

At a two-day offsite in West Virginia, members of the 147th A-100 class are guided by nonverbal and nonvisual cues while traversing a field.

A-Plus Growth

How do you give 700 new generalists a year the best possible start in the Foreign Service?

The Orientation Division of the Foreign Service Institute confronted that challenge in early 2009 when the Diplomacy 3.0 initiative dramatically increased the Department's hiring of new Foreign Service personnel. The Orientation Division provides all new Foreign Service generalists and specialists and Civil Service employees with an introduction to the State Department and the profession of diplomacy. The hiring surge has more than doubled the number of new entry-level officers beginning their careers with the Orientation for Foreign Service Generalists course, better known simply as "A-100."

About 325 new ELOs attended

A-100 in 2007. In 2009, increased congressional funding allowed the Department to hire nearly 700 ELOs, and the Department's goal for 2010 is even greater. Hiring of Foreign Service specialists also grew significantly, but the regular schedule of orientation courses could absorb those increases.

Making Room

Accommodating twice as many students in A-100 required adding three more classes a year, which, in turn, necessitated shortening the course from seven weeks to five. Eight A-100 classes are scheduled in 2010. Class size has grown from an average of 65 to the maximum classroom capacity of 98. To ensure students receive the same high-quality

orientation, the Orientation Division revamped the curriculum to focus on essential information presented more efficiently.

FSI also put technology to work. The A-100 classroom hosts the Department's first wireless network. Students use laptop computers to access the Intranet, Internet and class assignments. Students can connect to the Intranet from home using telework "fobs" and can do assignments and readings at home through an Internet-based e-learning Web site.

As a result, A-100 is more intense than ever. Students complete more assignments outside regular class hours and receive less administrative time during their orientation. The five-week course covers virtually every ele-

ment that was in the seven-week version, including a leadership and team-building offsite gathering, practice in public speaking and answering tough questions before a foreign audience, and Foreign Service-style writing. They also receive guidance from an ambassador-level class mentor and exposure to the interagency community.

Guest Presenters

As with the seven-week course, the students hear presentations from some of the most senior officials in the Department, including the under secretaries for Political Affairs and Management. Perhaps most important, they still forge lifelong bonds that make their A-100 classmates

Intro FSI course responds to hiring boom + *By Maeve Dwyer*

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton presides at the swearing-in of the 145th A-100 class. **Bottom:** Under Secretary for Management Patrick Kennedy administers the oath of office to the 151st A-100 class.



their first and often strongest network in the Foreign Service.

The A-100 course is just the beginning of a long training continuum that prepares officers to represent the United States abroad. Most new ELOs will spend from three to twelve months at FSI honing assignment-specific skills before going overseas, and this has required FSI to gear up to meet new training demands.

"FSI is bursting at the seams with new Foreign Service generalists and specialists and Civil Service employees, as well as new U.S. Agency for International Development colleagues and full-time language students," said FSI Director Ruth Whiteside. "I am delighted to have this 'problem' because it means the Department is able to hire enough people to begin to build a real training

'float' for the first time in recent memory. When a fully funded training float is in place, the Department will be able to ensure that all employees get the training they need."

The A-100 course has evolved to better serve today's ELO. The Orientation Division finds that more ELOs than ever have lived or worked overseas or have previous experience with the Department as interns, eligible family members, Civil Service employees or Foreign Service specialists. They've mastered a wider range of languages at higher levels of proficiency, including such critical languages as Arabic, Chinese and Hindi. While many new hires enter the Foreign Service directly from college or graduate school, many

others are on their second or third careers.

More than ever, A-100 students learn from each other as well as from their instructors.

Idealistic Motivation

But some things remain the same. Informal polls of 1980 and 2010 A-100 classes found that the classes had similar motives for joining the Foreign Service. The 1980 class said it wanted to serve; have fun; live, work and travel abroad; and

make a difference to America's well-being and security.

The 2010 class also cited its passion for national service and a desire for interesting and fun work that promotes understanding between the United States and other countries.

That sounds like a recipe for a good Foreign Service employee in any era. ■

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