



**THE
EXECUTIVE AGENCY**

TRAINING PROGRAM

**WORKING EFFECTIVELY
WITH CAREER STAFF**

CIVIL SERVANTS AND THE FOREIGN SERVICE





Federal Civil Service 101

The Federal Civil Service (CS) refers to all federal employees except members of the military services. Positions within the federal civil service fall under one of three categories based on the appointment, pay and classification rules that apply to the position: competitive service, senior executive service or excepted service.

Competitive Civil Service: Most civil service positions fall under the Competitive Civil Service. Applicants for competitive service positions are considered in open, merit-based competition with other candidates. Competitive service positions are paid according to the GS (General Schedule) pay-scale. Competitive service positions are relatively secure, procedures for firings and demotions are burdensome and open to appeal.

Senior Executive Service (SES): Most managerial, supervisory and policy positions above the GS-15 level not required to be filled by Senate-confirmed Presidential appointments, fall in the Senior Executive Service (SES). SES makes up the non-political leadership of the federal government (though, in fact, some SES are political appointees). It acts as the link between political appointees and the Federal work force, serving to ensure the impartiality of government. Most are career civil servants, elevated to the highest leadership positions after evaluation by a review board (political and non-politicals members). 63% of employees in SES have advanced degrees. There are nearly 7,000 people in the SES, making up less than .4% of the federal civil service.



Federal Civil Service 101

Excepted Civil Service: Positions that are exempt from OPM's strict hiring and classification rules fall under the Excepted Civil Service. In the event of disciplinary actions or job termination the excepted service has few rights and lacks the ability to non-competitively transfer into career civil servant positions, unlike competitive service and SES positions.

Statute-Excepted Positions: Some positions fall under the Excepted Civil Service by law. These tend to be positions (mostly national security-related), requiring speed and flexibility that the competitive hiring process does not afford. The FBI & CIA are examples of "excepted agencies," whose entire workforce falls under the excepted service. Most agencies have a mix of Competitive Service and Excepted Service positions. Foreign Service positions fall entirely in the excepted service.

Schedule A Positions are used for critical short-term needs and for situations in which it is impractical to use standard qualification requirements and ratings. Examples: chaplains, attorneys, medical doctors and interpreters .

Schedule B Positions are used for hiring programs with certain qualification requirements (ex. programs for recent graduates) and for experts with specialized knowledge. Salaries are largely at the supervisor's discretion, according to knowledge of the field.

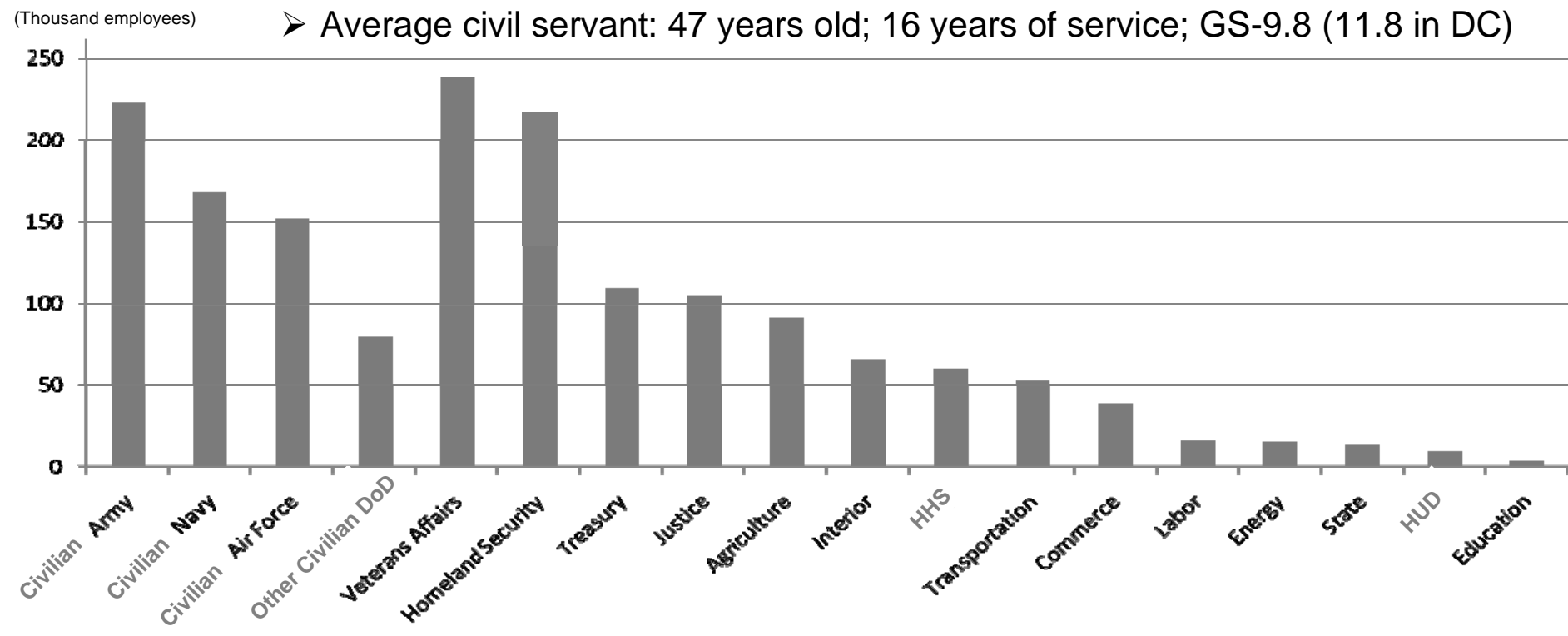
Schedule C Positions are used to fill political positions with policy-determining responsibilities or require the incumbent to confidentially serve a key official. Most Schedule C positions are below a GS-15 equivalent-level. Schedule C appointments are not competitive. Final authority rests with the appointing official – OPM does not review the qualifications of Schedule C appointees. There are approximately 3,000 schedule C positions in government.



