, but now my FDM password won’t work. What should I do?

A: The FDM passwords automatically expire after six months, so you will need to send an email to the IT Service Center, asking to have your FDM password reset. You will want to do that soon because your report is due May 15. Here are some other quick tips: For privacy reasons, please don’t identify your spouse or dependent children by name on the form; refer to them as “S” or “DC” respectively, and use your official, not your personal, address and phone number. Also, do not attach brokerage statements to the report, but instead list the underlying holdings of your brokerage account directly on the form.

Ethics Answers presents hypothetical ethical scenarios Department employees might face. For help with real ethics questions, email ethicsattorneymailbox@state.gov.
Active Years

Retiree Writer

From diplomat to self-published author

By Bruce K. Byers, retired Foreign Service officer

was always an aspiring writer. I wanted to write fiction. I started writing short stories when I was in high school, and as I traveled across America, and later through Europe, I kept diaries that have been invaluable for writing my stories. During my Foreign Service career I kept writing about my experiences and saving bits and pieces for future use. From time to time I worked some of them into longer manuscripts. All of these efforts form part of the writing craft for me.

After I retired, the muse inspired me to write a dozen short stories and then a novel involving a retired FSO who is recalled to a temporary assignment at an embassy in Southeast Asia that is then hit by a terrorist attack. The manuscript evolved into a nearly complete novel that I sent around to friends and family members for comment.

In 2012 I contacted my high school French teacher, who 52 years earlier had been a major influence in my life and had urged me to apply for a summer exchange program that in 1960 took me on my first trip to Europe, the first step toward graduate studies and, eventually, the Foreign Service exam.

When I re-encountered my former French teacher in 2013, I told her how she had profoundly helped me. Her influence sustained me in my college studies and, eventually, as an FSO. After our meeting, I was moved to write a novel about my high school years and my odyssey across America and across the Atlantic to Europe.

However, finding a publisher proved to be a challenge. After sending my manuscript to several literary agents and receiving kind rejections, I looked into self-publishing, using one of the many online means now available. I learned one should proceed cautiously, and do one’s research carefully and have realistic expectations. For instance, I did not expect my autobiographical novel would become a publishing sensation. Often, self-publishing companies raise a writer’s hopes beyond what is realistic.

I was also cautious because, of the many self-publishing companies, most are expensive with no guarantee that the resulting book will sell. After speaking with several other Foreign Service officers who had published and done their homework, I chose Author House, a Penguin Random House company. I had several lengthy conversations with their representative over nearly six months before being convinced that his company would work closely with me to publish my book. I also read the publishing services agreement very carefully and asked the representative many questions before committing.

I have not been disappointed. I had several conversations with the company’s marketing representative, and then chose from a range of marketing packages one that would meet my needs without being extravagant. The package included distribution of a press release to 500 media outlets in areas of the country I chose, access to GoodReads.com and a marketing evaluation through GoogleAds, to determine sales in a 30-day period. It also included a personalized website that readers can access to read excerpts and order the book. I turned down a discounted “Hollywood” package that would have sent my novel to an agency for evaluation and possible sale to TV or movie studios, as it held no guarantee of acceptance by a production company.

Clearly, self-publishing authors carry all of their project’s burden and expense. Few published authors make the best-seller lists and sales of their books may remain low. The advantage to self-publishing is that the author retains all rights to the published book. Royalties—if any—will be higher than using a conventional publisher. And the author controls the marketing of the book.

I had a finished manuscript before I signed the publishing agreement. After signing, I worked with the company’s teams to move my manuscript to become a ready-for-publication product. I kept control over each step in this process and was totally responsible for the outcome. I chose the book’s format, paper and even the type fonts for the text and chapter headings. I also selected photographs (choosing from many I had taken during my travels), wrote the captions, designed the cover and wrote the backcover text. To date I have invested $3,450 in the project, which means I’ll have to sell approximately 400 copies of the soft cover book to earn back that sum in royalties.

At each step in the production process I had to sign an authorization form that approved what the company had produced at my instructions. I also had to review the proofs—the laid out copy of everything that would be part of my book and sign an authorization to go forward to the printing stage.

Over the course of this process, I kept records and receipts for tax purposes since the project is a business whose expenses are deductible and whose royalties are taxable.

Sure, there’ve been some bumps in the road, but I feel the final result is a handsome book that I hope will attract readers interested in the trials of a young man trying to figure things out as he travels by bus across the country and embarks on a trans-Atlantic voyage to Europe for a summer of discovery. 

Bruce K. Byers reads in his living room in February. Photo courtesy of Bruce K. Byers
Lying in State

Political officer Bixby Vittulz is a skilled composer of bawdy though highly classified limericks.

There once was a classified
From Nantucket,
Who classified classified
And would pluck it...

Economic officer Hedda Fink-Downer can change the font on info memos using only her mind.

Come to me, comic says...

It’s true—all the ones with two out of three chili, next to them on the fiesta menu...

Wow...

What skill code is that?

Regional security officer Al Ventana de Laraniz can eat particularly spicy local food.

Consular officers Truman Kang and Judith Horn-Glopp can explain any consular regulation through synchronized swimming.

This is the part about visa ineligibility based on moral turpitude...

Management officer Dixie Hipple can enliven any country team meeting with her encyclopedic knowledge of the original “Star Trek.”

