

# Inside U.S. Foreign Policy

## U.S. Foreign Policy in Europe

### Career Conversations Speaker Bios

#### Room 1: From Gilman Scholar to the Foreign Service



Leyth Swidan

*Political Officer, U.S. Embassy Copenhagen*

Leyth Swidan joined the U.S. Department of State as a Foreign Service Officer in 2018. He currently serves as a Political Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen, Denmark and previously served as a Vice Consul at the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait City, Kuwait. Leyth is also the Employee Relations Liaison for Mosaic, the State Department's employee affinity group for Muslims and those interested in Muslim cultures and traditions. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, Leyth served at the U.S. Embassy in Singapore and on the Syria Desk as a Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellow. He holds an M.P.A. from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and a B.A. from Pomona College. Leyth studied abroad in Amman, Jordan in Fall 2014 and in London, United Kingdom as a Gilman Scholar in Spring 2015.

#### Room 2: Day in the Life of an Entry-Level Consular Officer



Carson Wu

*Visa Chief, U.S. Embassy London*

Carson Wu is the Visa Chief at the U.S. Embassy in London overseeing immigrant and non-immigrant visa processing. He has also served in Beijing, China, Bangkok, Thailand, New Delhi, India, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Kabul, Afghanistan. He was born in Detroit and graduated from the University of Michigan and University of Minnesota School of Law.

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#### Room 3: The Importance of Student Programs



J. Nathan Bland

*Diplomat-in-Residence, Tulane University*

J. Nathan Bland is a career Foreign Service Officer with over sixteen years of experience in a wide variety of areas with the U.S. Department of State. He is currently the Diplomat-in-Residence based at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana where he is responsible for recruiting the best and brightest candidates from diverse backgrounds within Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas for the U.S. Department of State career and student program opportunities. His most recent assignment was as an Assistant General Services Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, Mexico serving as the Embassy's primary Contracting Officer and overseeing logistics for VIP visits. Prior to that, he was the Political, Economic, and International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) Section Chief at the U.S. Embassy in Belmopan, Belize. He also served as the Acting Deputy Chief of Mission in at the U.S. Embassy in Belmopan, Belize for nearly a year.

Previous assignments include a tour at the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs where he led U.S. Government multilateral engagement on marine environmental protection issues in the Caribbean and ocean dumping. He also served as the Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See in Rome, Italy, and a Consular Officer at the U.S. Consulate in Shenyang, China. He began his career with the U.S. Department of State as a Presidential Management Fellow working in the Public Affairs Office for the East Asia and Pacific Affairs Bureau in 2004.

Nathan completed Executive Leadership Training from Harvard Business School as part of the Secretary's Leadership Seminar. He graduated from Seton Hall University's School of Diplomacy and International Relations with an M.A. in Diplomacy and International Relations and an M.A. in Asian Studies. Nathan wrote his M.A. thesis on China's efforts to stabilize the Xinjiang region drawing from his own experience living and working in the Xinjiang for 1½ years. He holds a B.S. in Business Administration from Louisiana College, and also successfully completed the State Department's Foreign Service Economic Studies course.

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#### Room 4: Diversity and the Foreign Service



**Sydney Smith**

*Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy London*

Sydney Smith is the Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy London where she covers exchange programs, misinformation, and open societies, among other things. She previously served as the Spokesperson at the U.S. Consulate General Karachi in Pakistan, where her work focused heavily on press freedom and misinformation. Previous tours include the State Department's Western Europe and EducationUSA offices, Deputy Director of the Community Engagement Office in Islamabad, Pakistan, and Deputy Public Affairs Officer in Peshawar, Pakistan. Sydney has a degree in Anthropology and Sociology from Amherst College and an M.Sc. in Media, Communication and Development from the London School of Economics. Prior to joining the State Department, she worked at the conflict resolution NGO, Search for Common Ground.

#### Room 5: Through Presidential Transitions as a Diplomat



**Kevin Moss**

*Political Officer, U.S. Consulate General Istanbul*

Kevin Moss is a Foreign Service Officer currently covering human rights at the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul, Turkey. In high school, he was a National Security Language Initiative for Youth scholarship recipient from 2009-2010 and studied Arabic in Egypt. He then continued to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona, where he majored in Global Security and minored in Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies after studying at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon, Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan, and Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco as a Gilman Scholar. Kevin graduated with a Master's in Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University, where he specialized in Contemporary Iran and received the Critical Language Scholarship to study Persian in Tajikistan. For his next assignment, Kevin will return to Egypt doing a military detail in the Multinational Force and Observes operation in the Sinai, then continue to Tel Aviv, Israel where he will cover human rights. Kevin joined the Foreign Service in 2016 and served in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and Singapore.

