



BOREN FORUM NEWSLETTER

Volume 1, Issue 2

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WELCOME

Welcome to the second **Boren Forum** newsletter, a publication written by and for alumni of the National Security Education Program. **The Boren Forum**, a new, free nonprofit organization for Boren alumni, is designed to promote the educational, social, and career development of Boren Scholars and Fellows upon return to the United States.

This issue explores the Department of State, the number one agency where Boren alumni have fulfilled their service. Learn more about the State Department and what it does, and meet a Boren alum who works at State. Are you planning on taking the Foreign Service exam? We offer some inside advice to help take off the pressure.

The Boren Forum is now incorporated! In February 2004 we became an official nonprofit with 501(c)(3) status in Maryland. Congratulations to the many steering committee members, who put the paperwork together, worked with lawyers and researched the law.

JOIN

We are excited that the Boren Forum now has nearly **200** members. To join, visit <http://www.borenforum.org> and register to become a member. Explore the website to learn how to network with other alumni across the country, and be sure to visit the new Alumni Photo Album. If you'd like to include pictures

from your own study abroad, send them to info@borenforum.org. Remember to include a caption!

We encourage you to suggest alumni to profile and other interview prospects along with tips from your job search. Share your international interests with your favorite sayings, jokes, and local ethnic restaurants from your country. Please send suggestions or comments to info@borenforum.org.

MEET AN ALUM

Nancy Leeper completed her Boren research on political-cultural geography in Macedonia in 2001.

Yoga classes punctuated by artillery fire make for an odd and disconcerting combination. But **Nancy Leeper** took it all in stride: just part of daily life in Skopje, Macedonia in March 2001. Admittedly, the conflict between ethnic Albanian rebels and Macedonian authorities posed a major "research challenge" for Nancy. She went to Macedonia as a Boren Fellow to study inter-ethnic cooperation projects financed by international grants. The war made inter-ethnic "cooperation" a rather moot point.

Nancy's research grew out of a life-long passion for international folk art. In 1988, she founded a Center for International Folk Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota, that organized a cultural exchange program with performers in

Northern Ossetia, a North Caucasus region near Chechnya. The center also sponsored visiting performers from Central Asia and the Balkans. Her day job, however, involved graphic design. Nancy realized that she needed more of an academic outlet for her various interests.



The University of Oregon's political geography program let Nancy develop and focus her multiple interests. A Master's thesis about a Croatian immigrant association drew her gaze to the Balkans, and the lovely sound of Macedonian (a Slavic language) prompted her to do Ph.D. research in Skopje. It was a close call between Macedonian and Albanian, which Nancy still hopes to learn one day. One of her favorite Macedonian expressions is "*Taka-Taka*" (always accompanied by a wagging hand gesture). It means, roughly, "not-so-bad/not-so-good."

Nancy works at the Department of State in the Bureau of Administration, and is finishing her doctorate on the side. Her section of the Office of Information Programs and Services (IPS) handles special document production in response to various kinds of information requests. For example, she is part of the team that found and processed over 125,000 documents from all parts of the State Department in response to the 9/11 Commission investigation. She got the

job by responding to a NSEPNET posting. Nancy enjoys the people she works with and likes being connected to so many different components of State Department activities. She highly recommends IPS as a Boren-friendly (and aware) office.

Nancy is also taking advantage of other State Department opportunities. In particular, she has a strong desire to return abroad. Nancy plans to take the Foreign Service oral assessment in March under the Diplomacy Fellows Program.

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: **The State Department**

The Department of State is one of the most popular government agencies where Boren alums fulfill their service requirement. More than 100 Scholars and Fellows have worked there since 1996. The State Department's mission is to "create a more secure, democratic, and prosperous world for the benefit of the American people and the international community." This noble cause, coupled with international focus, tends to appeal to Boren alums.

The State Department's job is to protect and assist U.S. citizens living or traveling abroad; assist U.S. businesses in the international marketplace; and to coordinate and provide support for international activities of other U.S. agencies (local, state, or federal government), official visits overseas and at home, and other diplomatic efforts. The department also keeps the public informed about U.S. foreign policy and relations with other countries and provides feedback from the public to administration officials.

The Department of State conducts all of these activities with a small workforce comprised of Civil Service and Foreign Service employees. According to State's website, the Department employs fewer people than do many local governments (i.e. Memphis, Tennessee or Baltimore, Maryland.)