Civil Service by the Numbers

There are appx. 1.9 million people in the federal civil service (excluding 750,000 postal service employees). Of these:

- 56% are men; 44% are women
- 43% have college degrees
- 32% are minorities
- Only 16% are based in DC (288,000 people)
- Average civil servant: 47 years old; 16 years of service; GS-9.8 (11.8 in DC)





The U.S. Foreign Service

The U.S. Foreign Service (FS) is the diplomatic service of the U.S. government. The Foreign Service represents the United States abroad, helps to implement U.S. foreign policy, and provides services to U.S. citizens abroad and foreigners seeking to travel to the U.S.

There are approximately 13,000 members of the Foreign Service, most employed by the State Department. Other federal agencies also employ members of the Foreign Service:

- 6,500 **State Department** Foreign Service Officers (FSO);
- 5,000 **State Department** Foreign Service Specialists (FSS);
- 1,000 **USAID** FSOs
- 250 **U.S. Commercial Service** FSOs (Department of Commerce);
- 150 **Foreign Agriculture Service** FSOs (Department of Agriculture); and
- 50 **Broadcasting Board of Governors** FSOs.



The State Department Foreign Service

State Department **Foreign Service Officers** are diplomats who serve most of their careers at overseas U.S. posts. Most leadership roles at U.S. embassies are filled from the FSO ranks, including two-thirds of ambassadorships. FSOs also hold management and policy positions (particularly in the regional bureaus) at State Department headquarters. FSOs are hired into one of five specific career tracks or “cones”. Though officially change career-tracks is very difficult, FSOs will serve in other cones throughout their careers.

Management Officers are responsible for day to day management of the embassy;

Consular Officers: Handle passport & visa issues, assist Americans abroad, and aid foreign nationals traveling or emigrating to the U.S.

Economic Officers analyze country and regional economic developments and promote U.S. economic and commercial interests.

Political Officers analyze country and regional political issues, including host country domestic and foreign policies.

Public Diplomacy Officers oversee public affairs efforts and exchanges, through contact with key country officials, press releases, and public outreach.

State Department **Foreign Service Specialists (FSSs)** serve specialized technical, support and administrative functions to help meet the responsibilities of the Foreign Service. FSS jobs are grouped into seven categories: Administration, Construction Engineering, Information Technology, International Information and English Language Programs, Medical and Health, Office Management and Security.



Becoming an FSO

Becoming a Foreign Service Officer is no simple task. Of the more than 100,000 applicants between 2001 and 2006, only 2,100 (2%) became Foreign Service Officers.

FSO applicants must:

- Pick and apply to one of the five career-tracks;
- Pass a series of challenging examinations including:
 - A “Personal Narrative and Qualifications Evaluation” Essay
 - The written Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT); offered five times a year.
 - The Foreign Service Oral Assessment

Applicants that successfully make it through these steps, are placed by career-track on a rank-ordered hiring register based on their oral exam score (with some preference going to those with language skills and to veterans). Applicants are hired by rank order off the register. If one is not hired within 18 months, they are removed from the list and must start the process over.

FSO Rank: FSO rank goes from FS-09 (lowest) through FS-01 (highest). Most FSOs enter at the FS-06, -05 or -04 rank depending on experience & education. The Senior Foreign Service is the SES equivalent. Rank within the Senior Foreign Service goes from “counselor” to “minister-counselor” to “career minister” to “career ambassador.”