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#### Room 6: Diplomat on Detail: My Year with the Brits



Rita Rico

*Transatlantic Diplomatic Fellow, U.S. Embassy London*

Rita Rico is on a yearlong detail to the U.K. Cabinet Office from the U.S. Department of State through the Transatlantic Diplomatic Fellowship program. She is a mid-level Foreign Service Officer specializing in public diplomacy and press and arrived in London from an assignment in Washington as Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy. She has also served in Belo Horizonte attached to the U.S. Embassy in Brazil and completed other diplomatic postings at the U.S. Embassies in Venezuela, Kenya, and Chile. Before joining the Foreign Service, Rita worked as a Senior Advisor in the U.S. Senate. She holds a Ph.D. from UCLA, M.A. from the University of Guadalajara, and a B.A. from Stanford University. Rita has hometown roots in both Chicago and San Diego.

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#### Room 7: State Department Exchange and Study Abroad Programs



Rebecca Johnson

*Program Officer, USA Study Abroad, Office of Global Educational Programs, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs*

Rebecca Johnson is a Program Officer for USA Study Abroad within the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), where she oversees a portfolio of capacity building and professional development initiatives. She manages the IDEAS Program (Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students), which provides grants and resources to help U.S. colleges and universities expand their study abroad programming. She also oversees professional development workshops for study abroad advisors and alumni of the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program and Critical Language Scholarship Program. Rebecca previously worked as the Special Assistant for ECA's Office of Global Educational Programs and in program development at American Councils for International Education. She was a Boren Scholar to Tanzania and later returned to her host community to partner with local teachers to create an education nonprofit that trains high school and college students to run arts-and-science-based school break programs for elementary school students. Rebecca holds degrees in international relations and journalism from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a Master of Public Administration degree with a focus on education policy from the George Washington University.

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#### Room 8: Teaching English in Europe



#### Theresa Gagnon

*Program Officer, USA Study Abroad, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State*

Ms. Theresa Gagnon serves as a Program Officer in the USA Study Abroad Branch of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. She is responsible for managing the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program and is the USA Study Abroad Branch's liaison for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. Theresa is a Civil Service Officer and has been with the Department of State since 2010. Prior to joining ECA, she was a senior analyst in the Strategic Planning and Analysis Division of the Office of Inspector General. She previously worked on strategic planning, evaluation, and resource management issues in the Bureau of Budget and Planning, and helped implement recommendations from the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review during her temporary service in the office of the Deputy Secretary of State. Before joining the Department, Theresa taught English language and American culture in rural Spain through the Auxiliares de Conversación Program, managed by the Spanish Ministry of Education. She is originally from Seattle, WA, and is a graduate of the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University, where she spent her junior year studying Latin American Politics and Spanish language in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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#### Room 9: COVID-19, Racism, and Our Institutions



**Tina Wong**

*International Relations Officer, Office of Policy and Regional Affairs, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs*

Tina advances U.S. national security through nonproliferation policy, export controls, sanctions, and international cooperation. Tina brings over 10 years of foreign policy, national security, and trade negotiations experience focused on advising U.S. government partners and leveling the playing field for American companies on infrastructure, telecommunications, agricultural, and defense sectors in emerging markets. She has led teams to engage like-minded countries and develop champions who join the United States to open new markets, create jobs, and promote global economic growth. Tina is also a mentor on diversity and inclusion efforts across the State Department and interagency to increase underrepresented groups in international affairs.

Her overseas tours included Beijing, China and Mexico City, Mexico. Her previous domestic assignments also included economic advisor, public diplomacy, and policy roles in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Bureau of International Information Programs, and Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. She was the 2019-2020 President of the Asian American Foreign Affairs Association and is a core member of the Europe Diversity and Inclusion Committee. From 2020-2021, she led a 20-member volunteer team to design, implement, and analyze 2020 foreign service assignment outcomes leading to high-level commitments to improving transparency and strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion. In July 2021, she was elected as State Representative at the American Foreign Service Association where she continues to advocate for data transparency and institutional reform. Tina is fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Spanish. She received her M.A. from the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University and B.A. from Wesleyan University.