



**FOREIGN COMMERCIAL SERVICE
INFORMATION PACKAGE**

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



Dear Prospective Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in the United States and Foreign Commercial Service. Our agency, also known simply as the Commercial Service, is the nation's lead Foreign Affairs Agency in commercial affairs. It employs United States citizens in a number of capacities including positions in the Foreign Service. This information packet was prepared to provide information about Commercial Service careers and assist U. S. citizens interested in becoming Foreign Service Officers in the Commercial Service. This information packet is in no way exhaustive, and the information contained herein is subject to change without notice. Please refer to the website below to obtain updated information.

The Commercial Service offers an outstanding platform for personal and professional growth. As Foreign Service Officers and members of the United State's diplomatic corps, Commercial Officers commonly have access to persons and places that are beyond the reach of most of their peers. A career as a Commercial Officer also provides outstanding opportunities to learn new languages and travel internationally. A Foreign Service career, however, is not for everyone. The demands on one's person and family should not be underestimated. Commercial Officers spend the majority of their careers overseas, far from home and often in challenging environments. Spouses and other accompanying dependents may find their careers and educations disrupted. Therefore, the decision to join the Foreign Service and become a Commercial Officer is one that should involve all of the members of your household.

We hope that we have piqued your interest. We encourage you to become familiar with our agency. For more information and updates on our latest developments, visit our website, www.trade.gov/cs/. Your application is most certainly welcome.



The Commercial Service

A Global Perspective / A Global Career

The United States and Foreign Commercial Service (USFCS) is one of four official Foreign Affairs Agencies under the Foreign Service Act of 1980. The other three official Foreign Affairs Agencies include the United States Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development, and the Foreign Agricultural Service. Each agency specializes in one or more functional areas of foreign affairs. The Commercial Service, as we are more commonly known, is responsible for **commercial affairs**. The Commercial Service is the trade promotion arm of the International Trade Administration (ITA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce and is responsible for:

- The promotion of United States goods and services
- The protection of United States commercial interests, especially for small- and medium-sized businesses.

Additionally, through overseas support of the International Trade Administration, Commercial Officers also:

- Work to eliminate market entry impediments caused by foreign governments
- Ensure equal treatment for U.S. companies and workers in foreign markets.
- Supports U.S. Government efforts in industry trade analysis, the shaping of trade policy, trade negotiation and organizing trade capacity building programs.

Commercial Officers (COs) are Foreign Service Officers of the United States of America, appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate to represent the government of the United States before foreign sovereign states. Commercial Officers carry out a wide variety of critical functions and work with a broad spectrum of government and private sector organizations to articulate, develop and refine United States commercial policy, promote U.S. exports and to protect U.S. commercial interests abroad.

Through the core functions of Trade Counseling, Market Intelligence, Business Matchmaking, Advocacy and Commercial Diplomacy, and Trade Promotion Programs, Commercial Officers promote economic prosperity, enhance job creation, and strengthen national security. Commercial Officers advocate on behalf of the government of the United States and American business to host-country governments with an eye to expanding United States export market share overseas. COs help American businesses in deciding whether, when and how to export and assist companies in implementing export strategies. Key to the successful execution of a Commercial Officer's duties is the ability to cultivate personal and professional contacts to be used in influencing foreign trade policies to benefit and protect United States commercial interests. Whether serving

overseas or domestically, a Commercial Officer's assignment presents the opportunity to use insights gained from personal and professional experience to impact American foreign relations through commercial diplomacy.

Serving a substantial portion of their careers at overseas diplomatic missions (usually in embassies, consulates or trade centers), Foreign Service Officers enjoy access to people and places beyond the experience of most United States Government employees. As an accredited United States diplomat, the Officer is an official representative of the United States by the accrediting country(ies), and carries the privileges and responsibilities associated with that representation at all times. While the demands on Officers' personal time are great, they are often offset by the opportunity to learn new languages, travel to diverse locations, live in new cultures, and expand professional competencies through first-hand experience in foreign markets.

The following information has been prepared to help you decide whether a Foreign Service career is *the right choice for you*. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the challenges, obligations and responsibilities that exist in the Commercial Service.





Qualification Requirements

A Global Perspective / A Global Career

Generally, all applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Possess a BA or BS degree and have three years of specialized experience. Specialized experience is described as experience performing the following duties:

- ❑ Assisting with the production of regional and/or international market analyses that are accepted as accurate and authoritative, and that form the basis of business-related decisions.
- ❑ Assisting with the development or implementation of international trade and marketing strategies for a U.S. product and/or service which includes identifying target markets, analyzing the potential of these new markets, developing a business plan to successfully establish business operations, and promoting the product and/or service domestically or internationally.
- ❑ Assisting in the planning and implementation of trade promotion activities such as trade missions, reverse trade missions, trade fairs or similar events.
- ❑ Actively participating in meetings with foreign governments or other organizations to influence the outcome of business activities between U.S. companies and foreign markets.
- ❑ Contributing to the analysis of commercial issues requiring trade, economic, or business knowledge of one or more geographic or political regions.

OR

2. Possess a MA or MS Degree or other graduate degree and two years of specialized experience as described above.

3. Applicant must also:

- ❑ Be a U.S. citizen.
- ❑ Be between the ages of 21 and 59 – The Foreign Service has a mandatory retirement age of 65. To retire under a Foreign Service retirement system, one must have at least five years of service credit under the system.
- ❑ Be available for a worldwide assignment and be willing to relocate approximately every 3-4 years.

