



the ROBERTSON REPORT

Public Service. National Leadership. Global Engagement.

November 2021



Announcing the Class of 2023 Fellows

RFG is pleased and proud to announce the most recent additions to the Robertson Fellows' network. Eleven new fellows began in the 2021-2022 academic year, which marks the 13th class supported by RFG.

Bush School, Texas A&M University

[Emily Ashbridge](#)

[Christina Baker](#)

[Chase Burciaga](#)

Maxwell School, Syracuse University

[Jacob Emont](#)

[Paul-Donavon Murray](#)

School of Global Policy & Strategy, University of California San Diego

[Elisabeth Earley](#)

[Peter Joseph Wilborn](#)

School of Public Policy, University of Maryland

[Cody Arigo](#)

[JaKyah Beatty](#)

[Naomi Atuahonu](#)

[Megan Whinna](#)

You can see all 28 of our current fellows on our website (new and also second-year students who are in the Class of 2022), where you can read more about their backgrounds, graduate school specialties, and plans for after graduation.

[View Current Robertson Fellows](#)

From the President

Dear Fellows and Friends,

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the new class of fellows! It's wonderful to have all of you in the Robertson Foundation fellowship family. You are joining a fellowship program with an alumni network that is now 200 strong. Your RFG colleagues are engaged in public service work across the U.S. and around the world and I strongly encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities that RFG provides you to meet other fellows and learn from the alumni. You are advancing your education for future leadership in public service at a time when you are critically needed. Fellowships can be transformative for your career and for creating a dynamic network of colleagues and friends that you will come to rely on long into the future.

This is an exciting time for RFG! With new leadership "in the office" and on both the advisory board and board of directors, the staff is working diligently to unveil some new initiatives and programs in the coming months. We are particularly invested in supporting alumni to develop and implement strategies that establish greater connections within and across cohorts.

To that end, I would like to announce that RFG is hiring one of our very own -- [Sharon Swabb](#) (UCSD GPS 2012) will join the RFG staff in January 2022 as our Chief Program Officer for Fellowships and Career Development. One of her key areas of responsibility will be alumni engagement and I know she will bring a fresh perspective and unique approach as both a member of the alumni and staff. Sharon is already assisting with fall programming for the fellows' orientation and alumni career panels. We look forward to welcoming her as a full-time staff member in the New Year!

To all of our alumni on behalf of the Robertson family, thank you for your continued efforts in public service and for making our family's mission a reality. We are proud to have you representing the Robertson Foundation for Government with your diverse backgrounds, experience, and areas of focus united in a common commitment to serve the nation.

Geoff Robertson

Six Robertson Fellows Awarded USINDOPACOM Fellowships





Six Robertson Fellows were awarded summer fellowships with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's Student Volunteer Fellowship Program (SVFP). They had the opportunity to work at the Command headquarters in Hawaii assisting with projects involving national security, defense strategy, and foreign policy. Below is a list of the USINDOPACOM Fellows and the office in which they interned:

[Victoria Adofoli](#) (Maryland) -- Cybersecurity Capacity Building Program (CCBP)

[Robyn Battles](#) (Bush) -- Center for Excellence for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM)

[Ricky Cieri](#) (Maxwell) -- Strategic and Interagency Partnerships Division (J92)

[Phoebe DeVos-Cole](#) (Maryland) -- Strategy and Policy Division (J56)

[Katherine Maxwell](#) (Maxwell) -- Office of Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

[Katherine Seevers](#) (Maryland) -- Command Synchronization Team (CST)

Through the SVFP, Fellows gained unique insight into the U.S. strategic interests and operations within the Indo-Pacific region. They attended briefings organized by USINDOPACOM to learn more about other U.S. Government entities including several Intelligence Community agencies, USAID, and the Department of Commerce. Some Fellows even participated in jungle warfare training at the Lightning Academy where they completed an obstacle course and observed U.S. Army training exercises.

Bush Fellow Supports Afghanistan Evacuation Efforts



[Demetria Charlifue](#) (Bush '22) serves as a Pathways Intern at the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs in the Office of Children's Issues. In July, her office of more than 125 personnel was mobilized to support the Department's Afghanistan Task Force. Read more about how Demetria worked nights to support the Department's historic evacuation and relocation efforts.

