

ISSUE 03
MAY 2021

THE VSFS CONNECTION

Newsletter for the Virtual Student Federal Service

**Virtual interns
are the future!**

Mentor Info Session

May 12, 8:15PM EST

More details inside!

VSFS Info Session For Mentors

Date: May 12, 2021
Time: 8:15pm EST

To join online: [Webex Link](#)
Event Number: 199 300 6991
Password: VSFS20212022

To join by phone: +1-415-527-5035
Access Code: 199 300 6991
Password: 87372021

May 12

NEW YORK CITY	8:15 PM
SAO PAULO	9:15 PM
VANCOUVER	5:15 PM

May 13

SEOUL	9:15 AM
SINGAPORE	8:15 AM
WELLINGTON	12:15 PM

Student VSFS Info Sessions will be held in June and July. Follow us on social media for details.

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INNOVATES WITH VIRTUAL INTERNS

By Megan Kuhn, VSFS Program Analyst

Leilani Martínez had a problem. The Branch Chief had many ideas for Content and Outreach for USAGov, but not enough people, and no funds to hire new staff or contractors. The solution? Virtual interns.

Martínez turned to the Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS), the longest-running remote internship program. Hosted by the U.S. Department of State, VSFS is a free shared resource for the entire U.S. government. Since 2009, more than 10,000 U.S. citizen college students have worked on unclassified projects during their academic year for more than 70 federal agencies. The General Services Administration (GSA) has been part of the VSFS family since

the 2016-2017 school year, and every year since GSA employees and contractors have submitted projects from May 1- June 18 on the VSFS website. Although the internships are unpaid, university students are eager to gain the real work experience that GSA offers. And many find that these internships are eligible for course credit.

Martínez was able to quickly expand her team. This school year University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus, junior **Daniela Sánchez** is producing social media content in Spanish for USAGov en Español, while University of Virginia senior **Julia Lee** is producing content for USAGov. Martínez' advice to her GSA colleagues is not to miss



Daniela Sánchez
VSFS Intern at GSA



Julia Lee
VSFS Intern at GSA

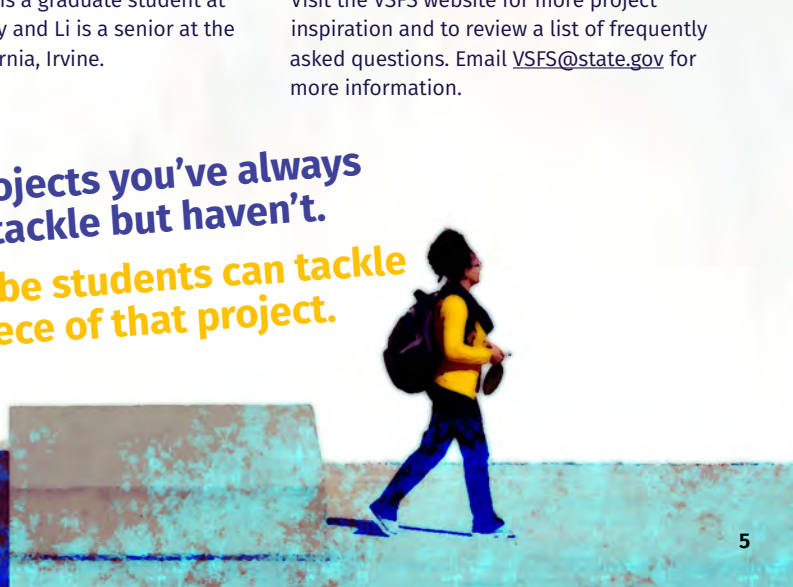
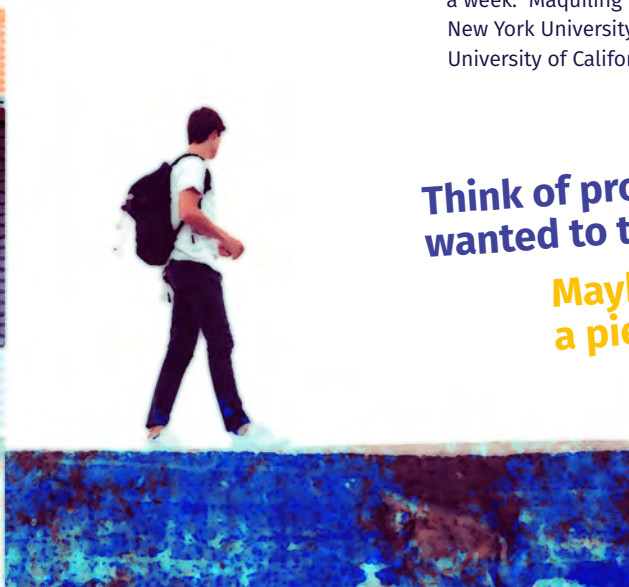
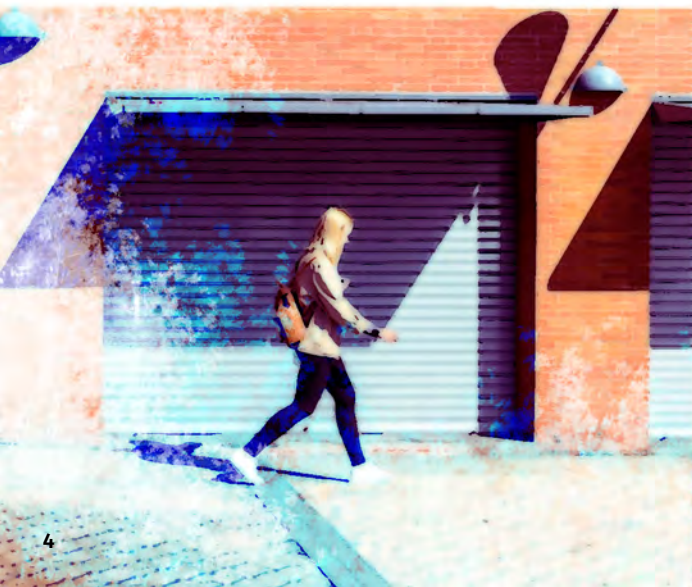
out! "Think of projects you've always wanted to tackle but haven't. Maybe students can tackle a piece of that project," she said.

