

Conference Teaches Diplomacy—From the Master

A group of 250 college and high school students, as well as teachers and State Department staff, filled Main State's George C. Marshall Center in late February for a conference on the former Secretary of State for whom the center is named. Titled "George C. Marshall: The Citizen as Diplomat," the conference was sponsored by the U.S. Diplomacy Center and the George C. Marshall Foundation.

U.S. Diplomacy Center Director Stephen Estrada said that, as part of the center's mission "to promote an understanding of diplomacy and inspire future leaders, we encouraged discussions among students, teachers, scholars and practicing diplomats about the ways the Marshall Plan involved citizens to help rebuild Europe after World War II."

One aspect of the Marshall Plan involved citizen exchanges. From 1947 to 1951, U.S. citizens became informal diplomats and helped the Marshall Plan succeed. A legacy of this is the exchange programs and international cooperatives that promote citizen involvement in diplomacy and expanded the role of diplomat beyond federal employees, said Priscilla Linn, a curator at the U.S. Diplomacy Center.

Lauren Judith Krizner, the Diplomacy Center's education specialist, said that in planning the conference she asked herself how the conference could best help citizens prepare to carry on the role of citizen diplomat and how Marshall Plan programs can teach citizens to better engage in global issues today.

Ambassador John K. Menzies delivered the conference's keynote speech on "Opportunities for Citizen Diplomacy Today," and historian Dr. Jacqueline McGlade spoke on "The Citizen Diplomat and the Marshall Plan." A panel discussion involved representatives from the German Marshall Fund, Mercy Corps and Business for Diplomatic Action, among others.

The conference also featured workshops where students spoke with diplomats on such topics as humanitarian responses to world crises and trade and consumerism. Students also engaged in two role-playing simulations, one where they negotiated an agreement on passing the Marshall Plan and the other aimed at gaining an agreement to end the turmoil in Darfur.

