

The Foreign Service wants YOU

by Alex Shetsen

The phrase "foreign service" means many things to many people. For some, it is an opportunity to travel throughout the world. Others imagine themselves hobnobbing with world leaders at stately receptions. For a third group, the Foreign Service is a way to promote Canada's interests, politically, economically, or socially abroad.

Whatever their reasons, about 5000 people participate every year in the preliminary government Foreign Service Competition. A small number will be among the forty or so the Department of External Affairs actually hires. A special seminar on entering the foreign service was given by Barry Yeates, a former diplomatic worker, last Thursday at the U of A.

While basically a how-to session on preparing for and writing the competition, the seminar also revealed interesting details about the types of work our representatives do abroad and how they are selected.

On entering the foreign service,

a long process in itself, a diplomatic worker is placed in one of four main "streams", or types of work, and is given a posting abroad.

The "commercial-economic" stream represents, through the government, the interests of Canada's business abroad; the "development-assistance" stream deals with Canada's role in Third World development, Canadian foreign aid, etc.; the "social affairs" stream is primarily concerned with immigration, sifting through the millions of people who want to enter Canada each year; and the "political" stream represents Canada's political interests.

It is commonly thought that to get a high posting abroad, a person needs to know somebody at the top of the government. But Yeates emphatically denied the importance of political connections.

"Only the top, ambassadorial positions may be influenced by who you know," he said. "Traditionally, only postings to London, Paris, Brussels, Lisbon, and Dublin have been influenced by party connections."

Significantly, both Moscow and Washington are not on that list. As for anything below these five ambassadorial postings, "I've never known of anybody who got ahead by hinting at his connections," said Yeates.

A diplomatic posting abroad carries an initial salary of 17 to 27 thousand dollars per year. The government will pay for transport of the diplomat's family, housing and food subsidies so that the cost of living is no more expensive than that in Canada, and the cost of educating the diplomat's children abroad.

Despite the aura of glamour often associated with the foreign service marital and family problems are common because of the strain of living outside Canada.

After writing the initial exam, about 250 candidates are selected for an interview. Of these, about 40 will be hired.

After a two year training period, they will be given a diplomatic posting abroad, subject to yearly review.

If at any time they wish to return to Canada, they may do so, continuing to work for the Department of External Affairs. But it is unlikely

that they will be given another posting abroad.

The only educational requirement for entering the foreign service is a bachelor's degree. However, candidates may apply even before that, although they will have to finish off their education to be hired.

It is not necessary to be bilingual, since the government gives intensive courses in both French and

English. Candidates must be Canadian citizens.

So if you feel that the Foreign Service has something to offer for you, register and write the multiple-choice competition.

It's held in the fall of most years. But first make sure, as Yeates advises, that "your wife, husband, or some other mate approves. Otherwise you could be in for a rough time."

Quips 'n' Quotes

In Iceland, it will be Teflon One versus Teflon Two

—Lawrence Martin of the Globe and Mail on the US-USSR Summit of last week.

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