

Laying the Groundwork for Overseas Work

Nearly Every Field Is International

By LILLY WHITEMAN
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Michael Eschleman, the Peace Corps' country director for Paraguay, remembers discussing the guerrilla wars and revolutions of Latin America back in college.

"We said things like, 'The U.S. should do this' . . . or 'The campesinos in El Salvador should do that.'"

"And suddenly, it hit me: How could I possibly know what our foreign policy should be, or recommend any course of action for other countries, if I had never visited them or even been out of the U.S.?"

Eschleman since has spent 15 years working in volunteer and then salaried positions on community development projects in Latin America for the Peace Corps.

If you would like to work overseas for the government, be aware that increased interest in foreign affairs has boosted competition for international careers, said Constance C. Jackson, associate administrator of the Agriculture Department's Foreign Agricultural Service.

Nevertheless, you can build credentials to impress federal employers:

■ **Pursue your passions:** Experts on international careers agree that almost all fields have international applications. So Betsy Davis, chief of the CIA's Recruitment and Retention Center, echoes the advice of many federal recruiters when she recommends preparing for an international career by "picking an area of study that you absolutely love and doing well at it."

She said, "When you are good at something, it shows."

■ **Earn overseas experience:** Study abroad or, during the summer or academic year, work on an overseas internship with the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development,



BY SCOTT BRUNDAGE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

ment, the Foreign Agricultural Service, the International Trade Administration, or one of the international organization listed in the careers section of the State Department's Web site (*state.gov*). Such internships offer experience with high-impact issues, including pollution, poverty and terrorism.

"The sky is the limit for interns who show aptitude," Jackson said. For example, one high-producing intern working in a temporarily short-staffed agricultural trade office in Moscow recently managed that office and

oversaw preparations for a major trade show.

Peace Corps experience is also prized by federal employers. About a third of USAID's Foreign Service have it, said Thomas Davis, who works in USAID's human resources office.

■ **Become worldly:** Learn about international affairs through courses, travel and extracurricular activities. "Follow domestic and foreign media outlets, such as the Economist and the BBC, that offer strong international coverage and may be available online,"

said Isabel Otero, who works to improve Irish cancer research and care with the National Cancer Institute's Ireland-Northern Ireland Cancer Consortium.

■ **Demonstrate your public-service mettle in the United States:** "It would be great if everyone could go overseas, but if you can't — and many people can't — you can show your skills and dedication in different ways," said Marianne Myles, director of the State Department's employment office. She suggested joining service-oriented campus and community organizations. Others suggested working in disaster relief or in economically depressed areas in this country.

■ **Hold domestic internships:** Otero worked as an intern at the National Institutes of Health during high school and college and thus got her foot in the door at the Department of Health and Human Services. After college, she participated in that department's Emerging Leaders Program, which eventually led to her job at the National Cancer Institute.

■ **Show leadership:** Manage events, teams and seminars in school and lead projects at work, Myles said.

■ **Seek mentors:** Solicit career advice from international professionals whose footsteps you would like to follow, Eschleman said. "Everyone loves to talk about their experiences," he said.

■ **Learn languages:** Fluency in foreign languages is advantageous. But it's not a prerequisite, because many jobs provide language training.

■ **Join professional organizations:** Network and stay current in your field by using online and in-person resources provided by professional organizations and organizations addressing international issues, including the Society for International Development and the American Foreign Service Association.

■ **Be persistent:** Many job-seekers must submit multiple applications before landing overseas positions, Myles said.

In Your Applications and Interviews . . .

- Say why you want to work overseas and advance your target agency's mission.
- Explain that you understand the logistical, cultural and professional challenges of your target job and would be equipped to meet them.
- Describe academic and extracurricular accomplishments that demonstrate your integrity and adaptability as well as your leadership, communication and interpersonal skills, even if you have not demonstrated them in international contexts.