How do I apply?

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



1. Complete the online application.

Applicants must pass the initial online application screening process before receiving an invitation for the one-day oral assessment. A link to the application is placed on the employment page of the www.trade.gov/cs website approximately three to four months prior to the Assessment. Please note that you cannot access the vacancy announcement until it is officially posted on the website. The Foreign Commercial Service offers the Assessment Center exam on average once every two years.

2. What is an Assessment Center?

In general, the term "Assessment Center" refers to the process for administering a series of exercises to determine if applicants have the skills and abilities to serve successfully as a Commercial Service Officer. The Commercial Service Assessment Center is a day-long examination process, which allows prospective Foreign Commercial Service Officers to demonstrate their oral and written communication skills, negotiating ability, and management and administrative abilities. The Commercial Service assumes that candidates have an understanding of export promotion programs, including the roles of public and private sector agencies and organizations, and the dynamics and techniques of export promotion for purposes of the assessment.

The exam consists of a number of exercises that may include any or all of the following: hypothetical exercises, writing exercises, in-box tests, leaderless group exercises and an interview. The Foreign Service Act of 1980 stipulates that entry to the Foreign Service will occur through an "impartial and rigorous examination." The Commercial Service Assessment Center is designed to serve this purpose.

3. I applied and passed the Pre-Screen Exam...what's next?

All applications are reviewed, rated, and the top candidates that meet the education and/or experience requirements are invited to attend the Commercial Service Assessment. The highest-ranking candidates who pass the Assessment are placed on a list called the Rank Order Register.

At this stage in the application process, candidates have the option of providing proof of proficiency in one language. Although language ability is not a requirement for entry into the Foreign Commercial Service, candidates who opt to take a foreign language test will receive additional points when the Rank Order Register is finalized. Information regarding language testing is distributed to candidates on the day of the Assessment.

The Foreign Commercial Service confers conditional offers of employment from the Rank Order Register, from the highest scorer to the lowest. The Register is valid for a

maximum of twenty-four months from the date certified by the Director General (the highest ranking official in the Foreign Commercial Service). The candidates who do not receive a conditional offer before the Rank Order Register expires may reapply for the next Assessment exam.



Commercial Service Assessment Exam

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



The Commercial Service Assessment is the vehicle used to recruit candidates into the Foreign Commercial Service. Candidates who pass the initial online application screening process are invited to participate in the Commercial Service Assessment. This phase of the application process includes one day of testing in the Washington, DC area at the candidate's expense.

Performance Dimensions:

The Assessment is designed to test for competencies, which demonstrate whether candidates possess specific skills needed to successfully perform the job of a Commercial Service Officer. The skills tested in this Assessment were determined after conducting a thorough job analysis. Specifically, these skills and their definitions are:

Substantive knowledge

- Industry sector knowledge – has knowledge of industry and service sectors relevant to the host country and region, including best prospect and priority growth sectors, in order to set priorities, develop effective programs, and better serve client needs; demonstrates business acumen and provides sound analysis of economic, financial, policy, market, social and cultural conditions that influence export strategies and initiatives.
- Host country/market and/or regional knowledge – has knowledge of the host country's and region's prevailing political, economic, business, trade, and investment context, as well as practices, opportunities, and limitations, in order to set priorities, develop effective programs, and meet client needs.
- Trade promotion knowledge – has knowledge to perform or directs market research in support of client export objectives; conducts promotional initiatives, such as trade events; increases the awareness of the CS and its products and services to the U.S. business community, foreign customers, and trade promotion partners; uses sales skills to generate enthusiasm in others for products and services; identifies and assesses various trade finance sources and strategies to meet specific client needs.
- Commercial diplomacy/advocacy knowledge – has knowledge of market access and compliance issues in order to leverage and coordinate programs and to ensure that appropriate advice, assistance and resources are provided to U.S. companies; uses knowledge of the host country's political structure and key channels of influence in order to address barriers to market access or protect U.S. foreign direct investment; has knowledge of key U.S. competition in a foreign market to provide for better and more effective advocacy on behalf of U.S. firms, as well as general market intelligence; develops effective advocacy/market access strategies on behalf of U.S. interests; demonstrates skill as, and observes protocol norms expected of, a U.S. diplomat.

- Commerce Department and other trade-related agencies knowledge – has knowledge of the international context in which trade relations are conducted and policy decisions are shaped; has knowledge of U.S. commercial priorities, interests, and objectives pursued abroad and domestically including the policy development process; has knowledge of pertinent U.S. laws and regulations affecting exporting and international trade; has knowledge of the missions/objectives, relationships, programs, and relevant rules of other federal agencies and state and local networks of trade partners in export promotion; works as part of the country team in the Embassy or Consulate.
- Commercial service practices and procedures knowledge – has knowledge of the practices, procedures, rules, regulations, networks, and norms needed to accomplish tasks and to fulfill the objectives of the Commercial Section of the Embassy or Consulate and the Department of Commerce.
- Information Technology knowledge – has knowledge to select, access, and use information, data, and communications technologies; uses technological resources and electronic media to gather trade data and information, perform analyses, prepare work products, and deliver services.