Life in the Foreign Service

The first five years in the Foreign Service are spent as an entry-level officer. This time includes two tours, at least one overseas (often both), and at least one in consular affairs. Entry-level FSOs must become proficient in at least one foreign language. Tours often include training at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), housed at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC) in Arlington, VA.

FS assignments are given in the summer and winter; defined by cycles (eg. “Summer 2009 cycle”). FSOs have some say in assignment; factors such as rank, language skill & previous assignments play a part. For the first two tours, HR will advertise open positions and FSOs who are due for new assignments submit preference requests. A panel of career development officers makes assignment decisions based on need and candidate preference. Mid-level FSOs apply directly to the open position and the hiring office, bureau or embassy selects a candidate.

There are jobs that are traditionally FS jobs (regional bureaus) and CS jobs (functional bureaus), but you are increasingly likely to find FSOs in functional spots and CSs in regional spots.

Members of the Foreign Service must be available for duty anywhere (including danger and hardship posts) and spend much of their career abroad. A stretch of U.S. assignments rarely last more than five years. Most in the Foreign Service spend at least one tour at an “unaccompanied post”, a location too dangerous for their family members to join them.

The Foreign Service is a *rank in person* scheme, whereas the Civil Service is a *rank in position* scheme. FSOs get assigned to different positions but always carry their FS rank. In the civil service, the position carries the rank.



Tricks of the Trade

Biggest Mistakes:

- The single biggest mistake a political appointee can make is being arrogant, disrespectful and bossy to career employees
- Don't go barnstorming into your position and start making changes. This will just serve to alienate the career staff & cause you a whole lot of trouble that you will have to go clean up
- Career staff are typically very attentive to issues of protocol and can resent politicals who come in with new ideas to change the way things are done.

Working Effectively with Career Staff:

- Career staff have deep knowledge of their agency and other agencies. They are often subject-matter experts in one or more of the agency's functions. All career staff are bureaucratic process experts and know how the system works. They generally have a well-developed network of colleagues and friends throughout the agency.
- Reach out to them for this knowledge. They can help you avoid common pitfalls and easily foreseeable mistakes.
- Don't be afraid to bring forward new ideas and proposals, but remember that your ideas will be better when leavened with the knowledge & expertise that career staff can provide.



Tricks of the Trade

- Vet any strategy through career staff before moving forward. Career staff can be defeatist at times and political appointees have a tendency to dismiss their objections as pessimism. They're just expressing the opposition that any change will face in the bureaucracy. No one likes to hear why something can't be done, but it's good to know why people are going to throw roadblocks up so you can engineer a work around.
- Find the career people who will work with you and get them to help you navigate the bureaucracy. Every political appointee should have a career officer at their side to help navigate the internal obstacles.
- Senior career staff can be your most powerful allies. They know where the agency's bodies are buried and they know why previous initiatives have succeeded or failed (and how past failed initiatives could have succeeded). Most often, they want you to respect their experience and expertise, the rank or position they have achieved, and to listen to them as you formulate and execute initiatives. If you do this, you can often make them your partner and ally, even if they may disagree with the particular initiative (remember, these officials are typically survivors of multiple administrations of both parties).
- Learn the agency's culture and work within it rather than disregard it. Ignoring the usual ways things are done only creates resistance and resentment and can undermine your efforts.



Tricks of the Trade

Treating Career Staff with Respect

- Career staff share the same dedication to service as you do, although their commitment is to the public or their agency rather than any political party
- Many career staff have deliberately chosen a lifestyle and a workplace that does not function at the pace as a campaign or much of the private sector. It is important to respect this decision and understand that while you may work longer hours, your career colleagues have no less passion for their jobs and will likely far outlast you in Federal service.
- Remember that while your star may be rising and your connections may be great, your time is limited and you will likely be on to other things before most of your initiatives have reached fruition. If you want them to succeed, get buy-in from the career staff.
- Meet all the career staff in your office individually to get a sense of where they see the organization and their role in it. Evaluate how your (or your bosses) agenda fits with what the office is already doing. Where there's a disconnect, have informal conversations with the issue and process experts in the office to see why the specific agenda items don't fit and what needs to happen so they can.
- Shut up and listen. Career employees have an endless number of ways to undercut you and make you're life difficult if you don't treat them with respect or if they feel that you are deliberately working at cross-purposes to them.

Additional Reading

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Howard Simpson, *Bush Hat, Black Tie: Adventures of a Foreign Service Officer* (Dulles, VA, Potomac Books, 1999).

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