[READ MORE](#)

RFG Supports First Ever VSFS Outstanding Intern Awards



The Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS) held their first ever Virtual Intern of the Year Awards on June 30, 2021. RFG President Geoff Robertson made a special guest appearance to announce the winners and to present the VSFS Interns of the Year with cash awards on behalf of the Foundation.

During the one-hour online ceremony, three interns and three mentors were honored, and recognition given to special projects, and achievements by VSFS intern teams. Two of the three mentors recognized - Colonel King from the Department of Defense and Dominique Ramirez from the Department of Veteran Affairs - publicly thanked the Department of State for hosting such a visionary program that has made a tremendous difference in their ability to innovate, communicate, and multiply their results. The third mentor recognized was Megan Ihrie from the State Department, posted in Peru, and working on Chinese influence in South Africa.

[WATCH THE EVENT](#)

Professional Perspective

Two Jabs Forward and One Big Delta Step Backward: Post-Covid we'll see long-term changes in USG work life and a little more internship-to-hiring flexibility

The following article is by Michael Schneider, PhD, RFG's Fellows' Career Advisor and former (retired) Director of the Maxwell School's Washington Public Diplomacy Program.

As of early October '21 the 3rd -- or 4th -- wave of the global pandemic of '20 is changing public service as well as other institutions here and abroad. As the Delta variant sweeps through the less-vaccinated states of the union, America has yet to ring the "all-clear" bell. Rather, we learn daily to our pain that we have miles to go before we can rest from the disease.

One among many symbols of the Covid conundrum is the variety of emerging "post-Covid" employment patterns of the USG. Departments and Agencies have adopted very different approaches to in-person and telework.

Agencies have been given autonomy to decide the details of who returns to the office, for how long, in which configurations. An informal and partial analysis shows that many authorities have kicked this particular decision down the chain of command in many cases: from Dept/Agency down to the Administration, the Bureau, the Division, the Branch, ultimately the Office.

The federal patchwork of responses speaks for the nation's overall response to Covid. Is this flexibility or confusion? Once again, our fractious political culture could not agree on a single

answer to a national challenge. Even the pandemic, so life-threatening, could not focus the nation on a single answer. You've all seen the articles showing how deeply political affiliation has affected whether people are vaccinated.

The current divide in American public opinion has worsened during the pandemic and doesn't bode well for public trust in government

Popular division over the most effective way to respond to Covid reflects rising distrust in governing institutions. The Pew Research Center which has charted American public trust/distrust in government for decades [shows the decline in public trust since the late '50s](#). Trust in other institutions has declined also, but not so broadly as regarding government, especially the Feds. As we seek solutions for the Covid Pandemic, we find national unity at a low point and partisanship very high.

The deepening gulf in political partisanship and rising distrust in governing institutions in turn adds another negative pressure in the daily lives of federal employees. (See also [Partisan Views Affect Trust in Government](#).)

Farewell, government as usual

With the pandemic, on top of broad political trends, it's not likely that "government as usual" will return. Like business and other walks of life, post-pandemic USG work life is likely to be: (a) more varied and flexible in the use of space, time and in ways to cooperate, (b) more tied to new modalities of communication to build trust, since there will be fewer informal in-person ways to know colleagues and (c) more reliant on new forms of engagement with the public.

Former University of Maryland School of Public Policy Dean Donald Kettle outlines twelve takeaways from the impact of Covid on federal governance:

- "....Some jobs are never coming back to the office
- Most employees would prefer a more flexible way of working
- The next generation of workers has very specific wants for the workplace
- A workplace designed for lifetime careers won't attract the most-needed workers.
- There are exciting innovations in federal hiring that need to be supercharged
- We shouldn't go back to 'normal' for most work anyway
- Even if we could return to normal,' it would be a mistake – the world is changing so fast
- There's a growing gap between the public and private sectors in managing these issues
- There's hope in data and artificial intelligence
- What matters most is mission, not process
- Future federal jobs won't be defined by agencies or offices but by purpose and networks
- Outcomes, not authority, will shape the way people work...."