Of course I’m not a klingon—I’m an Andorian! Gosh, you wouldn’t know a tribble from a gorn...
Assignments in the Department’s 30 High Threat/High Risk posts are intensely challenging. For many years, Foreign Service personnel have courageously volunteered to operate in these environments of hardship and danger. FSI believes it is now time to do much more to support our people before they embark on these assignments and to set them up for quick success once they land on the ground. Diplomacy at these posts is fundamentally different—and exponentially more difficult—than at more “normal” posts. Among the factors to consider:

- These is no grace period to settle in and come up to speed.
- Host-country counterparts may lack the capacity and resources to act.
- The ability to maintain positive focus and productive tempo may be degraded by tough circumstances.

To help those assigned to such posts grapple with these challenges, FSI has created a new course called Diplomacy at High Threat Posts. This four-day interagency course focuses on:

- Knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to advance U.S. strategic goals in circumstances of conflict, crisis and violence;
- Tools to carry out policy and programming when contact with local interlocutors may be sporadic, travel movements restricted and budgets more challenging to implement; and
- Hands-on techniques to ensure personal and professional resilience as well as post cohesion when living in a fast-paced, constantly changing and high-stress environment.

The course includes sessions on risk management and accountability, collaborating across U.S. government agencies, special consular issues, working with Locally Employed Staff and using non traditional means to conduct outreach and engage with contacts. The course culminates with a daylong, multimedia country team exercise in which interagency participants apply practices learned throughout the week.

Initial reactions to the course have been overwhelmingly positive. More than eight agencies participated and several, including Special Forces Command, described the course as essential and unprecedented. "The need to develop strategies in an austere environment is critical," he noted. "You need to find a way to fill the 24 hours in a day and find some separation from work and social life."

Tiffany McGriff, information officer in Nairobi, took the course to get a broader perspective on interagency collaboration. "It was very informative to hear the varied—and sometimes overlapping—perspectives and priorities of interagency colleagues," she said. "Most useful was having DS [Diplomatic Security] and DoD [Department of Defense] in the room to highlight their roles and how we all coexist in the same space."

FSI has expanded the 2015 offerings of the course. It will be offered: May 4-7, May 25-28, June 15-18, June 29-July 2, July 20-23, Aug. 3-6, Aug. 17-20 and Sept. 8-11.

To register, Department employees should visit the FSI intranet site and search for RS251. Other U.S. government personnel should submit via fax a completed SF-182 Request for Training document to FSI's Office of the Registrar (Fax 703-302-7152). Tuition for the course for non-State personnel is $930.
Leonard Shurtleff, 74, a retired FSO, died Jan. 22 of heart failure in Gainesville, Fla. He joined the Department in 1962 and served at posts in Caracas, Freetown, Douala, Nouakchott, Bogota, Monrovia and Brazzaville, where he was ambassador from 1987-1990. In Washington, he was deputy assistant secretary in the Office of the Under Secretary for Management. He retired in 1995 and enjoyed traveling and lecturing on World War I as president of the WWI Historical Association.

Dorothy Stewart, 84, a retired Foreign Service personnel specialist, died Dec. 16 in Sarasota, Fla. She joined the Foreign Service in the early 1950s and spent most of her 29 years with the federal government in Washington, D.C. working for the U.S. Information Agency. Her overseas postings included Paris, Bangkok and Addis Ababa. After retiring in 1983 she engaged in volunteer work and held many part-time jobs, including as a tour guide for a travel agency.

Alvin Henry Streeter, 65, a retired FSO, died Jan. 4 in Washington, D.C. He joined the Department in 1988 and his postings included Tegucigalpa, Moscow, Mexico City, Cairo and Khartoum. Prior to his Foreign Service career, he worked for the Department as a Civil Service employee in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. He served in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. In retirement, he continued his interests in foreign and public policy. He was an advocate for veteran health care programs. He enjoyed writing, playing chess and spending time with his family.

James E. Taylor, 76, a retired FSO, died Sept. 19 at his home in Wintergreen, Va. He served in the Air Force for four years and then joined the Department in 1966. He was posted to Tehran, Munich, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Moscow, Kabul and Tel Aviv. He retired in 1991 and accompanied his wife, FSO Louise Taylor, on assignment to Rabat. Among his many passions were travel, history, music, theater, skiing in the Alps, Labrador retrievers and anything French.

Questions concerning employee deaths should be directed to the Office of Casualty Assistance at (202) 736-4302. Inquiries concerning deaths of retired employees should be directed to the Office of Retirement at (202) 261-8960. For specific questions on submitting an obituary, please contact Michael Hahn at hahnmg@state.gov or (202) 663-2230.
Azerbaijan  Pg. 9
The Heydar Aliyev Center is a 619,000-square-foot building complex in Baku, Azerbaijan, that houses a conference hall, a gallery and a museum.
Photo by Markus Wiltaner

Brazil  Pg. 3
The last rays of afternoon sunlight break through the clouds as a summer rain shower passes over residential towers in the Jardim Paulista district of São Paulo, Brazil.
Photo by ruimc77

Ghana  Pg. 24
A woman carries fruit for sale atop her head at a street market in Tamale, Northern Region, Ghana.
Photo by Stefano Peppucci

Egypt  Pg. 18
A small car hugs a graffiti-covered wall in a residential alleyway in Luxor, Egypt.
Photo by Eric Montfort
Go Green in ‘15

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