IT Specialists **Paul F. Volpe** and CSM Division Branch Chief **Shankar Prasad** from GSA IT submitted a coding and design thinking project. Computer science majors **Alyssa Marie Maquiling** and **Taofeng "Tommy" Li** experiment with new software and determine how to integrate new technology into GSA's ecosystem. Volpe raved about Maquiling and Li's work, noting "Their energy has allowed them to oftentimes out-perform senior developers assigned to similar tasks in terms of adapting to and adopting new technologies. It just goes to show how much you can accomplish with focus and determination in just a few hours a week." Maquiling is a graduate student at New York University and Li is a senior at the University of California, Irvine.

Any government employee or contractor can participate as a VSFS project mentor; every project requires two mentors. Once you and your favorite colleague register as project mentors using a .gov email on the VSFS website, you can submit an unclassified project during the annual May 1 - June 18 project submission period. Students apply in July to the VSFS vacancy announcement on USAJOBS.gov. Project mentors review applications, conduct interviews, and make selections in August. Students and mentors begin working on their projects together in September! Internships run through the end of the academic year. The time commitment for students is about 10 hours per week, and mentors engage with students weekly.

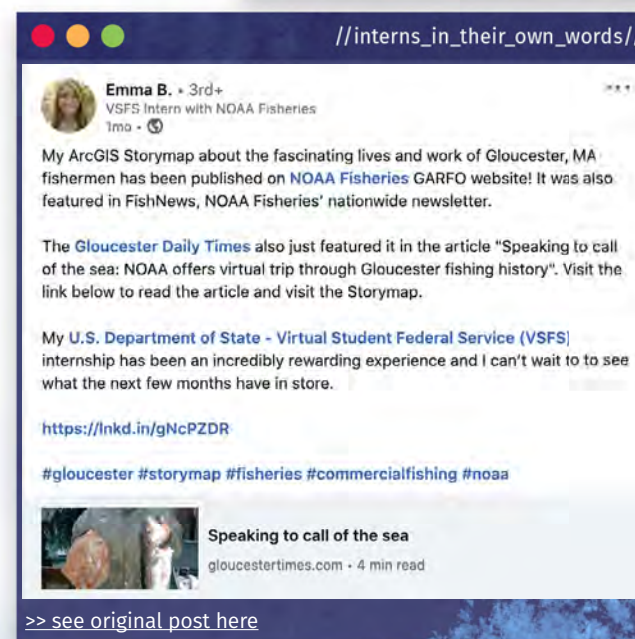
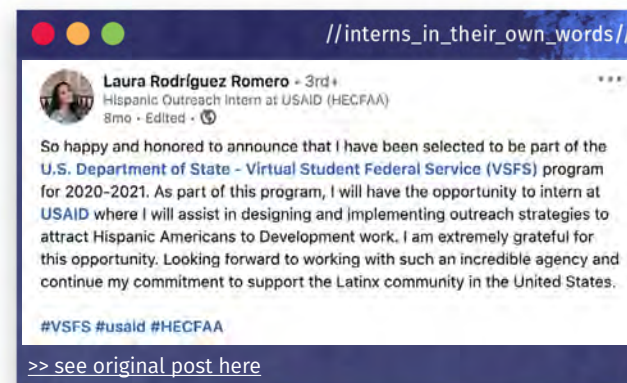
Visit the VSFS website for more project inspiration and to review a list of frequently asked questions. Email VSFS@state.gov for more information.