(See ["The Failure of Government's Post-Covid Imagination"](#)) Dean Kettle's conclusions rely on his emphasis on the influence of Gen Z demographics, lifestyle/career tastes and hopes.

A little more in the weeds, a commentator in a recent Mike Causey column in Federal Executive News Service foresees:

- With COVID-driven telework and many organizations recognizing productivity *improvements*, the office of the future will be different physically and in attendance....
- Fewer dedicated offices and cubicles with more conference rooms for occasional in-person get-togethers to refresh relationships and establish consensus on future

plans.

- IT departments will expand VPN security for remote connections and add rules and regulations on personally owned devices connecting to networks.
- The interconnection tools such as text messaging and virtual conferencing have made working from home very similar to in-person activities; especially when those include video, since I can read the skepticism on someone's expression and ask them to share more.
- HR and managers may want to look into Myers-Briggs Type indicators to estimate who is most likely to want to be mostly remote versus on-site; extroverts [would] more likely need face-time with colleagues.
- Restaurants and pubs will probably see smaller after-work group get-togethers.
- "....From a career-promotion standpoint, we may need to check on our boss' Myers Briggs to evaluate whether face-time ranks high in establishing credibility....
- "There may need to be some adjustments to leadership training for those who have not yet moved to managing by results over managing by walking around." — G.R. in Philly

DEI goals will be more important

Along with several really troubling increases in violent crime during the pandemic, we should recognize a few positive national efforts on behalf of greater diversity, equity and inclusion. One potentially significant step was President Biden's Executive Order last spring that required a government-wide DEI and accessibility strategic plan with quarterly goals and individual agency plans.

The EO directs agencies to strengthen demographic data collection, expand diversity and inclusion training and hire or elevate chief diversity officers who would improve their agency's efforts. The President also reinstated a requirement for diversity training, halted by the Trump Administration.

President Biden's EO contains one of the most far-reaching statements on behalf of inclusion and hopes for improved recruitment, retention and professional development of underserved communities, including broader health coverage for LGBTQ+ federal workers, and increased protections for government employees with disabilities (See [Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce](#))

State re-starts its effort to improve lagging DEI programs

The State Department, for one, has established a new Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDIO) position, Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, who will coordinate Department-wide DEI efforts and report directly to the Secretary of State.

SecState Antony Blinken commented, "....The CDIO will align and advance D&I policies across the Department, bring transparency to these initiatives, and hold senior leadership accountable on progress. Our goal is to incorporate diversity and inclusion into the Department's work at every level...." Every Bureau has at least one designated DEI officer.

The Department has long encouraged affinity groups; [check out this list with links](#). However, given its struggles in recent years to recruit and retain minorities and women, the lack of diversity at senior levels and its loss of diverse talent in recent years, the Department and its new DEI coordinator face formidable challenges.

DEI goals also mandate more unpaid internships to broaden the future employee talent pool

Presidential Biden's Executive Order also called on agencies to reduce their reliance on unpaid internships and to increase paid internships, fellowships and apprenticeships. One of the stumbling blocks for economically disadvantaged students has long been their inability to afford unpaid internships that are important to open employment doors. See also a [handy online compendium of organizational resources for DEI](#) from APSIA.

Coming to the USG – greater flexibility in entry level hiring through term/temporary hiring....

In August the Feds announced new regulations to allow agencies to recruit some students to positions on a term or temporary basis. Students working for BA or MA degrees will be eligible. Agencies can use this new authority to hire students to a temporary appointment of a year or a term appointment of one-to-four years. Students will work for their agency at the GS 11 level or below while in school. Students who finish their degrees and meet a series of other requirements are eligible for a permanent position at the same agency.

The key to this new approach is that the Feds may convert interns non-competitively to a permanent position within the same organization, as long as they've completed their degree programs and at least 640 hours of employment — and fulfill employment standards and time-in-grade requirements for the job.

