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St. Petersburg Conference on World Affairs returns, expands to three days

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Distinguished diplomats, military and intelligence officials, media and academic experts from across the country will gather at USF St. Petersburg Feb. 13-15 for the Second Annual Conference on World Affairs.

Sponsored by the USF St. Petersburg [Honors Program](#) and the non-profit St. Petersburg in the World, the conference will include 15 panel discussions focused on the critical international issues of the day.

It is free and open to the public. Complimentary parking will be available at the USFSP parking garage, 260 5th Ave S. The conference begins at 4 p.m. on Feb. 13 and continues at 9 a.m. on Feb. 14 and 15. It will be held in the University Student Center Ballroom, 200 6th Ave. S. [Read more details, including a complete list of speakers.](#)

The inaugural St. Petersburg Conference on World Affairs last year was a resounding success. Several hundred people attended each of the panel discussions. Participants showed their support through both financial contributions as well as their overwhelmingly positive comments on the presentations.

The conference is expanding to three days this year, with more panels and topics with the primary goal to expose the Tampa Bay area to key information and insights on foreign affairs issues critical to our lives and well-being.

Speakers have been drawn from a wide array of disciplines and viewpoints, including a former CIA official, a former deputy commander of Central Command who helped lead the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a former special assistant to the president on the National Security Council and former ambassadors to Lebanon, Bosnia, Namibia and Peru. Myriad academic experts will participate from the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, the University of South Florida Tampa, New College, Duquesne University, Penn State University, the University of Denver, the University of Virginia and others.

“The St. Petersburg Conference on World Affairs has quickly become a signature event for the Honors Program at USF St. Petersburg, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary,” said Thomas Smith, Ph.D., associate professor of political science and director of the Honors Program. “We believe these deep discussions by some of our country’s top thought leaders will benefit our students and enrich our community.”

The conference is spearheaded by Douglas McElhaney, former ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, a member of the Advisory Board of the USF St. Petersburg Honors Program and a founder of St. Petersburg in the World. “We had a great conference last year and are excited about this year’s lineup of distinguished speakers,” McElhaney said. “Our goal is to provide the residents of the Tampa Bay area with insights about our world that are grounded in facts, not political rhetoric.”

St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Kriseman will kick off the conference at 4 p.m. Feb. 13 with introductory remarks. “We are honored to welcome the Conference on World Affairs back to the Sunshine City for a second year,” Mayor Kriseman said. “I would like to thank Ambassador McElhaney for bringing our community together once again to address issues which have significant impact on St. Petersburg’s economic and cultural future. I would also like to thank Regional Chancellor Sophia Wisniewska for including our city in three days of insightful dialogue, helping position St. Petersburg for a key role in the global marketplace.”

Topics to be debated include : “Religion and Politics are Like Oil and Water,” “Africa: A New Success Story or China’s Backyard?,” “Getting Out of the Mideast and Asserting US Power in Asia,” “Sustaining Earth’s Resources is a Left-Wing Plot,” and “American Human Rights Policy Should Stress LGBT Issues.”



Thomas Smith, Ph.D.

The conference will also include a session on Feb. 14 for students interested in pursuing a career in the US Foreign Service. The session will feature Edward Loo, a Foreign Service Officer and current Diplomat in Residence at Florida International University. Former US diplomats will also be in attendance to add their perspectives. A bag lunch is offered by USF St. Petersburg.

The Honors Program at USF St. Petersburg offers academically gifted, highly motivated students an exceptional experience that broadens and deepens their undergraduate education. A distinguished faculty guides special seminars and lectures and provide Honors students with an array of research opportunities culminating in an original senior thesis.

For more information about the Honors Program, please call Thomas Smith at (727) 873-4872. [Read how you can support the Honors Program.](#)

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