In diplomatic schools across the globe, a fresh generation of young thinkers are learning how to improve international relations from the institutions that spawned today's political heavyweights.

**Preface**

In diplomatic schools across the globe, a fresh generation of young thinkers are learning how to improve international relations from the institutions that spawned today's political heavyweights.

**Writer**

Sasha Issenberg

Talleyrand attended seminary. Metternich went to law school. Kissinger studied political science.

But the era of diplomacy as accidental career path – staffed by learned generalists who stumble into the field of statecraft – has come to an end. The 21st-century envoy, from chiefs of mission to consular aides and even pouch-carriers, is likelier to have been educated specifically to represent his or her country abroad, and have a diploma or certificate to prove it.

There is plenty of work for them to do, as even in an era of austerity, the diplomatic corps are on the march. Geopolitical strategists in Beijing and Brussels see the best way of accomplishing their objectives – China to assert its economic clout particularly in resource-rich regions, the European Union to present a unified policy through its External Action Service – is by populating every foreign capital. Barack Obama’s drawdowns of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan mean a shift in nation-building duties. The US may have abandoned its bases in Iraq but in Baghdad it now maintains the world’s largest embassy – replacing boots with suits. Diplomacy is more important than ever. — (M)

---

**Starting dialogue**

**Santiago**

It’s the last week of the term at the Academia Diplomática de Chile Andrés Bello, and Robert Funk, a widely quoted political scientist from the Universidad de Chile, is lightening up his class with a model United Nations.

He assigns a country to each of the 20 students and gives them a few minutes to prepare before they argue for or against an imaginary motion calling for regime change in China. The students whip out matching tablet computers and get up on their assigned states’ foreign policies.

The students’ focus is no surprise. The academy subjects hundreds of applicants to a battery of tests on knowledge, psychological makeup and the ability to handle pressure, says director of studies Natalia Escobar.

The academy building is the century-old Palacio Edwards, a block-long Victorian façade with a marble staircase, a solemn prayer room and glass-topped cabinets to display diplomatic medals. But hidden inside is the student lounge, an open-plan office full of flat-screen monitors, and the main auditorium, with the clean lines and polished wood of a new private university. The school aims to break out of the traditional walls of diplomacy and connect more directly with the public, says Ambassador Pablo Cabrera, the school’s director.

Chile’s diplomats can keep taking classes at the academy throughout their careers but nothing compares to the first year, with its course of 14 classes in the first semester and 18 in the second. The load is comparable to law school, students say.

With unemployment at a historic low in Chile, the diplomatic corps is trying to attract those who could earn more in law or business. It is recruiting more women and students from beyond the capital. The academy itself also helps, as students are paid while they attend, Cabrera says. “That’s no small thing.” — seb

The lesson: A more diverse intake is boosting Chile’s diplomatic power.
Central planners

Bruges

Its location may be a quirk of history but in many ways Bruges is the perfect setting for the College of Europe. Each day thou-
sands of tourists pour from trains and coaches to stroll the cobble streets and marvel at the chocolate-box version of Old Europe, complete with medieval squares, Gothic churches, quaint lace shops and lazy canal-boat trips. In the midst of all of this, the next generation of leaders, diplomats, lob-
byst and strategists are debating the new Europe, a continent overshadowed today by recession and unemployment, but one in which many young people see a bright future where they can make their mark.

“The EU is so recent when we think about it and it changes so quickly, so persistently that the founders agreed to bring it down to a Capuchin friar and they’re doing now can have an impact,” says Claire Baffert, a 26-year-
old student at the college here.

Nicolaides, director of stud-
ies, boasts a purple inclu-
ding doing a final essay on the Schengen Agreement, he makes a pilgrimage to Bruges setting pre-
dates the establishment of the core of EU institutions in nearby Brussels: it was drawn to a Capuchin friar from Bruges who lobbied so persistently that the founders agreed to bring the college here.

Politicians and analysts worry that soaring levels of youth unemployment – which many blame on EU austerity policies – will create a generation hostile to the very idea of an integrated Europe, and the professors need to prepare their students for the hurdles that lie ahead. Professor Phedon Nicolaides, director of stud-
ies for economics and law, says they now incorporate analysis of the crisis in their classes. But he stresses that they are not there to sell the dream of the EU to the next generation. “If you are not trying to pros-
eyle them, we are trying to teach them to think critically and insistently,” he says.

A chief motivation for students is the opportunity to mix with people from all over the world, and the future networking possibili-
ties that opens up. Enrique Ibanez is typical of College of Europe students. The 25-
year-old Spaniard speaks four languages fluently, has just graduated from the International Relations and Diplomacy MA and would like to work in the EU foreign service. While he sees flaws in the EU – in particular its communica-
tions with ordinary people – he is confident it will overcome the current crisis and emerge stronger. “There are other poles of power emerging, so no single country – not even Germany – could play the role as a whole that the EU could have on the interna-
tional stage.”

The lesson: Europe’s new generation is ready for the challenge.

Learning fast

Kuala Lumpur

A short walk from the room where Malaysia’s post-
independence leaders navigated their fledging na-
tion through the challenges of the Cold War world, the country’s next generation of diplomats is learning the skills of their craft.

“As it’s a Friday, a holy day for Muslims, they start with prayer. The 21 impeccably dressed young men and women, gathered around a conference table, bow their heads and ask God for guidance, forgive-
ness and inspiration.

For the first hour, they’ll talk leadership. In the next, they’re subjected to a particularly hostile press conference. After that, they head to the language lab. While early Malaysian diplomats used to get their training on-the-job, these days they’re required to study for between three and six months at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations in the heart of Malaysia’s capital, Kuala Lumpur. The school’s courses cover not only theories of diplomacy but practical skills such as the art of conversation, how to host a banquet and the most appropriate way to deal with the media. The Institute, which is part of the Foreign Ministry, runs diploma-related courses and 25 language courses last year and devised a number of programmes tailored for diplomats from emerging nations, hosting officers from Lao in the wake of the revolution in Cambodia as well as civil servants from Burma.

“We feel we are respon-
sible and we have the tools – we might be a developing country, but the government allocates the money for this pur-
pose,” says the Institute’s director general Ku Jaafar Ku Shari, who took the job after a diplomatic career in locations ranging from Laos to Croatia.

Malaysia secured its independence peacefully – from the UK in 1957. The new country, largely Muslim but with large communi-
ties of ethnic Chinese and Indian citizens, found itself battling not only a Commu-
nist insurgency but a hostile neighbour in the form of Indonesia. It’s perhaps not surprising that peace, stability and security were placed at the core of the country’s foreign policy.

“Malaysia started from zero and it went through ups and downs, but we can now see the success and how they might apply to Timor,” says José Antonio Amorim Dias, a former-activist who’s now Timor Leste’s Ambassador to Malaysia. Dias turned to the Institute to develop a short programme for his country’s newly appointed Heads of Mission, keen to learn more not only about Malay-
sia’s experience in nation-building but also to boost senior officials’ command of English. “We have to set an example as a good citizen of the world,” says Ku Jaafar. “We must make Malaysia a preferred brand name, a model in interna-
tional relations.”

The lesson: Malaysia is becoming an Asian leader in teaching diplomacy.