Leadership competence

- Initiative and results orientation – shows leadership in working with partner agencies, U.S. businesses, foreign customers, and trade promotion partners to advance U.S. commercial and international trade interests in order to meet program/client needs and leverage programs and resources; produces results by identifying business outcomes and setting performance goals, developing a corresponding program strategy, aligning assets to strategy, modifying strategy based on results, and discarding low-result activities.
- Influence and advocacy skill – has skill in motivating, guiding, and influencing others toward effective individual or teamwork performance, goal attainment, and personal development; has skill in advocating for a policy, position, or product by using persuasion, appeal, mutual benefit, and persistence, including influencing events through the actions of others; shows presence through self presentation, determination, energy, and self-confidence.
- Negotiating skill – negotiates and builds consensus among individuals or groups both within and outside the Commercial Service by presenting and defending a set of interests in developing an agreement, by facilitating agreements that involve sharing or exchanging resources to promote mutual goals and interests, by perceiving alternative courses that will satisfy one's own requirements but will offer greater acceptability to others, by persuading others to change their point of view or behavior without losing their future support, and by resolving conflicts, confrontations, and disagreements.
- Teamwork skill – works cooperatively and collaboratively with others to achieve goals by sharing or integrating ideas, knowledge, skills, information, support, resources, responsibility, and recognition, and by taking into account the perspectives, goals, and communication styles of others; participates in overseas, domestic, and headquarters team initiatives; builds teams of members with

- diverse skills and interests; leads teams to achieve success, including managing the resources and organizational relationships to support that team.
- Change management skill – Demonstrates continuous intent to improve customer service, program performance, work environment, quality standards, flexibility, and creative thinking; develops and implements an organizational vision, including balancing innovation and change with continuity.
 - Ethical compliance and leadership - Demonstrates the highest level of personal and professional ethical standards; understands and complies with U.S. Government ethics guidance, rules and procedures and ensures the compliance of those under ones supervision; understands the ethical issues involved in business and trade; explains and conveys the need for compliance with U.S. Government ethics-related legislation including, but not limited to, the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, boycotts, anti-boycotts and human rights issues to CS clients and others; deals with/reports ethical violations if, and as, appropriate.

Management competence

- People management skill – manages and elevates individual and team performance through directing work activities, setting goals, providing feedback, serving as a role model, holding individuals accountable, rewarding performance, resolving conduct and performance problems, and applying other people management techniques; prepares performance appraisals and personnel actions objectively, on time, and in accordance with established laws and regulations; uses knowledge of people management principles (e.g., teamwork, motivation, leadership, conflict resolution, communication, etc.) in order to effectively supervise officers and local staff.
- Program management skill – uses knowledge of basic administrative procedures and practices in areas of budget, personnel, travel, and property in order to effectively manage an office; is operationally effective in getting a job done efficiently, on time, and with mastery of all essential details; proactively contributes toward streamlining administrative processes and/or improving product and service delivery; allocates fiscal and personnel resources in an efficient and productive manner; adapts projects/programs/services to align with changing U.S. business needs and methods of operation.
- Creativity and innovation – develops new ideas or sees opportunities to improve programs and other actions to further the mission of the Commercial Service, including ensuring that the projects, programs, and services are in line with changing U.S. business trends; develops and delivers new products and services that better meet the needs of U.S. businesses, such as customized counseling, information, and services.
- Customer service skill – Provides effective customer service with the goal of helping clients, including individual companies as well as partner organizations, achieve concrete export results. Has or acquires knowledge of customer needs, goals, capabilities, and expectations; analyzes client export potential and readiness to compete in overseas markets; acquires and furnishes appropriate trade opportunity and contact information to client firms; provides sound client-

- focused export counseling; responds in a timely manner to customer queries and requests for assistance; responds creatively to changing or urgent customer requirements; takes into account client feedback for purposes of enhancing program and product quality.
- Partnering/leveraging skill – finds, builds, and maintains relationships with globally dispersed individuals, companies, and other organizations uniquely positioned to promote U.S. business and other Commerce Department policy objectives. Develops and maintains strong working relationships with other sections within the Mission.

Intellectual competence

- Conceptual skill – thinks clearly; understands complex rules and procedures; organizes data sensibly and translates them into practical implications; thinks logically by reaching sound conclusions from explicit assumptions and communicates the reasons clearly and rationally; exhibits foresight by identifying opportunities, anticipating problems and consequences, and then planning or initiating actions accordingly.
- Problem solving and decision making skill – anticipates or identifies problems and their causes; develops and analyzes potential solutions or improvements using rational and logical processes; makes decisions and judgments that consider relevant facts and information, potential risks and benefits, applicable rules, regulations, and procedures, ethical considerations, potential impact on other USG priorities, reputation of the USG, and short-and long-term consequences or alternatives.
- Organizing and planning skill – organizes and structures work for effective performance and goal attainment; anticipates obstacles; judges and establishes realistic priorities in projects, goals, and workloads among multiple competing demands, formulates plans consistent with available human, financial, and physical resources; modifies plans or adjusts priorities given changing goals or conditions and available time; plans strategically to optimize short and long-range outcomes and minimize tradeoffs.
- Interpreting authority relationships skill – discerns relationships of authority in varying contexts; understands the dynamics of how organizations operate and make decisions, including recognition of formal and informal communication channels; works within a hierarchical organization with multiple "bosses" in order to achieve results within a bureaucratic or political context; understands the effective range and use of one's own authority.

