

## JUSTIFICATION

After one year's experience with the administration of the new Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT), the Department of State has determined that it is possible to reduce the burden on applicants by splitting the current registration process, which uses form DS 1998, into two parts. Previously, applicants registered at the website of the test administrator (ACT) by providing specific information focusing on their education and work history, and also answering six Personal Narrative (PN) questions that required short-essay responses. These essay responses were used to evaluate further only the candidates who were successful on the FSOT, or roughly 40 percent of all candidates.

To reduce the amount of time required for an applicant to register for the FSOT, the Department of State proposes to separate DS 1998 into Part A and Part B. The Personal Narrative questions will constitute Part B, while Part A will consist of the remaining questions from the original form. Only those applicants who pass the FSOT will be required to complete Part B (which will save nearly 2 hours per person for the roughly 60 percent of candidates who do not pass).

In addition, other minor changes will reduce the time required for registration. For example, in Part A, the number of blank fields for candidates to list previous jobs will be reduced from 20 to 15; blank fields for undergraduate and graduate schools will each be reduced from 3 to 2; and the requirement to list Grade Point Averages will be dropped. In Part B, the first of the six original short-essay Personal Narrative questions will be dropped; candidates will no longer have to answer that question, nor provide the name and contact information of a reference who could verify the response.

Previously, the average time required to complete the registration was estimated to be three hours. Following the separation of DS 1998 into two parts, the average time required to complete Part A is estimated at 40 minutes, while Part B requires an average of 110 minutes – for a total of 2.5 hours.

The goal of the form change is to decrease the disincentive presented by the time-consuming registration process, thereby promoting diversity within the Foreign Service by encouraging the largest possible pool of candidates. There was a 38% decrease in the number of candidates who took the FSOT last year, and it appears the primary reason was the added requirement to complete the Personal Narrative questions prior to taking the FSOT. The Department of State would appreciate an expedited OMB review of the proposed form change because registration for the next FSOT will close on October 29, 2008 and the contract test administrator, ACT, is prepared to implement the revised form shortly thereafter. OMB approval in early November would enable the Department of State, through ACT, to begin using the revised form by mid-November, so that candidates interested in registering for the next FSOT (to be given in February, 2009) would find the burden of time to do so significantly reduced.