Under the new intern hiring policy, agencies can more actively reach out to recruit qualified students. They can forgo "normal public notice procedures" and advertise the positions widely. Posting to USAJobs isn't a requirement, and OPM encouraged agencies to promote their positions in a way that provides for "diverse and qualified applicants."

It is a little early to know whether and how federal agencies will take advantage of this new opportunity, but it offers prospects for more flexibility in hiring young professionals and moving them into the ranks of full-time employees. The detailed instructions both clarify and at times complicate the process. As the announcement says:

"....This flexibility is critical to agencies' ability to continue to meet current and future mission needs. Intern programs allow agencies to hire students, while in school, and provide them with on-the-job training to prepare them for a career in the Federal Government. It also introduces students to the wide range of occupations and employment opportunities that the Federal Government employs and offers. In FY 2020, the Federal Government hired fewer than 5,925 students Government-wide (a small portion of the number of interns hired under other authorities). The low number of intern hires is insufficient to build the pipeline needed to sustain the Federal workforce."

(See "[Agencies get another tool for recruiting and hiring student interns OPM says](#)") If you want to get into the weeds on this potential opportunity, check 5 CFR Parts 315, 316, and 330; RIN 3206-AN86 - Hiring Authority for Post-Secondary Students.

.... And better opportunities for military spouses

Military spouses might be able to take advantage of [an upgraded DoD program](#) giving preference in hiring spouses. The new guidelines significantly ease the application process and make it possible for individual spouses to apply for work in a wider array of fields.

Another example of DoD's effort to provide greater opportunities for spouses is an annual series of conferences and workshops. [Check out the list from last year.](#)

For Policy Wonks – a few other sources on current and future USG employment

For Policy Works, a few other sources on current and future USG employment challenges:

See Don Kettle's, "[The Battle for the Public Service is Just Beginning](#)". He ably reviews the intense debate over the ill-fated Schedule F and the future of the federal workforce.

If you missed it, see the earlier newsletter article on [RFG support for the Virtual Student Federal Service](#), another indicator of greater flexibility in the USG's search for talent.

For an insightful early analysis of the pandemic on decision making in the U.S. see Prof. Jennifer Selin's article in the Brookings online site, "[How the Constitution's Federalist Framework is Being Tested by Covid-19](#)".

Also, look at a NAPA-Commissioned study "[Building an Agile Government](#)," which recommends that the USG adopt and adapt "Agile" procedures and mindset.

Your experience with telework and thoughts about future change in the USG, including desirable reforms, would be welcomed. [Submit your feedback](#) and we'll share them with the RFG community and others.

DEI Update

DEI Council update

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Council is pleased to announce it has concluded the collection portion of its audit survey of the fellows and alumni. We are working on a brief report of the findings and conclusions, which we look forward to sharing with the RFG community soon.

Additionally, as part of ongoing efforts to foster discussion and promote a shared culture of diversity, the DEI Council is launching a blogspace where fellows can interact, discuss diversity-related issues, and share relevant media content and resources.

For further information or to get involved with the DEI Council, please contact us at rfgdeicouncil@gmail.com.

VISIT BLOG

Upcoming Events

November 10

RFG Fellows & Alumni Social Networking

7:00 - 8:00 p.m. ET

This event is open only to Robertson Fellows and alumni

[Register](#)

November 15

Best Practices in Applying to Graduate School

11 a.m. - 12 p.m. ET

Join the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs (APSIA) for the November session of their monthly introductory webinar on best practices when applying for

graduate school. APSIA's International Admissions and Operations Manager will answer questions about selecting a graduate program, preparing an application, paying for school, career opportunities, and more.

[Learn more and register](#)

December 8-10

Senior Executives Association Virtual Leadership Summit

10 a.m. - 5 p.m. ET

The 2021 Senior Executives Association (SEA) Federal Leadership Summit is the Federal government's premier leadership development and policy gathering that invites attendees to Embrace Change and Lead Transformation. Through evocative keynote speakers, breakout panel discussions, engaging thought leadership presentations, curated workshops, and a dynamic virtual experience, the virtual leadership summit will provide attendees with the tools, resources, and ideas to thrive in this volatile and ever-changing world.

[Learn more and register](#)

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