

ENTERING FEDERAL SERVICE: OR, HOW TO FIND
FUN AND PROFIT IN FILLING OUT FORMS

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Traditionally a history major blushes whenever an indiscreet relative asks what does Charlemagne have to do with getting a job. Nowadays almost any kind of major becomes uneasy or angry whenever there is a discussion of the present uncertain job market (as documented on this issue's cover flap!). Aside from the current economic recession, there is a rather good reason for the apparent liberal arts -- job incongruity. Liberal arts colleges, such as Wesconn, are fundamentally designed for developing the intellect, which is not necessarily a prime qualification in the job market. On the other hand, as we in academia are fond of saying, it shouldn't hurt either. A young person who has learned to integrate and interpret various elements of the liberal arts should -- using this ability -- be better able to adapt to an ever-changing job market than the person who has not so learned. A major in history, therefore, need not be a totally useless venture ... Blush ye not!

But to the subject of this essay: the graduating history major (or any graduating liberal arts major, for that matter) and his chances of gaining entrance to the federal service. This essay proposes to give some advice based on my experience with the federal service and to identify a few of the government announcements, bulletins, and forms which may prove useful to anyone applying for federal service. (It should be noted here that all announcements, bulletins and forms mentioned in this essay may be obtained by telephoning (toll-free) the Federal Job Center in Hartford, Connecticut: 1-800-842-7322. The Center also maintains a vocational library at 450 Main St., Hartford.)

The federal service consists, like the private sector, of jobs which are

dead-ends and deadening in their unvarying routine, and jobs which are wide-open for career development. Most jobs fall in between these two polarities. The first job entrance into federal service is difficult as compared with the relative ease one experiences when transferring to different agencies and jobs within the government afterwards. Many persons enter the federal service through jobs on salary levels with which they are not particularly enthused; they anticipate that, after a year or so in the initial position, they will be able to transfer or gain promotion to other more desirable positions. Such anticipation seems to be generally borne out.

An excellent starting point for our purposes is BRE-39, The Federal Career Directory: A Guide for College Students. This 135 page directory lists federal careers for college graduates and the specific federal agencies which hire for such careers; it features brief job descriptions as well as the background qualifications each requires. The most basic federal service document, however, (assuming that you do not have advanced graduate work experience) is Announcement No. 429, "Professional and Administrative Career Examination", otherwise known as PACE. (Note: If you do have graduate credits (MA or its equivalent), obtain Announcement No. 413, "Mid-Level Positions: Grades GS-9 through GS-12". For GS-9 consideration, I would suggest that you also take PACE; and if your score is a high one, include it on your mid-level application.) The introductory paragraphs of the PACE announcement contains a statement concerning previous college preparation which delights history majors to no end: "Most positions filled through this examination do not require education or experience in a specific field," (A listing of these positions appears in the appendix at the end of this essay.)

The PACE announcement contains information regarding jobs most often filled through the examination, jobs which do not fall under the examination, location of and schedule of Connecticut examination centers, samples of exam questions, and an application to take this test. The purpose of PACE is to establish

eligibility for positions GS-5 and GS-7, having annual starting salaries in 1975 of \$8,500 and \$10,520 respectively. The eligibility requirements include, for the GS-5 position, a B.A. degree within nine months upon taking the exam, with at least a 2.9 grade point average, and a minimal score of 90.

The PACE scores are listed with two of a possible twelve regional Civil Service Commission Offices and with the Washington, D.C. Area Office. Agency hiring for GS-5, GS-7 and, to a very limited extent, GS-9 positions, draw from the top PACE scores. Obviously, it is very important to score as high as possible. The PACE may be repeated for the purpose of boosting your score. A number of publishing companies, ARCO Publications, for instance, sell civil service exam review-books which present past exam questions with answers and tips on how to study for the current PACE.

I should stress that, due to the past few years of federal hiring freezes and reductions in forces, entrance into the federal service has become highly competitive. It is a good idea, after receiving your PACE score, to complete a SF-171 form entitled "Personal Qualifications Statement"; and, using the Federal Career Directory (see above), send the SF-171 form and a cover letter of employment inquiry, indicating your career interests and your availability for an interview, to the specific agency which has the job you want. Since several thousands of candidates will have the same PACE score as yourself, the purpose of sending the SF-171 form and your cover letter indicating availability for interviewing -- at no travel cost to the agency ("I will be in the area of your agency several times in the next two months ...") -- is to get the attention of the agency's personnel office. For if the agency has a vacancy, and if your PACE score equals the current top score of the PACE rating list, the agency may act directly upon your SF-171 application, rather than upon an "unknown" candidate drawn from the list.

For those of you who are not graduating this year, federal summer jobs have two important aspects: obviously, summer income; but also, enhancement

of your SF-171 for a career job later on. By next November, obtain Announcement No. 4114, "Summer Jobs in Federal Agencies," and apply for work in the agency in which you are interested, or one which is similar to it. Indicate in your summer job application that you are interested in a federal service career after graduation. Summer work in an agency will not only gain you contacts, "inside" job information, and relevant job experience for your SF-171, but also experience from which to judge whether a federal career is what you really want.

