

Inside U.S. Foreign Policy

U.S. Foreign Policy in East Asia and the Pacific

Career Conversations Speaker Bios

Room 1: Building Ties Between Countries through Cultural Affairs Programming



Lydia Barraza

Cultural Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy Bangkok

Lydia Barraza is the Cultural Affairs Officer at U.S. Embassy Bangkok. Her last tour was as the State Department's Spanish-language Spokesperson and Director of the Miami Media Hub. Lydia previously served as Deputy Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Havana, Cuba, during the re-establishment of diplomatic relations. Prior to Cuba, she served as the Spokesperson and then Public Affairs Officer in Lahore, Pakistan, and as Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer managing programs across North India in New Delhi. She began her career in Lagos, Nigeria, where she worked in the consular and political sections. Before joining the Department of State, Lydia was a fellow for the American India Foundation in India, where she worked on HIV/AIDS education. Lydia is from Texas and holds a degree in Political Science and International Studies from Southern Methodist University. She speaks Spanish, Hindi, Urdu, and Thai. Lydia's husband Cesar also works at the Embassy, and they have two active little boys, Isaac and Caleb.

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Room 2: Work as a Public Diplomacy Officer



Della Hareland

Cultural Coordinator, Office of Public Diplomacy, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Della Hareland is a Foreign Service Officer currently serving as the Cultural Coordinator in the Office of Public Diplomacy in the Department of State's East Asian and Pacific Affairs Bureau. Prior to this assignment, Della was in a long-term training assignment at the National Intelligence University. Prior to that she served in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs as a Program Officer in the Professional Fellows Division, was posted to Beijing, China, as an Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, was the Public Diplomacy Officer at the Office of Chinese and Mongolian Affairs, served as an Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer in Lima, Peru, and was a Consular Officer in the Dominican Republic. Prior to joining the State Department, Della worked in information technology at Intel Corporation. Della holds a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from the University of Puget Sound and a Masters of Science in Strategic Intelligence from the National Intelligence University. Della is married to a Foreign Service Officer and they have two children.

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Room 3: State Department Internships and Fellowships: From College to Career



Aaron Huang

Vice Consul, U.S. Consulate Ho Chi Minh City

Aaron is a political-track U.S. Foreign Service Officer specializing in Chinese foreign policy and cross-Strait relations. He is currently a vice consul at the U.S. Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Before that, he was the American Institute in Taiwan's acting spokesperson, implementing a strategic communications campaign to counter Chinese propaganda in Taiwan. He was also a fellow at the State Department's intelligence bureau, where he assessed China's relations with Japan, Russia, and North Korea. With the Gilman Scholarship, he worked at the U.K. Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee to examine the British government's performance on equality issues, such as its treatment of asylum seekers and LGBTQ+ persons. He holds an MPP from Harvard Kennedy School and a B.A. in economics, Asian studies, and policy studies from Rice University (summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa). He is fluent in Mandarin and has limited proficiency in Vietnamese.

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Room 4: Environment, Science, Technology, and Health Work at State



Kate Macken

*Environment, Science, Technology, and Health Officer,
Office of Economic Policy, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific
Affairs*

Kate Macken is the Environment, Science, Technology, and Health (ESTH) Officer in the Office of Economic Policy in the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Her portfolio includes issues such as climate change, wildlife trafficking, and ocean sustainability. She also covers ESTH issues in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum. Prior to being posted in Washington D.C., Kate served as an Economic and Consular Officer in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Caracas, Venezuela. Kate has a master's degree in International Environmental Policy from the Monterey Institute of International Studies in Monterey, CA. She is originally from western Nebraska.

Room 5: Conflict Stabilization Work in Asia



Jenny Malheiro

Asia Director, Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

Jenny Malheiro joined the Foreign Service in 2000 and currently serves as the Asia Director for the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO). In this role, she leads U.S. interagency contingency planning and response for civilian conflicts in Asia. Jenny previously served as the Director for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) at Embassy Bangkok, where she coordinated diplomatic engagement for 12 federal law enforcement agencies throughout Southeast Asia. She oversaw a U.S.-led international police academy and separately managed a \$10 million portfolio of specialized police and legal training programs. Prior to that, she led a 700-person team in Afghanistan to deliver a complex \$250 million foreign assistance program to address criminal justice reform, legal education, and gender-based violence in Afghanistan. Other overseas diplomatic assignments have included Cambodia, China, Portugal, Brazil, and Trinidad & Tobago. Domestically, she has served in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA). Originally from New Orleans, she holds a J.D. from Emory University and a B.S. in International Politics from Georgetown University. She is married with three children.

