



The Virtual Internship Program (VIP) Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida provides an innovative internship experience in the public sector that removes the barriers of the traditional, domestic internship experience, financial or otherwise.

The 21st Century workplace environment is no longer geographic dependent. Assignments, tasks, and work can be done from home as easily as it can be done from the office. Technology has opened the opportunity to allow interns to work remotely while being as effective and impactful as if they were in an office down the hall. Virtual Interns provide an innovative advantage to benefit any office anywhere.

What are the goals of the Virtual Internship Program (VIP)?

- To provide students with an experiential opportunity that will provide a new perspective and develop useful skills for the public workplace.
- To help students explore real-world problems and give them meaningful opportunities to address those problems.
- To expose students to professional experiences and expectations that will better prepare them for the 21st-Century professional milieu, which is increasingly virtual/online/remote and therefore requires stronger time management and communication skills.
- To provide students an inside look at how government offices/non-profit organizations/other public sector offices function in the real world.
- To give students financial support to spend time on-site and therefore experience a professional setting and network with like-minded professionals
- To extend internships to students who have traditionally been unlikely to experience such opportunities due to economic or geographic hurdles.

Why a virtual internship?



- It allows students to receive practical experience in an office or field that might otherwise be unavailable to them due to geographic and financial constraints.
- It accommodates the demanding schedules of our most motivated students.
- It ensures that students are given meaningful assignments. In our experience, the best work is project-based, which can consist of weekly assignments or a larger long-term assignment where students can have an impact in the office.
- It allows students to stay enrolled in classes, thereby saving money and/or not increasing student loan debt.
- In a changing economy, students need to be able to demonstrate productive experiences working remotely/digitally. Students will be able to sharpen their communication skills, and learn web-based skills that any future employer will find meaningful.
- It fits with the objective of the UF College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Beyond 120 Initiative to promote and provide opportunities for student-centered, experiential learning. Preparing students for productive career paths through liberal arts and sciences.
- It aligns with the mission of the Bob Graham Center for Public Service to promote the knowledge, skills, and qualities of engaged citizenship through academic study and research, and to provide opportunities for students to use those skills in real world situations.

What is the student-intern experience?

- The student internship experience will comprise two components—the Internship Component and the Course Component—for a combined weekly effort 9 hours on average (the average expected effort for a 3-credit course). Each component is described more fully below.

- **Internship Component**



Internship Tasks. The student-intern will complete the tasks that are assigned to them by the supervising office, with the expectation that the workload will be 6-8 hours each week on average.



On-Site Visit. With financial support from the Bob Graham Center, students will be expected to spend one week on-site at their internship placement, preferably before the start of the semester in which the internship is being completed.

- **Course Component**



Workday Briefing. The student-intern will complete briefings on the days that s/he works. The briefing will consist of listing internship tasks for the day and logging any communication with the supervising office. This will provide the intern with the ability to track all work activity and communication throughout the semester.



Weekly Review. The student-intern will complete a weekly reflection that addresses the following questions: What did you get done this week? What did you not get done? What helped you to be successful? What got in your way/prevented you from getting certain things done?



Final Paper. The student-intern will submit a final paper (5-7 pages) in the form of a research paper, policy proposal, legislation activity report, or any other form for which the student-intern receives prior approval from the instructor. This paper should be inspired and informed by the internship experience.

- **What else do we need to know about the student-intern experience?**

- Past experience has shown virtual interns as being fully capable of undertaking office tasks such as long- and short-term projects, research, outreach, marketing, product development, advocacy, and communications.
- Qualifying placements include but are not limited to those in government offices/agencies, non-profit organizations, or private sector offices in which the student-intern's primary responsibilities will be related to government/public affairs, although Bob Graham Center staff will be willing to evaluate other placement types on a case-by-case basis.
- Examples:
 - Working for a non-profit organization
 - Working for a local, state, or federal agency
 - Working for a media outlet that covers government affairs
 - Working for a political interest/advocacy group
 - Working for a political party organization
 - Working for a state association

- The student-intern can be anywhere under the sun for the majority of the internship. However, when possible, the student-intern will spend up to one business week on site at the placement office. This will be subsidized by the Bob Graham Center.
- The student-intern will register for IDS 4940: Virtual Internship Program for 3 credits. If the student's home department offers course credit for internships, this internship can be utilized for those department credits with prior approval from the instructor and home department.
- The student-intern will use UF Canvas, to submit all Workday Briefings, Weekly Reviews, and the Final Paper.
- The student-intern will have contact with an internship supervisor (at their placement) at least once a week, although daily or bi-weekly is preferred.
- Before the internship begins, the student-intern will review time management skill building through UF's Gatorwell office, which offers a host of resources - http://gatorwell.ufsa.ufl.edu/health_topic/time_management#Resources Mandatory to view brief course on Improving Time Management - <https://mediasite.video.ufl.edu/mediasite/Play/c8c70d12-5f7a-4daa-b09e-e64868b5e869>

What are the expectations for the supervising office?