The U.S. maintains diplomatic relations with about 180 countries and also maintains relations with many international organizations, adding up to a total of more than 250 posts around the world. In the U.S., about 5,000 professional, technical, and administrative Civil Service employees work along side Foreign Service officers serving a stateside tour, compiling and analyzing reports from overseas, providing logistical support to posts, consulting with and keeping the Congress informed about foreign policy initiatives and policies, communicating with the American public, formulating and overseeing the budget, issuing passports and travel warnings, and more.

Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) advocate American foreign policy, protect American citizens, and promote American business interests throughout the world. They staff our Embassies, consulates and other diplomatic missions

devoted to strengthening peace, stability, and prosperity.

(From <http://www.state.gov>.)

If you are interested in becoming a Foreign Service officer, you must first take a written and oral exam. The deadline for applying for the written exam is by midnight, Wednesday, March 24. The next written exam is scheduled April 24. If you pass the written exam you are eligible to go on to the oral exam. To register for the exam, visit <http://www.careers.state.gov/officer/register.html>

FOREIGN SERVICE: Fast-Track Recruitment for Boren Fellows

If you are a graduate Boren *Fellow*, you are eligible to skip the written exam and go straight to the oral with the **Diplomacy Fellows Program (DFP)**. The State Department rightly figures that the Boren fellows' competitive selection, language skills, international experience, and graduate studies are equivalent to passing the written exam. In essence, State Department recruiters use the Boren along with the other DFP-eligible grants as "talent scouts."

The DFP encourages our talent pool to apply for the Foreign Service by removing the initial hurdle to application (the written exam). Of course, DFP'ers still have to pass the challenging oral assessment, but the program does at least abridge the lengthy overall application process. The DFP is announced via the State Department's website, www.careers.state.gov/officer/aep.html, and will also be relayed by Dr. Solomon's job e-mails. Deadlines vary from year to year depending on the State Department's hiring needs. Currently,

the State Department is not accepting applications to the program.

Oral Assessment

The oral assessment is a highly selective, all-day examination process. It features interviews, hypothetical questions (if ‘x’ diplomatic emergency happens, what would you do?), a group exercise, and a policy memo. For more details, see www.careers.state.gov/officer/officerorals.html. Fewer than 20 percent of all applicants pass it. Boren participants in the DFP may be well equipped to pass the assessment, but it represents a significant challenge even for our talented group. If you persevere, though, you can end up joining the 100 or so former Boren fellows and scholars, according to NSEP records, who work for the State Department in various capacities (i.e. foreign and civil service).



The State Department is developing ways to improve DFP performance. For example, this past November DFP organizers held a reception that brought together DC applicants with high-level Foreign Service officers. Talking with diplomats represents one of the best ways to decide if the Foreign Service is for you. It will also give you valuable insights into the character traits and problem-solving abilities the oral assessment tries to measure.

If you do not live near the DC area, you may still be able to track down a diplomat to talk to; many major universities have diplomats-in-residence with whom you can arrange an informational interview. (See www.careers.state.gov/diplomats.html#lst.) In addition, the State Department has oral prep sessions at sites around the country. Look at State’s career website for the calendar. You do not have to be signed up for the DFP or to have taken the written exam to attend. These information sessions represent a great supplement to the website in explaining the different parts of the exam and how to prepare for them. It is never too early to start thinking about the Foreign Service. Keep in mind that the security clearance process alone will take at least six months, provided you pass the exam.

Tips on Taking the Test

A certain amount of stress is built in to the oral assessment. After all, the examiners want to see how you handle yourself under pressure. That said, however, there are things you can do to make the process easier. Try to fill out all the required forms at least a week before your scheduled exam. This sounds basic, but some of us who took the exam left this until the last minute and ended up not getting enough sleep. The statement of interest, form 1950 (a kind of resume), and SF 86 (security clearance) take more time to fill out than you might expect. Thinking about these forms will also help you in the interview process, especially with such inevitable questions as “Why do you want to join the Foreign Service?”

Other basics include figuring out the exam location and how to get there by 7 a.m. This sounds easy, but people do in fact arrive late, risking automatic disqualification.