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Room 6: Advancing People-to-People Ties in East Asia and the Pacific



Gurdit Singh

Policy Officer for East Asia and the Pacific, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

Gurdit Singh is a career Foreign Service Officer in the U.S. Department of State. He has extensive public diplomacy experience in leveraging exchange programs and strategic communications to advance U.S. government objectives. As a Policy Officer in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), Gurdit has strengthened people-to-people ties with audiences in East Asia and the Pacific by building smart linkages between ECA programs and foreign policy objectives. Previously, he served as the Deputy Press Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Indonesia, where he led the broadcast and social media teams in advancing policies such as countering disinformation, promoting media literacy, and the Indo-Pacific Strategy. As the Assistant Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Consulate General in Hyderabad, India, he was responsible for overseeing a broad array of cultural, educational, professional, sports, and youth exchange programs. His other overseas assignments include serving as the Chief of Non-Immigrant Visas and American Citizen Services, on a rotating basis, at the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, Gurdit directed a study abroad program for American college students in Hyderabad.

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Room 7: State Department Exchange and Study Abroad Programs



Amelia VanderLaan

Outreach Officer, USA Study Abroad, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

Amelia VanderLaan is a Foreign Service Officer currently serving as the USA Study Abroad Outreach Officer in the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. She previously served as the Assistant Public Affairs Officer at U.S. Embassy Cyprus from 2017 to 2019 managing exchange and cultural programs along with outreach initiatives. From 2015 to 2017 she served in Canada heading the Investment Visa section of the U.S. Consulate in Toronto. Prior to the Foreign Service, she was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to teach in Sinop, Turkey, for one year. She also advised students on pursuing international opportunities when she worked as a fellowships advisor at Smith College and served as a Teaching Fellow at Athens College. Amelia graduated from Smith College with a B.A. in Government. She received her M.A. from the University of Athens in Southeast European Studies. She speaks Greek, Turkish, and Spanish.

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Room 8: View from the State Department's Operations Center



Courtney "C.J." Woods
Watch Officer, Operations Center, Executive Secretariat

Courtney "C.J." Woods serves as a Watch Officer within the State Department's Operations Center, the Department's communications and crisis management center. Working 24 hours a day, the Operations Center monitors world events, prepares briefings for the Secretary and other Department principals, coordinates the Department's responses to crises, and facilitates communication between the Department and the rest of the world. Since joining the Foreign Service in August 2011, C.J. has also served as a Consular Officer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Assistant Public Affairs Officer in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Public Affairs Officer and Spokesperson at the U.S. Embassy in Dili, Timor-Leste; and Policy Officer for East Asian and Pacific Affairs for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in Washington, D.C. He has also completed temporary duty assignments in São Paulo, Brazil; Lagos, Nigeria; and Gaborone, Botswana. During his Foreign Service career, C.J. has received the Superior and Meritorious Honor Awards as well as the Franklin Award.

C.J. was born in Houston, Texas, and raised in Eudora, Arkansas. He holds a master's degree in Public Policy with a specialization in International Development and a Certificate in Nonprofit Management and Development from the University of Southern California Sol Price School of Public Policy. C.J. graduated from Morehouse College with a bachelor's degree in Education and Child Development. During his academic studies, he received a number of scholarships and meritorious honors, including the Oprah Winfrey Scholarship, the Corella and Bertram F. Bonner Scholarship, and the Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Graduate Fellowship. Before joining the State Department, C.J. was an elementary school teacher and worked as a program coordinator at Morehouse and the Georgia Institute of Technology. He also served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mozambique, training future teachers of English and developing a national teacher training curriculum.

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Room 9: Advancing U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities in East Asia and the Pacific



Brian Gibel

Director, Office of Public Diplomacy, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Brian Gibel is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service with over 20 years of experience at the Department of State. He assumed his current position in June 2021. His overseas diplomatic assignments include service at embassies and consulates in Islamabad, Shenyang, and multiple tours in Shanghai (two) and Seoul (three). In Washington, D.C., Brian also served as Deputy Director in the South and Central Asian Affairs Bureau's Office of Press and Public Diplomacy and as a Pearson Fellow on the staff of the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee. Brian graduated from Harvard University, was an NCAA Division I wrestler and has master's degrees from the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy and the University of Sydney in Australia. A native New Yorker, he and his wife Hyun Hee Kim have a teenage daughter.