- The supervising office will designate a primary contact to which the student-intern will regularly report, communicate with, and coordinate all tasks.
- The supervising office will provide any and all adequate training for the intern as it applies to the role and work the intern will provide. Any additional training as necessary will be at the discretion of the supervising office.
- The supervising office will have the opportunity to interview the applicants of their choice, and ultimately decide which intern(s) they would like.
- The supervising office will provide detailed explanations of the hours and tasks that the student-intern will be expected to complete. Scheduling is at the discretion of the office in conjunction with the availability of the student-intern's academic schedule.
- The supervising office will provide the student-intern with meaningful and appropriate tasks. This program is a symbiotic relationship, and VIPs have proven capable of handling tasks/work that would be assigned to any in-person intern.
- The supervising office will provide weekly feedback and mentoring to the student-intern. If there are multiple interns in the office, the supervising office will interface with all of them at least once a week, either individually or as a group.
- The supervising office will communicate with the Graham Center about any issues, concerns, ideas, and feedback to help improve the program and the student experience.

What role does the Bob Graham Center play?



- Bob Graham Center staff will coordinate all recruiting, placements, and academic credit. The Graham Center will receive all applications, and coordinate interviews with the appropriate offices, although the final decision will be the supervising office.
- Bob Graham Center staff will ensure the integrity of the student experience, offering student support throughout the semester.
- Bob Graham Center staff will serve as instructors for the accompanying online course.

Who is eligible to be a VIP student-intern?

- All currently enrolled full-time UF residential and UF Online undergraduate students with a 3.0 GPA or higher
- Students are only eligible to participate in the VIP **one** semester throughout their time at UF. Therefore, students who have completed the VIP are not eligible to apply for any VIP positions (even with a different VIP employer). However, students who have completed VIP internships are eligible to pursue additional opportunities with the same supervising office in a non-VIP related capacity.

What is the application and selection process?

- Students must complete three required components to the application:
 1. VIP application form (Document downloaded from Graham Center Website)
 2. Resume
 3. Cover letter

*All materials must be submitted directly to Dr. Kevin M. Baron (kbaron76@ufl.edu) at the Bob Graham Center for each position of interest.
- The selection process will function in phases, with students being notified of their status after each phase:
 1. Phase 1. Application review by Bob Graham Center staff
 2. Phase 2. Application materials provided to supervising office for review
 3. Phase 3. Interviews with supervising offices

*The Graham Center staff will assist with coordinating the application and interview process. Interviews will be conducted virtually, either by videoconference or conference call, and arranged with VIP instructor and supervising office. Internship placements will be determined by the supervising office.

Actual examples of virtual internship experiences

- A UF student interned for a Florida-based non-profit advocacy organization. Their role was coordinating an advocacy campaign to gain a state appropriation that would allow medical screenings for high school athletes in Florida. The student coordinated efforts through online and social media education, calling and working with legislative offices in Tallahassee, and working in conjunction with other organizations to coalition build support for the policy. The student developed communication skills, engaged in policy research and effective lobbying, learned how to run an advocacy

campaign and coalition build with supportive organizations, and ultimately saw the state appropriate some funding for their cause.

- A UF student worked for a prominent political fact-checking organization. In their role, they researched Florida politics and politicians, conducting extensive research into statements and positions in order to hold elected officials accountable. The student developed research skills, as well as was able to blog, run social media campaigns, and write their own fact-checks that were published.
- A UF student worked for a national non-profit that created games for civics-based education at the K-12 level. The student was able to develop innovative strategies for outreach and promotion of new games, create social media campaigns for education purposes, develop communication and marketing skills, learn non-profit management, and ultimately produce a product specific BuzzFeed Quiz to gain attention for the organization.

Any questions may be directed to Dr. Kevin Baron, Civic Engagement Coordinator at the Bob Graham Center for Public Service. He may be reached at kbaron76@ufl.edu or at 352-846-1575.