

# International Affairs



The sub-field of international affairs is one of the most popular among the undergraduate students in political science. This is not surprising since the fields of diplomacy, international trade, human rights and development remain at the forefront of contemporary concerns.

To begin weighing all your career options, you should first clarify what draws you to international affairs as a potential career field. Are you primarily interested in things like travel, foreign language skills, or in the history and culture of a particular region of the world? Or, are your interests more specific, such as diplomacy or international trade?

This document provides an overview of some options, but students interested in pursuing careers in international affairs should do more thorough research and talk with as many people as they can about possible opportunities including professors and actual professionals working in the field.

## *Federal Government Opportunities in International Affairs*

- **Congress:** The US Congress, especially the Senate, has many members and committees that work on international issues. To gain useful skills and experiences you might consider working in the local or Capitol Hill office of a Congress member who specializes (or sits on one of the various committees or subcommittees) on national security policy, foreign policy or international economic policy.
- **U.S. State Department:** DOS is divided into many bureaus organized along regional (e.g. Bureau of African Affairs) and functional (e.g. Bureau for Democracy) lines. DOS's corps of Foreign Services Officers (FSOs) and Civil Service professionals are involved in issues like conflict resolution, nuclear non-proliferation and promotion of America's political and business interests abroad. Recent developments suggest that there will be an increasing need for FSOs, although the hiring process remains long and competitive (There are several stages in the process, including a written exam, an oral exam for those who pass the written exam and an extensive background security check). The Civil Service offers a second career path in the State Department and Civil Service employees enjoy the same benefits as regular Federal Civil Service employees. Unlike FSO applicants, those who seek Civil Service positions must identify the job vacancy first and apply for them individually. For more information, visit <https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/students/>
- **Department of Commerce:** Many agencies and offices within the Department of Commerce work on issues of trade and international affairs, including the International Trade Administration and the Bureau of Industry and Security. Job opportunities and student internship programs can be found at <https://www.commerce.gov/page/internships-department-commerce>
- **Department of Agriculture:** The Department of Agriculture also maintains several offices and positions dealing with international issues, including the US Foreign Agriculture Service, which maintains a worldwide network of agricultural counselors, attaches and trade offices to monitor international markets, compile trade data and make policy recommendations. Information about FAS positions and opportunities can be found at <https://www.fas.usda.gov/about-fas/careers>.
- **US Agency for International Development:** USAID administers all US foreign aid programs and projects worldwide, and works with nonprofit organizations, businesses, educational institutions and local governments to create and implement programs. For more information, go to <https://www.usaid.gov/careers>.
- Many other US Cabinet Departments and Agencies have offices and bureaus that work on international issues. More information is provided on their individual websites.
- **US Armed Forces:** The US military branches offer recruits significant options for advanced training and work experiences that can later be applied to careers in international affairs, along

with opportunities for extensive travel. Prior military service can boost an applicant's chances for Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department.

- **Peace Corps:** Peace Corps workers take two-year assignments in a variety of countries and the program offers significant opportunities to develop international skills and experiences. While the pay is not great, the experiences can be very rewarding. For more information, visit <https://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/volunteer-openings/>

### *State and Local Governments and International Affairs*

While most attention is focused on the federal government's involvement in international affairs, local and state governments are also significant players that are heavily involved in foreign trade, international tourism and cultural and educational exchanges.

- International trade is among the top agenda items for state and local governments and most states maintain foreign trade offices to promote export business opportunities.
- Because the US is a major tourist destination for international visitors, most states and many locales maintain tourism offices that work with other countries and international organizations to attract visitors and promote tourist areas overseas.
- Increasingly state legislators are adding specializations in international issues such as border relations, immigration and trade. Legislative staff positions in members' offices or committees provide great ways to develop your knowledge and gain government work experience that will prove helpful in securing future public and private sector employment.
- Finally, colleges and universities sponsor numerous international programs involving educational exchanges, economic development and research in a variety of areas, where students can gain international experience by working as research assistants or administrative staff.

### *International Organizations*

- **United Nations:** While the options for careers in international affairs have widened significantly in the last few decades, the UN remains one of the most sought-after employers due to its continued high profile and prestige around the globe. There are several employment programs in the UN and various ways to apply for jobs (see: <https://careers.un.org/lbw/Home.aspx>). Each agency within the UN system maintains its own hiring policies, application procedures, and human resources department.
- **Other NGOs and PVOs:** Numerous international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and private volunteer organizations (PVOs) deal with a variety of issues including development, humanitarian assistance, education, democracy, the environment and health. Career opportunities are located in these organizations' field offices, or in their headquarters, which are typically located in major cities. Examples of potential employers include Amnesty International USA, Sister Cities International, International Rescue Committee, Catholic Relief Services, Islamic Relief USA and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

### *Consulting Firms and Advocacy Organizations*

Consulting firms do much of the work for governmental and nongovernmental programs in international affairs. The World Bank, United Nations and federal departments and agencies such as the State Department and Department of Commerce rely heavily on contractors and consultants. The largest firms maintain offices around the world and deal with almost any imaginable topic.

Political science graduates who also have a background in foreign languages, finance, information technology or management may be strong applicants for consulting firms.

### *Private Business Sector*

Businesses are among the largest employers of individuals in international affairs, as companies and multinational corporations operate in more than one country at a time and rely on internationally savvy people. Possible employment opportunities include (1) working for a US based firm seeking clients and business opportunities in other countries, (2) working for an international firm outside the US and (3) working for a US subsidiary located outside the US.