Interpersonal competence

- Sensitivity to others – always interacts professionally with others in ways that are respectful, courteous, and tactful; demonstrates appreciation for individual differences and for the attitudes and feelings of others; understands the points of view of others and behaves in a manner that will gain their cooperation.
- Adaptability – is open and receptive to new information, ideas, or strategies to achieve goals; changes one's own behavior or work methods to adjust to other

- people or to changing situations or work demands; helps others adapt to change; enhances positive, and reduces negative, impact of change on organizational effectiveness.
- Cross-cultural skill – learns and clearly interprets relevant information about another society, its values, beliefs, customs, and institutional processes, and relates such information to U.S. interests and objectives; respectfully and effectively interacts and works with other cultures, including supervising subordinates in those cultures by building rapport, managing relationships, and accommodating differences; understands and applies the principles of fair treatment and equal opportunity to all employees, colleagues, and host country citizens; furthers the Department's diversity and affirmative action goals and objectives.
 - Teaching, coaching, and mentoring skill – teaches and guides others; coaches others by listening to them, winning their confidence, and making realistic and supportive recommendations; allows others autonomy and responsibility without recourse to constant supervision; mentors other officers and staff for their development.
 - Positive attitude – is resilient in remaining optimistic in challenging and often difficult environments. Maintains confidence in oneself; supports organizational goals even during difficult times; instills or encourages by example similar qualities in others.

Communication competence

- Written communication skill – expresses ideas and information in written form clearly, succinctly, accurately, and in an organized manner; uses correct English language conventions of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence and paragraph structure; tailors written communication to the intended purpose and audience; edits the work of others correctly; conveys nuances of meaning in order to interact effectively with foreign and domestic governments and businesses, other officers, and staff.
- Oral communication skill – expresses ideas and facts orally in a clear and understandable manner that sustains listener attention and interest, and that is sensible and persuasive; understands and uses suitable styles of communication (e.g., formal versus informal, concise versus detailed, written versus oral, etc.) to fit the purpose; tailors oral communication to the intended audience.
- Listening skill – attends to, receives, and correctly interprets oral communications and directions; correctly interprets the context of messages and tone, as well as non-verbal cues of speakers.
- Foreign language skill – learns and uses foreign languages as appropriate in order to more effectively interact with foreign businesses, governments, and the public, as well as to enhance understanding of the host country and region.

Oral Assessment:

As this Assessment tests for skills and abilities, rather than knowledge, there is little to do to prepare except to review the skills you will be measured on, get a good's night rest, and relax. The test has been prepared for candidates who all have a minimum of three years working experience (or a master's degree and two years experience) specific to international trade, business, government, or related areas, and candidates will be expected to generally draw from this experience. Candidates may wish to familiarize themselves with the mission of the U.S. Commercial Service by reviewing our web page at <http://www.trade.gov/cs>.

Examples of the types of exercises that may appear during the Assessment are:

--Structured Interview: This is done through two distinct interviews. The hypothetical interview presents candidates with job related situations similar to those they would likely encounter in the FCS and asks them to describe how they would resolve the problem presented. The Past Behavior Interview asks candidates to describe how they performed in specific situations in their experience that are similar to situations they could expect to encounter in the FCS.

--Group Exercise: This exercise is a leaderless group discussion in which candidates work in a group of up to six candidates to solve a realistic work-related problem. Each candidate prepares and gives a brief presentation on their assigned role to their peers, and then the entire group debates the various positions and comes to a decision.

--Advocacy Exercise: The candidates play the role of Foreign Commercial Service Officers (FCSO) advocating on behalf of a U.S. company. They prepare and give a brief presentation, respond to questions on their presentation, and then compose a memo that summarizes the presentation and offers suggestions for next steps.

--In-box Exercise: This exercise is a "speeded" Assessment. Candidates decide which emails to delegate and to whom, and then they were required to put the remaining e-mails in order of priority.

--Editing Exercise: This exercise requires candidates to perform the common FCSO task of editing reports created by host country employees for whom English is not their native language.



Foreign Commercial Service Officer

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



Commercial Officers serving overseas provide in-country leadership for United States export promotion programs, designed in partnership with other agencies and organizations, to capitalize on existing market potential and create new opportunities. Commercial Officers advocate and intercede with local governments and trade organizations on behalf of the Government of the United States and American companies, and develop and utilize an extensive network of host country contacts at the local, regional, and national levels. The Commercial Section at United States diplomatic missions regularly host Congressional, state and local government delegations, as directed by the Ambassador, and coordinates trade delegations led by senior Administration officials. Commercial Officers lead the implementation of Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee country/regional initiatives, support policy negotiations, resolve trade complaints, and implement comprehensive country export promotion programs.

There are approximately 250 Commercial Service Officers serving in over 70 countries usually in locations with the most promising market potential for United States goods and services. Over the course of a 20-year career, the typical Officer can expect to serve in at least five overseas assignments. Officers must also serve a two-year assignment at one of the 108 U.S. Export Assistance Centers throughout the country.

