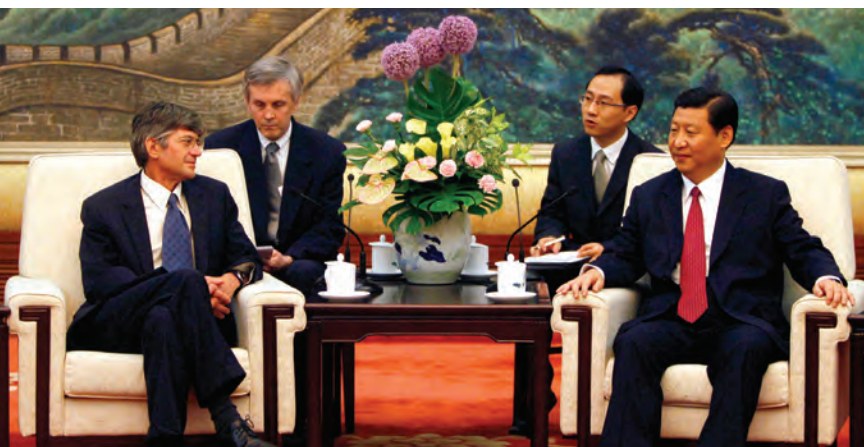


DIPLOMAT



IN JULY, JAMES STEINBERG, DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE IN THE Obama administration, left his post to become the ninth dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. The move marks a return to academia for Steinberg, who served three years as dean of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas before his appointment to the U.S. Department of State. In addition to serving as dean of Maxwell, he holds the title of University Professor of Social Science, International Affairs, and Law. His wife, Sherburne Abbott, also served in the Obama administration as associate director for environment of the Office of Science and Technology Policy in the Executive Office of the President. She is now SU's vice president for sustainability initiatives and University Professor of Sustainability Science and Policy.

An expert in public affairs and foreign policy, Steinberg has moved seamlessly among positions in public service, academia, and think tanks, including the Brookings Institution, where he served as vice president and director of foreign policy studies from 2001 to 2005. While studying law at Yale, he took a year off and worked in the Carter administration's Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1977. In his second stint at the White House, Steinberg served as deputy national security advisor to President Clinton from 1996 to 2000. He sat down with us recently to talk about his career, public service, and his goals as dean of the Maxwell School.

As U.S. deputy secretary of state, James Steinberg traveled the world engaging in diplomatic relations. During a 2009 meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing (above left), he speaks with Chinese Vice Minister Xi Jinping. Associated Press

Steinberg (above right) and Philip Gordon, assistant secretary for European and Eurasian affairs, attend a meeting at the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia, last February. AFP/Getty Images



Former Deputy
Secretary of State
James Steinberg
brings decades of
high-level domestic
and international
experience to his
new role as
the dean of the
Maxwell School

BY CAROL L. BOLL

You were part of a historic administration in Washington, D.C. What prompted you to return to academia?

I told the president and Secretary of State Clinton from the beginning that I planned to serve for about two years. It's been a great honor and privilege to serve, and this is the third administration I've worked in. But I feel a special responsibility to—and special pleasure in—raising our kids [they have two young daughters], and that's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Given the level of polarization—leading to what some call “gridlock”—in national affairs, is it particularly difficult today to recruit young people into public service?

No, not if “public service” is understood broadly; yes, if “public service” is understood as government. From my experience at the University of Texas and in dealing with young people coming into public service, I believe this generation is as public service-minded as any I can recall. We see this in the numbers of young people in Teach for America, the Peace Corps, and all kinds of activism and community involvement. So I think there's a strong motivation to public service, but there also is a certain amount of skepticism about government, so people are looking for other avenues to get involved. We have to think about how to make careers in government more rewarding—and rewarded—for young people; and we *also* have to help them better understand the opportunities through our graduate and undergraduate programs.

What attracted you to public service?

Like many people my age, I'm very much a product of presidents Kennedy and Johnson. As a young person growing up in Boston, the inspiration, the sense of vibrancy and commitment, and opportunity that Kennedy represented affected a lot of people of my generation. And then we saw that carried forward with President Johnson and the Great Society. When I was in college, I worked for the first African American city councilor in Boston and then for Kevin White, a very progressive mayor of Boston, and I had a chance firsthand to see both the challenges and rewards of being involved in the great issues of our time.

In law school I worked in the Carter administration and [later] for Senator Ted Kennedy, which was an extraordinary opportunity. I've worked in think tanks both in the U.S. and abroad, and I've been back and forth between government and academia. I think it's a great strength of our system of government that there is this opportunity for people to come in and out, because when you come back to the academy, you benefit from having seen what it's like to have to put ideas into action. And when you're in government, you benefit from the time of reflection, thought, self-analysis, and critique that you get in academia, so you have new and fresh ideas. I've been fortunate to be able to do both, and I've found both rewarding.

How has the U.S. role in the world evolved since you first entered public service?