There are many jobs which are not filled through PACE. If you are interested in one of these jobs, you should complete the SF-171 and send it with a cover letter directly to the agency. I will briefly list, by way of example, a few GS-5 and GS-7 jobs which have nothing to do with PACE (announcement identification is given with the parenthesis): computer specialist (No. 420), librarian (No. 422), teacher (LK-0-14), Bureau of Indian Affairs and teacher/counselor (DM-2-02). This listing can be enlarged upon a browsing of The Federal Career Directory and through examination of job announcements available at the Hartford Job Center.

There are also many agencies which are not under civil service regulations, such as the National Security Agency, the Postal Service, and the Atomic Energy Commission. Such agencies have their own employment procedures. As there is a fairly strong tradition of history majors in one of these non-civil service agencies -- the Foreign Service -- I wish to focus the remainder of this essay on that career possibility.

The Foreign Service Officer is among the most prestigious careers to be had in the federal government. Entrance into the foreign service is noted for its high degree of competitiveness. In 1973 some 13,000 persons competed for less than 200 foreign service positions. An excellent basic source of information about the foreign service is the examination application brochure, "Examination for Foreign Service Officer Careers". The examination is given once a year in December; applications for taking the exam must be completed

by the end of October.

Before taking this test a number of career decisions have to be made. The foreign service has two career tracks: one under the Department of States; and the other, under the U.S. Information Agency. (Note: A governmental sponsored study has recently recommended the disbanding of the USIA for the creation (to paraphrase) of an overly expensive propaganda agency. See the New York Times "Week in Review," March 19, 1975). If you were to choose the Department of State career track, you would also have to choose between the following career specialties: Administrative Affairs, Consular Affairs, Economic-Commercial Affairs, or Political Affairs. Your choice of career tracks will be reflected in the context of the examination taken. I have placed in the appendix to this essay a very brief and selective bibliography of informative material about the foreign service which may be helpful to you in making the above career choices.

Over the years most persons taking the foreign service exam have chosen the specialty of Political Affairs; the least "popular" specialties being Economic-Commercial Affairs and Administrative Affairs. I mention this ranking of specialties by candidate choice because of the 150 to 200 positions available each year (of which the USIA has only 12 to 24 positions available each year) are more or less evenly distributed over the specialties. Thus, Political Affairs is not the only most popular specialty, but also the most competitive.

The Foreign Service Officer Examination is a four hour test which has questions ranging from the highly analytical to the just plain trivial. It has the usual quantitative and verbal sections; however, its reputation is made in the sections covering specialty choice, American civilization, and international relations. There is also a 45 minute essay question regarding some current topic in world events. Those candidates scoring highest on the exam (i.e., 1,000 out of 13,000 in 1973) will undergo an extensive oral examination from which the 150 to 200 selections will be made. As with PACE, exam

review-books can be obtained which may help orient yourself to the next examination. I would suggest a close reading of the New York Times -- arts as well as politics -- from now until December, as a useful general-background preparation.

Eligibility for the foreign service is largely a matter of the exam; additional requirements are your (and/or your spouse's) U.S. citizenship, and an age limit of 21 years at the time of the examination (a college senior of 20 years of age is also acceptable). Most appointments are at FSO-8 (\$9,969 to \$11,961); none are higher than FSO-7 (\$11,641 to \$13,969). The promotion ladder ultimately culminates at FSO-1 (\$36,000).

This essay has attempted to identify certain areas which a person who is interested in federal service should find fruitful to pursue. In closing, may I wish all of you the best of luck as well as a last bit of advice: "History Majors Arise and Go Forth!"

FEDERAL SERVICE: APPENDIX

Item # 1 -- A partial listing of federal jobs requiring a B.A. degree but no specific job preparation.

Administrative assistant
Alcohol and tobacco tax inspector
Alcohol, tobacco, and firearms special investigator
Budget officer
Budget analyst
Claims examiner
Computer specialist
Criminal investigator
Customs inspector
Immigration inspector
Import specialist
Industrial specialist
Intelligence research specialist
Internal security inspector
Investigator (general)
Management analyst
Museum curator
Narcotics agent
Personnel management specialist
Personnel staffing specialist
Public health program specialist
Public information specialist

Quality assurance specialist
Realty specialist
Revenue officer
Safety officer
Secret service agent
Tax law specialist
Writer and editor

Item # 2 -- A brief, selective bibliography of informative materials about the Foreign Service.

Foreign Service of the Seventies, Publication #8535, Dept. of State and Foreign Service Series 142 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970).

The Foreign Service of the United States: Origins, Development and Functions, written by William Barnes and John Heath-Morgan (Office of Public Affairs, Dept. of State, 1961).

The Foreign Service of the United States, written by W. Wendell Blancke (New York: Praeger, 1969).

The Information Machine: The ISIA and American Foreign Policy, written by Robert Elder (Syracuse University Press, 1968).