The Senior Commercial Officer (SCO) oversees the Commercial Section of an overseas diplomatic mission, including a staff of Commercial Service Officers; host-country staff, called Locally Engaged Staff (LES); and any United States or third-country national local hires. Commercial Sections may range in size from one or two Officers with only a few LES's, to large posts with 10 or 12 Officers and 40 or more LES's. A commercial Officer is responsible for export promotion/marketing, in addition to the administrative management of the operation (budget, personnel, and planning).

Generally, the SCO reports directly to the Ambassador and is part of the Ambassador's Country Team. Under the general direction of the Ambassador, the SCO and the Commercial Section of the Mission focus on commercial and trade issues. The SCO is the Ambassador's principal advisor on commercial issues and typically takes the lead in formulating the post's Strategic Commercial Plan. The staff of the Commercial Section works closely with staff from other agencies at the Mission on issues that cut across agency lines (e.g. the United States Department of State, the United States Department of Agriculture, the United States Department of Defense and others).

... and Other Duties as Assigned

In addition to the duties performed during normal office hours, Foreign Service Officers serving overseas have **representational responsibilities** that must be fulfilled during the evenings or on the weekends. These responsibilities may include hosting social events at

home or attending receptions often several times per week in an effort to build professional ties with local officials and business representatives.

Commercial Officers, like all other Officers at the Mission, must also take his or her turn serving as *Duty Officer*. The Duty Officer is on call evenings, weekends and holidays, for a week at a time, to handle emergencies. Examples of emergencies include receiving a call from the lawyer of a jailed United States national at 2:00 a.m. demanding immediate assistance from the Embassy, or checking incoming cables on New Year's Day to determine if any urgent issues should be brought to the Ambassador's attention. Officers at a smaller post usually serve as Duty Officer more often due to the limited number of Officers at the mission and the need for continual Duty Officer coverage.

During emergencies, the Ambassador has the authority to deploy staff as he or she sees fit, regardless of the Department to which the staff member belongs. Consequently, a Commercial Officer might find him or herself running the Embassy's motor pool or serving as a Site Officer, organizing and managing logistics for meetings during a Presidential visit. If the host country is undergoing a period of civil disturbance, a Commercial Officer may assist in evacuating United States nationals from the area.



Promoting Diversity

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



The Commercial Service recognizes the value of a diverse workforce and actively seeks to promote diversity. Our diversity is part of what makes us unique, as individuals and as a nation. Aspects of our diversity contribute to our personal identities and allow us to approach problems from different perspectives. Promoting diversity means creating a workplace that is inclusive and permits our organization to benefit from new ideas and innovations.

The Commercial Service also promotes diversity in its programs. Among those programs specially targeted toward under-represented populations, the ***Global Diversity Initiative*** provides support to minority-owned, new-to-export companies; export marketing training, consulting and support to new-to-export firms; and participation in global trade events. The ***Rural Export Initiative*** utilizes new technology to bring export opportunities to companies in rural areas of the United States; creates local supportive partner networks; and ensures better access to export assistance programs for rural companies.

In the belief that diversity is one of our national assets, the Commercial Service has been both proactive and innovative in its recruitment, employment and programmatic efforts. It is our goal as an organization to ensure that the Commercial Service represents the many faces of the United States in all of its endeavors.



Assignments and Tours of Duty

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



The Assignments Panel is a body comprised of members from within the International Trade Administration that determines all Commercial Service Officer assignments. Decisions of the Assignments Panel take account of such factors as transfer eligibility; personal rank; language proficiency; requirements pertaining to hardship and domestic tours; requirements for substantial overseas service; and the expressed interest of the employee, including considerations of career and professional development. Career (tenured) and Career Candidate (tenure-track) Commercial Service Officers formally express their preferences in the form of a “bid list”. However, the needs of the Service come first; and the Commercial Service reserves the right to direct-assign an Officer to a position.

All Rank Order Register Candidates are direct assigned to positions for their first tours of duty. The Rank Order Register is a list of persons who have passed the Commercial Service Assessment, but have not yet been hired as Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers. Rank Order Register Candidates must receive and accept an assignment, pass security and medical clearances, and successfully complete a drug screen to be sworn-in and officially converted to the status of Career Candidate. Once hired and converted to the status of Career Candidate (tenure-track) Commercial Service Officer, new Officers are invited to participate in the bidding process. However, Rank Order Register Candidates cannot bid.

To determine a Rank Order Register Candidate’s assignment, the Assignments Officer reviews position and staffing requirements, and solicits information from candidates pertaining to regional preferences and language abilities. Based on the information provided by candidates, the Assignments Officer attempts to find suitable matches, and makes recommendations to the Assignments Panel. All candidates for assignment must be worldwide available, regardless of their personal preferences; and Rank Order Register Candidates who decline their assignments will not receive further consideration by the Assignments Panel. (Candidates who decline their assignments are welcome to re-apply to sit for future administrations of the Commercial Service Assessment and attempt to qualify for inclusion on a new Rank Order Register.)

The ***standard tour of duty*** for each post is set by the Director General, and varies from four years for non-hardship posts, to one to three years for posts in “hardship” locations. Regardless of the standard tour of duty for a post, all first-tour Commercial Service Officers are assigned two-year tours of duty. ***New Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers are expected to begin a tour of duty at an Export Assistance Center within the United States early in their career, typically the first or second tour.*** Officers may bid to extend their tours of duty in one-year increments; however, the maximum continuous stay at a foreign post is five years.