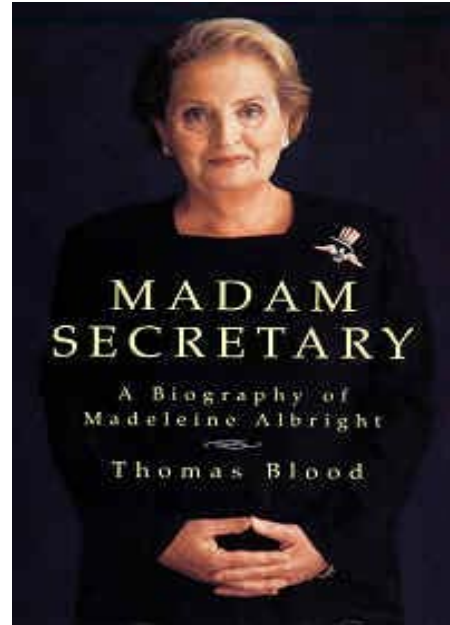


On a higher plane, you can also use creativity to reduce exam-day jitters. For example, four DFP'ers in the DC area met recently to role-play the group project. Each prepared and exchanged a different grant proposal for the fictional country of San Azúcar. Each participant received a packet to digest and present to the group. After these six-minute presentations, they practiced the 25-minute group decision process over which proposal to fund. This kind of role-playing really helps at the actual exam. If you can't find three other DFP'ers, then dragoon three friends.

Above all, don't panic. Lots of very impressive people fail this exam, especially the first time around. If you just barely pass it, you may need to improve your score to make the cut-off for your particular career track. You can do this by demonstrating language ability. Naturally, "super hard" languages like Arabic receive the biggest bonuses. Think of this experience as an interesting test of your wits and poise!

BOOK REVIEW: Albright

Madam Secretary: A Memoir by Madeleine Albright and Bill Woodward, (New York, Miramax Books, 2003), 562 pages.



Madeleine Albright follows the advice of her friend Gabriel García Márquez on how to write a memoir: "Don't be Angry." Albright doesn't try to settle scores in her book. Instead, readers will find a richly detailed and witty account of her personal journey and professional accomplishments and setbacks. If you're interested in what life is like for a high-level diplomat, you'll find this work fascinating. It is also essential reading for those interested in U.S. policy toward the Balkans and the Middle East. These two regions particularly engaged Albright in her tenure as Ambassador to the U.N. and as Secretary of State under the first and second Clinton administrations.

Albright's personal journey from diplomat's daughter to society housewife

to political mover and shaker provides one of the book's most engaging aspects. Her early upbringing as the daughter of a Czechoslovakian diplomat prior to World War II gave her language skills and a firm anti-appeasement, anti-Communist worldview that would strongly influence her diplomatic career. One moving passage recounts her discovery that her family was actually Jewish and that many of her relatives had been killed during the Holocaust. As post-war refugees in Colorado, her parents chose not to dwell on that aspect of her heritage.

This memoir also provides insights about the quirky paths government careers can take. Albright parlayed a Ph.D. and extensive volunteer work in DC into a job with Senator Muskie, followed by a position at the National Security Council (NSC) under her old professor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Curiously, her first task at the NSC involved shooting down a memo she had drafted only the week before for Senator Muskie.

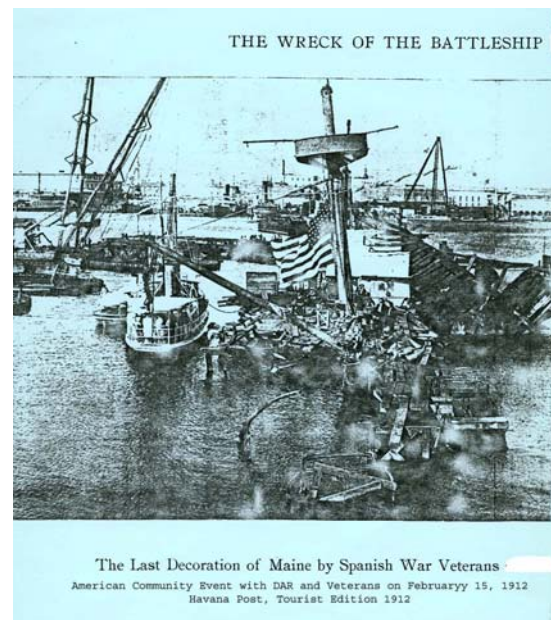
Much of the book focuses on the nitty-gritty of Albright's diplomatic activities. This material may prove a bit dense in parts for some readers, but rewards perseverance. For example, Albright offers sound advice on a range of subjects including how to overcome gender barriers, juggle family and career, the utility of face-to-face meetings, and how to divide the post-Cold War world into what she terms the "Four Food Groups." Although focused on the Clinton years, the memoir also comments on events up to 2003. Albright notes that she supported the ouster of Saddam Hussein but had "doubts about the Bush administration's

diplomatic timing, tactics, rationales, and post-war plans." (287)

The policy sections are leavened by Albright's descriptions of her encounters with various political and cultural luminaries such as Colin Powell, Vlacav Havel and Barbara Streisand. She also makes it clear that she enjoyed a good relationship with the Clintons, especially Hillary, and forthrightly mentions how baffled she felt by the Monica affair. In all, this book proves a fine read.