This spring I'll be teaching an undergraduate course called America in the World, and that's exactly what I want to get



Dean James Steinberg visits with students in Maxwell Hall.

students to think about—how it has evolved, what choices have been made over our history, and what have been the arguments for different conceptions of the American role in the world. One of the things I've admired about the two most recent presidents I worked for—and three secretaries of state—is they've seen how it's necessary to adapt our role since the end of the Cold War, to understand that the problems are different and our tools or strategies have to evolve to adapt to that. And I think we've been enormously successful.

One of the things I feel proud about—and give great credit to President Obama and Secretary Clinton for this—is we have both restored respect for the U.S. and demonstrated we know how to provide leadership while working with others. And I think that's the real challenge of our time. All the great problems require international cooperation, so we have to find ways to work with others. We can't just do it ourselves, no matter how determined we are. At the same time, we have to provide leadership because we are uniquely placed to do that.

What are some of the essential skill sets students need today to work in public affairs or foreign relations?

I think there are perspectives rather than skill sets. Most importantly, we need to teach students how to ask the right questions and how to think about different ways of approaching the answers, rather than trying to teach the answers. They also need to recognize that in today's world, they have to be able to work alongside people with different backgrounds, cultures, experiences, responsibilities. That is critical to their success,

because it's not good enough just to have the right idea. You have to get people to adopt that idea. And so learning how to build coalitions, how to work with others, and how to make institutions work is a critical skill that transcends any particular problem area or discipline. It's not just having the good idea; it's how to get the good idea implemented that's critical to success.

It's been 10 years since the 9/11 attacks. How did that day change us as a country?

In some ways—obviously, for most Americans—9/11 was a sharp awakening to the problem of international terrorism. But having been in government prior to that and seeing the bombings of our embassies in 1998 and the attack on the USS *Cole* in 2000, 9/11 was just the most consequential of what had been a long-term trend of increasing problems coming from nonstate actors. So, to my mind, that is what's most significant—not the specific terrorist act, but the recognition that in the 21st century, although there are still conflicts among states, the U.S. actually shares quite a lot in common with most other governments.

The places that present the greatest challenge for us are the nontraditional challenges, whether from nonstate actors like terrorists and international criminals, or from natural phenomena like pandemic disease, environmental damage, and climate change. And that requires a different set of tools and a different perspective. Again, I think that's been a hallmark of both the Clinton and Obama administrations. And I think that's important for us to reflect on as we observe this 10th anniversary—that our success in dealing with Al-Qaeda and bin Laden and the like has required both leadership by the U.S. and enormous cooperation from others.

What do you consider your greatest career accomplishment to date?

To have been part of a group of people who have tried to navigate the transformation of the American role from one of a Cold War confrontation to a new kind of leadership in an interdependent world. This is something I think we have done reasonably well as a country. We haven't fallen back; we haven't retreated. Yet we haven't tried to be a hegemon, blowing our way around the world.

I've also been personally involved in trying to build relationships with some of the new emerging powers, like China, India, and Brazil, and I think those are important opportunities going forward. I also think we must make sure we find a way to sustain American values at the same time we pursue our interests—and understand that the two are not in conflict with each other—not only in how we deal with other countries, but how we behave ourselves. I think it was important, coming into

this current administration, that we had a reaffirmation that if we want others to accept our view about universal principles—rights, dignity, rule of law—we have to be faithful to them ourselves.

What are your goals now as dean of the Maxwell School?

There's a "meta-goal," which is to make sure Maxwell remains at the forefront of innovative scholarship and innovative approaches to preparing people for careers that affect the public service. It's a school with a great tradition that's obviously done very well, and that's a wonderful resource. But the world changes fast, and we need to make sure we're adapting and changing as quickly.

I'm particularly excited about the decision, which predated my time, to bring together the public affairs and international relations programs, because I think that's a far-sighted approach that recognizes these areas are not separate and distinct

from each other. There's no "domestic" and "foreign"; they have to be seen as one whole in this era of globalization. Things that happen abroad affect us at home, and succeeding at home requires us to understand the international context. So that'll be a big priority—to implement that basic decision and make sure it's effective. We also must make sure we are attracting the best students and faculty and taking advantage of new opportunities that are emerging as new issues emerge. We

want to make sure we're at the forefront in preparing people to deal with the challenges of our time.

Another priority for me is what's become known as "bridging the gap," making sure we have good dialogue across the spectrum—from practitioners to preprofessional schools to the more academic disciplines. Each has something to contribute to the other, and we can build the connections between them, recognizing each has strengths and can contribute to the others. Maxwell is uniquely well placed to do that because we have both the professional and academic programs here.

And your first order of business?

Maxwell is too diverse a school to have a "first." But, for me, it's to try to both convey to everybody here my own enthusiasm for being a part of this enterprise and, at the same time, try to stimulate everybody to reach a little further, a little higher. This is a school with both great achievements and a great reputation, so I feel very confident about that, and I hope that as a community we can continue to think about how we can do better—in whatever work we engage in here—to make this a special place. «

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