Tenure Requirements for Career Candidates

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers are permitted a maximum of five years to be converted to Career status, or “tenured”. Career Candidates are expected to demonstrate professional competence, attested to in their performance evaluations, and proficiency in at least one foreign language. The recommendation to convert a Career Candidate to Career status is made by the ***Commissioning and Tenure Board***. Tenured Commercial Service Officers are called “Career Commercial Service Officers”. Failure to be converted to Career status by the expiration of the fifth year of continuous service as a Career Candidate will result in separation from the Service.

Advancement as a Commercial Service Officer is entirely dependent upon an Officer’s skills and aspirations. Commercial Service Officers are eligible to enter the ranks of the Senior Foreign Service and the Ambassadorial Class. Promotions are merit-based and do not take into account length of service. Once converted to Career status (“tenured”), the “***up or out***” nature of the Service forces Commercial Service Officers to continually demonstrate superior performance or risk being separated from the Service. The intent of this policy is to ensure the progressive advancement of highly skilled and talented employees through the ranks of the organization, and retain the expertise and experience of our most capable officers.



A New Lifestyle

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



... Housing

When a Foreign Service Officer arrives at an overseas post, he or she will be met by a “sponsor”, who introduces the Officer to mission personnel and provides assistance with shopping, schools, household help, etc. for the first few weeks of the assignment.

Commercial Officers serving overseas are provided United States Government-owned or leased quarters, or are given a living quarters allowance which generally covers rent and utilities at a given duty station. Some quarters are unfurnished, except for major appliances, such as stoves, refrigerators, freezers, washer machines and dryers. Travel orders, therefore, often allow for a full shipment of household effects (up to 18,000 lbs.). Effects not shipped may be stored at United States Government expense. The total weight of shipped and stored effects may not exceed 18,000 lbs. At some duty stations, basic furniture is provided. In this case, a limited shipment of household effects is authorized (7,200 lbs.). The United States Government does not provide housing, nor does it defray the cost of housing, for Commercial Officers serving within the United States or its territories.

... Privately Owned Vehicles (POV)

Privately owned vehicles that meet local import and licensing requirements may be included in an Officer’s authorized shipment. Vehicles that do not meet local standards may still be imported (depending on the post to which an Officer is assigned); however, their use in country may require the owner to make significant alterations to the vehicle to comply with local standards.

Officers may make arrangements to ship newly purchased vehicles that meet local standards directly to post from the manufacturer; or vehicles may be purchased on the local market. A market for vehicles often exists within the diplomatic community among Officers who are leaving post and those who have recently arrived. There are significant restrictions that vary by country pertaining to the sale by diplomats of vehicles outside the diplomatic community.

... Allowances and Differentials

A cost of living allowance is provided when the cost of living differential between a post and Washington, DC is significant. Post differential is a fixed percentage of an Officer’s base salary, ranging from five to twenty-five percent that is intended to compensate Officers for service in locations with difficult living conditions. Only a few of the CS posts have danger pay, another allowance that compensates Officers for service in locations that present significant security risks. Education allowances will be discussed,

below, under “Schools and Education Allowances”. One or more of the above allowances may apply depending upon the duty station where an Officer is assigned.

... Accompanying Dependents

Legal dependents planning to accompany an Officer to post must pass a physical examination and obtain a “medical clearance”. In rare cases, dependents may not be allowed to accompany the Officer because of dangerous conditions at post, or for reasons related to the results of the medical clearance conducted on the dependent in question. In cases where a dependent cannot or does not wish to accompany the Officer to post, a *separate maintenance allowance* may be available.

Many training and orientation resources are available to Officers’ legal dependents through the United States Department of State Overseas Briefing Center (OBC) (<http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/c6954.htm>) and Family Liaison Office (FLO) (<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/>). Please check the FLO website for information related to family support services, family member employment, and community liaison services.

... Employment Opportunities for Spouses and Accompanying Dependents

The United States has Bilateral Work Agreements or de facto reciprocal work arrangements with some of the countries staffed by Commercial Service Officers. Bilateral Work Agreements may enable dependents of United States Government employees assigned to official duties at United States diplomatic missions to seek employment on the local labor market. In the case of de facto reciprocal work arrangements, dependents may apply through specified channels for a permit to work in the local economy.

United States diplomatic missions usually make an effort to hire the dependents of Officers stationed there to fill primarily administrative or consular positions at post; however, vacancies are usually limited in number. It is important to note that it is often difficult for the spouses of Commercial Service Officers to find gainful employment on the local labor market in most foreign countries. Commercial Service Officers and their dependents may make use of the resources of the United States Department of State Overseas Briefing Center (OBC) and the Family Liaison Office (FLO) to learn more about overseas employment opportunities for spouses and accompanying dependents.

... Schools and Education Allowances

While Officers serve overseas, the full cost of tuition at a United States Government-sponsored school at post is provided for all dependents from Kindergarten through Grade 12. If there are no United States Government-sponsored schools at an Officer’s post of assignment, the Commercial Service offers an *education allowance* to defray the cost of tuition, room and board, and periodic transportation between post and the nearest locality where an adequate school is available.

United States Government-sponsored schools include those founded by United States companies, church organizations, and individual proprietors. Most are nonprofit, nondenominational, independent schools, established on a cooperative basis by United States citizens residing in foreign communities. These schools receive assistance and support from the United States Government under a program administered by the Office of Overseas Schools at the United States Department of State. The purpose of this assistance is to help schools provide adequate educational opportunities for the dependents of United States Government employees and to demonstrate to foreign nationals the philosophy and methods of American education. Many of these “accredited” schools are open to nationals of all countries and their teaching staffs although most are predominantly American.