IT'S HISTORIC – "Remember the *Maine*!"

On February 15, 1898, the U.S. battleship *Maine* exploded in Havana harbor. Two hundred and sixty-six of the men aboard died; only 84 officers and crew survived.



New forms of mass media helped ignite a firestorm of U.S. public outrage against the Spanish colonial authorities blamed for a "perfidious" attack. In fact, the incident probably resulted from an accident: an internal coalbunker

explosion. However, newspapers like the *New York Herald* promoted the bellicose slogan “Remember the *Maine!*” which soon spread to a vast array of media including candy wrappers, buttons, posters, toys, and songs. This propaganda gave President McKinley the popular support he needed to intervene in Cuba’s brutal independence war (1895-1898) which was hurting U.S. investments.

The Spanish-American War proved one of America’s most domestically popular conflicts (Cubans and Spaniards, of course, had quite different views). After all, the war lasted only a few months, produced few U.S. casualties, and resulted in some really splendid spoils – Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam along with hegemony over an ostensibly independent Cuba.

As a result, Americans remembered the *Maine* with almost religious devotion up until World War I through anniversary celebrations, monuments, memorial services, and displays of pieces and objects from the wreck – even the captain’s bath tub! To this day, many Cubans resent how the *Maine*’s memory was used by U.S. officials to foster the idea that Cubans owed the United States a debt of gratitude for America’s sacrifices on their behalf. The official Castro position remains that the U.S. blew up its own battleship in order to have a pretext for war and annexation.

RING IN THE NEW YEAR



Different cultures have developed a variety of interesting ways (and dates) to welcome a new year. In Spain, for example, tradition

has it that swallowing 12 grapes during the 12 chimes at midnight on New Year’s Eve will bring good luck. Boren alumni contributed the Asian traditions below.

Thai New Year (from **Liz Rinker**, 2002 Scholar to Thailand)

The Thais get to celebrate the New Year three different times *every* year! The original Thai New Year, *Songkran*, is a weeklong festival in April that features throwing water at everyone in sight. Unless you are a monk, infant, or are elderly, plan to be wet all day, every day!



Thailand also celebrates Chinese New Year because of China’s powerful cultural influence and joins the Western world in partying on December 31. *Sawatdii Pii Mai!* – Happy New Year from Thailand!

Korean New Year (from **Sarah Oh**, 2001 Scholar to S. Korea)

Koreans celebrate both the solar New Year (January 1) and, more importantly, the Lunar New Year called “*Sol Nal*.” Typically, Koreans gather with relatives in their traditional clothing (called *Hanbok*) for “*Saebae*,” an offering of New Year’s greetings to one’s elders.

The Korean New Year's Day begins with a memorial service for one's ancestors. After the service, the entire family shares a special New Year's breakfast, dressed in their finest silks and performs "Saebae."

The younger family members, (usually children), bow to their parents and grandparents from a standing position all the way down to the floor. This is accompanied by the universal New Year's greeting: "*Seh-heh boke mahn-hee bah-du-she-yo.*" After the children bow, the elders give them cakes, fruit, or money.

HAPPY HOUR

What better way to get to know alumni than to share good spirits over happy hour? The Boren Forum hosted its first **monthly Happy Hour** on December 11, at R.F.D. in Washington D.C. More than 20 local alumni turned out at the four-hour event to meet, greet and network with other Boren alums.

The reponse from alumni was so positive that we brought people together again on February 18 for Happy Hour at the Banana Café, a Cuban restaurant near Eastern Market in Washington D.C. Alum **John-Marshall Klein** contributed to the foreign flair with photos from his study in Cuba. Alumni had most of the Piano Bar to themselves and chatted away until 11 p.m. about study abroad and Uncle Sam.

The next **Boren Forum Happy Hour** is planned Wednesday, March 24, at Gordon Biersch, 900 F. Street NW Washington, DC. We'd love to see you there! Stop by and meet other alumni in

person and *stay in the know* with the Boren Forum.



Bart Goldyn, Chris Runyan and Darby Parliament are all grins at the Boren Forum Happy Hour (Dec. 2003).



Kevin Gormley and David Deutsch are happy it's Happy Hour with the Boren Forum at R.F.D. (Dec. 2003).

NEW MEMBERS

Thanks to the following new committee members for organizing events, helping create the website and for providing support!

Dave Deutsch – Fellow 2000, China

Ben Kong – Scholar 2002, China

Laureen Reagan – Scholar 1999, Tanzania

Bart Goldyn – Fellow 2000, Poland

Stephanie Larsen – Scholar 1999, Macedonia