These schools range from tiny schools with only a few elementary school pupils to large schools of over 1,000 students, providing education through high school. Instructional programs provide a core curriculum that prepares students to enter schools, colleges and universities in the United States. The language of instruction is English, supplemented at most schools with instruction in the local language. The content of the curriculum is American, but may vary, depending on the proportion of United States nationals in the student population. The curricula tend to be largely academic and the quality of instruction ranges from good to excellent at most schools. Further information about overseas educational opportunities can be found at <http://www.state.gov/m/a/os/>.



Employee Benefits for Commercial Officers

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



The Commercial Service offers a competitive employee benefits package for Commercial Service Officers. Covered benefits include the following.

... Retirement

Commercial Service employees, appointed as Career (tenure) or Career Candidate (tenure-track) Commercial Service Officers, are subject to the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability System (FSRDS) or Foreign Service Pension System (FSPS), depending on the individual's Federal employment history. There is a mandatory retirement age of 65 under the Foreign Service Retirement System. (The minimum retirement age is 50 with 20 years of creditable service, five years of which must have been covered by the Foreign Service Retirement System.)

... Leave

Sick leave is accrued at a rate of four hours per pay period for a total of thirteen days per year by all Commercial Service Officers, regardless of the number of years of service.

Annual leave is earned at a rate of four, six, or eight hours per pay period, depending on the length of service.

- 4 hours per pay period or 13 days per leave year for less than 2 years of Federal service
- 6 hours per pay period or 20 days per leave year after 3 years of federal service but less than 15 years
- 8 hours per pay period or 26 days per leave year after 15 years of federal service

In addition to annual leave, *home leave* is accumulated at a rate of fifteen working days for each year of overseas service. A minimum of eighteen months of continuous service abroad is required for home leave eligibility, and Officers must take home leave after three years of continuous service overseas. Under home leave, the United States Government pays roundtrip travel expenses for the employee and eligible dependents to the employee's designated home leave address in the United States.

... Other Benefits

Thrift Savings Plan (equivalent to 401(k) with Government matching)

Foreign Service Officers may participate in this long-term savings, retirement, and investment program for federal employees. Additional information is available at www.tsp.gov.

Life Insurance

Foreign Commercial Service Officers are eligible to participate in the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) Plan. This plan offers low rates that are made through payroll deductions. The U.S. Government pays one-third of the cost for this insurance. This plan is voluntary and is intended as a form of immediate group term life insurance. The Office of Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (OFEGLI), which is a private entity that has a contract with the Federal Government, processes and pays claims under the FEGLI Program. Additional information is available at <http://www.opm.gov/insure/life/>

Family Medical Leave

The Family Medical leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 provides Federal employees with up to 12 workweeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for the following reasons:

- Birth of a child
- Adoption of a child
- Serious illness of an employee
- Care of a seriously ill child, spouse or parent

Ten Paid Holidays Per Year

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King's Birthday
- President's Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Columbus Day
- Veteran's Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day

NOTE: The U.S. Government also observes some local holidays celebrated at overseas posts of assignment.



Pay Schedule

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



The Foreign Commercial Service recruits at the FS-04 entry level. This Foreign Service pay grade is roughly equivalent to the civil service grades of GS-12. The Commercial Service bases an officer's personal grade on the number of years of directly relevant, paid experience an applicant possesses, and the number of years an applicant has been paid a given salary level in a position where the responsibilities approximate those of a Commercial Officer. The more experience an applicant possesses prior to joining the Foreign Service within the Commercial Service, the higher his/her personal grade.

Once grade and step are determined based on education and experience documented during the application process, the candidate's current salary is examined to determine if he or she will lose money by joining the Foreign Commercial Service. Every attempt is made to match the candidate's current salary to the FCS starting salary.



Frequently asked Questions and Answers

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



Q. Are you a part of the Department of State?

- A. The Commercial Service is a branch of the International Trade Administration within the United States Department of Commerce. There are three other branches of the International Trade Administration:
- Market Access and Compliance (MAC) is responsible for country and regional analysis of United States export markets. MAC looks for exporting problems caused by foreign governments and uses every possible tool to achieve equal treatment for U.S. companies and workers.
 - Manufacturing and Services (MAS) undertakes industry trade analysis, shapes U.S. trade policy, participates in trade negotiations, organizes trade capacity building programs, and evaluates the impact of domestic and international economic and regulatory policies on U.S. manufacturers and service industries.
 - Import Administration (IA) investigates antidumping and countervailing duty claims and supports the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

While independent from the Department of State, the U.S. Commercial Service works very closely with them.

Q. What is a Limited non-career candidate?

- A. Limited Non-career Foreign Service Officers ("Limiteds") are members of the general public, hired as Foreign Commercial Service Officers for specific duty stations and tours of duty based on specialized skill or experience that they possess. Limited Non-career Foreign Service Officers' first tours of duty are limited to two years. There is no promise, implicit or explicit, of onward assignment or other further employment with the Commercial Service at the termination of the initial two-year tour of duty, any extension(s), or subsequent Limited Non-career appointment(s). Limiteds cannot serve with the Commercial Service more than five consecutive years.

Q. How does age affect your ability to become a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

- A. The Foreign Service Act of 1980 requires that Career and Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers be retired at the end of the month during which the officer reaches the age of 65. To retire under the Foreign Service Retirement System, one must have vested at least five years of service in the System. To ensure full retirement benefits to our Career and Career Candidate Officer Corps, the Commercial Service deems all persons over the age of 59 ineligible for appointment as Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers.

Q. What if I do not possess the minimum required directly relevant, professional experience?

A. You will be rated ineligible to participate in the Commercial Service Assessment.

Q. How do health or medical conditions affect your ability to become a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

A. All applicants and their accompanying dependents are required to submit to a medical examination in order to obtain medical clearance as a Commercial Service Officer. Applicants are also required to pass a drug screen.

The purpose of the examination is to determine whether the applicant and his or her accompanying dependents are free of medical conditions, which require specialized evaluation and / or medical care, or which would be aggravated by environmental factors at certain overseas locations.

On a case-by-case basis, the Commercial Service may grant an administrative waiver of pre-employment medical standards. The well being of the applicant and accompanying dependents, cost to the United States Government, and the best interests of the Service are taken into account when determining whether to grant an administrative waiver. If granted, the applicant and / or accompanying dependent(s) receives a limited medical clearance for overseas assignment. Under no circumstance will the drug screen be waived, nor will an applicant who has failed a drug screen be hired.

Q. From the date of my acceptance of the conditional offer of employment, how long does it take to complete my clearances?

A. The clearance process can take six or more months to complete, depending upon the candidate's and family member's background and travel history.

Q. What happens if I decline my conditional offer of employment as a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

A. Rank Order Register Candidates who decline their conditional offers of employment are removed from further consideration off the relevant Rank Order Register. A candidate may defer an offer of employment for professional or personal reasons, but the candidate would then be moved to the bottom of the Register. To receive further consideration, candidates who decline their conditional offers of employment are required to pass the next administered Commercial Service Assessment and await their turn on the resulting Rank Order Register.

Q. How do I become a Foreign Commercial Service Officer (FCSO)?

- A. The Foreign Commercial Service Assessment Center is the first step in becoming an FCSO. The Commercial Service Assessment is a competitive, daylong examination that consists of a number of exercises. Exercises may include any or all of the following: Situational Interviews, Advocacy exercises, Editing exercises, In-box exercises and Leaderless Group Exercises.

Those who pass the Assessment are placed on a list called the Rank Order Register. Conditional offers of employment are made from the Rank Order Register, from the highest scorer to the lowest scorer on the list. The register is valid for a maximum of 24 months from the date certified by the Director General, Foreign Commercial Service.

Q. What if I don't qualify (to take the Commercial Service Assessment / for Limited Non-career Appointment)?

- A. Qualification requirements vary depending on the vacancy announcement. You can gain directly relevant experience if you do not currently meet the minimum qualification criteria for a Foreign Commercial Service Officer position with the Commercial Service. Alternate career paths that offer directly relevant experience include:

- ❑ International Trade Specialist positions with the Government of the United States (job series 1140).
- ❑ Export promotion positions with the export promotion offices of your state government with substantive export promotion responsibilities.
- ❑ Program Analyst positions with the Government of the United States with substantive export promotion responsibilities (job series 0343).
- ❑ Economist positions with substantive United States export market research and analysis responsibilities. (Within the Executive Branch of the Government of the United States, these positions usually carry the 0110 job series.)
- ❑ Research Analyst positions in private corporations that involve substantive research and analysis of United States export markets (i.e., consulting companies, banks, brokerage houses, and multinational corporations).
- ❑ International Sales and Marketing positions that involve substantive responsibility for moving product to United States export markets.

Applicants do not qualify on the basis of unpaid experience, academic achievement, language skill, or pedagogic experience alone. The Commercial Service also considers imports into the United States a “domestic” affair. Such experience usually is not credited as directly relevant.

Q. Do you hire foreign nationals?

- A. In country, the Commercial Service hires duly authorized individuals to work in Commercial Affairs as either Foreign Service Nationals or Local Resident Hires. "Duly authorized individuals" as persons authorized to work in the country in question. Contact the Commercial Officer at the nearest United States Embassy for more information on eligibility requirements and current vacancy announcements.

Q. Do you hire Interns?

- A. The Overseas Work-Study Internship Program is developed in accordance with the authority of Section 301 of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. §3111), Chapter 7 of the Federal Personnel Manual, and Department of Commerce specific guidelines on voluntary and uncompensated service implemented in DAO 202-311.

The purpose of the program is to provide college or university juniors, seniors, and graduate students of Economics, Business Administration and related fields with "hands-on" experience working in the Commercial Section of a U.S. Embassy. The program is uncompensated and designed to encourage students to consider careers in the commercial field. Internships in the Work-Study Program are considered to be adjunct to an applicant's education. Students must be currently enrolled and taking at least one-half of a full-time academic workload. They must also plan to continue their education immediately upon termination of their internship.

Interns typically serve for one semester or quarter during their academic year, or for a minimum of 10 weeks during the summer, U.S. citizenship and good academic standing are required, along with the successful completion of a security assurance check. For additional information, review the application instructions on the employment page of the www.trade.gov/cs website.