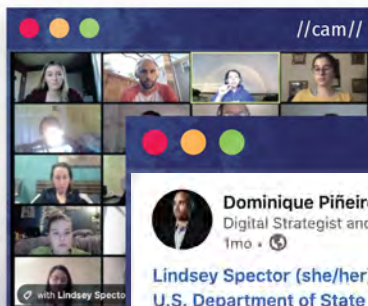
Think of projects you've always
wanted to tackle but haven't.
Maybe students can tackle
a piece of that project.





Interns continue to amaze their mentors with the significance of their contributions.





//cam//

//interns_in_their_own_words//



Dominique Piñero • 3rd+

Digital Strategist and Trainer at U.S. Department of State - Bureau of Glob...

Lindsey Spector (she/her) masterfully led a session on networking for the 40+ U.S. Department of State - Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS) Interns. Always a pleasure working alongside such a talented Digital Diplomat who helps build the leaders of tomorrow. [#networking](#) [#internships](#) [#VSFS](#) [#digitaldiplomacy](#)

>> see original post here



Regina Navarro-Gomez • 2nd

Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs, Virtual Front Office Intern at U.S....

Excited to share a note I wrote. It has been such a valuable experience to connect with incredible women connecting through international programs. Languages and cultures bridge people together in the most remarkable ways, and this was one of many.

Thankful for such an awesome team at the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs who in many ways helped create this note. Also, thankful for opportunities such as the [U.S. Department of State - Virtual Student Federal Service \(VSFS\)](#) program for creating virtual opportunities to intern with the Department of State.

Check it out below:

Each year the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) connects emerging international leaders with Americans across the U.S. Accompanying these groups are interpreters and liaisons who help ensure the Program's success. A Spanish interpreter shares her story in our latest DipNote.

A Spanish interpreter shares her <https://go.usa.gov/xHcqf>

[#internationalexchange](#) [#interp](#) [#virtualinternship](#)

>> see original post here



My International Visitor Leadership Program Moment: Exchanges Impact Interpreters As Well As Participants - United States Department of State
state.gov • 3 min read

//article//

//twitter_feed//

youthdotgov
@youthdotgov

Ada is a [@VSFSatState](#) Intern with YE4C. She is passionate about disability studies and is excited to make YE4C more inclusive for neurodiverse individuals.

Virtual Student
Federal Service
Intern



Ada is a 19-year-old living in Los Angeles, California. She is a student at UCLA as well as a Virtual Student Federal Service Intern. Ada is passionate about disability studies and is excited to make Youth Engaged 4 Change more inclusive for neurodiverse individuals. Keep an eye out for resources relating to this topic on YE4C's social media channels and website

10:45 AM · Mar 29, 2021

youthdotgov
@youthdotgov

Ifeoma is a [@VSFSatState](#) Intern, attends [@Baylor](#), and is a vital asset to the YE4C Editorial Board team! She assists with managing the Editorial Board, creates content for YE4C's website, and created resources to help young people transition to life at home during COVID-19.

Virtual Student
Federal Service
Intern



Ifeoma is a 21-year-old from Waco, Texas, and attends Baylor University where she majors in Cell and Molecular Biology. She is a Virtual Student Federal Service Intern and a vital asset to the Editorial Board team! She assists with managing the YE4C Editorial Board, creates content for YE4C's website, and created resources to help young people transition to life at home during COVID-19.

10:05 AM · Apr 6, 2021

>> see original post here >> and here

//interns_in_their_own_words//

Austin Clark • 3rd+
Legislative Intern at Georgia General Assembly House Of Representatives
3h • 5

Earlier this month I had the privilege of listening in on a conversation between two International Women of Courage (IWOC) recipients and the [Massachusetts Nurses Association \(MNA\)](#) Association.

This was truly one of the most insightful and enjoyable Zoom calls I have attended. The two recipients are nurses. One, a nun who provides care to displaced Palestinians; and the other a leader of a nurses organization in Venezuela. Hearing their stories and conviction for their mission was truly inspiring.

It was an honor to not only author this piece showcasing these important conversations, but to hear first hand the bravery these two women show every day.

Thank you [WorldBoston](#), [Meridian International Center](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), and [U.S. Department of State - Virtual Student Federal Service \(VSFS\)](#)

[#studentinternship](#) [#federalgovernment](#) [#statedepartment](#) [#iwoc](#)
[#studentwriting](#) [#studentsuccess](#)

>> [see original post here](#)

//image//

The Bungee Book Club

Where you come to stretch your mind

//interns_in_their_own_words//

Huyen Maluck • 3rd+
Graduate Student at University of South Carolina | VSFS Intern for USAID
1mo • 5

For the 2020-21 school year, being a [U.S. Department of State - Virtual Student Federal Service \(VSFS\)](#) intern for [USAID](#) has been a wonderful learning experience. I collaborated on projects with my VSFS mentors and the Bungee Book Club (BBC) executive board. I maintained the BBC website (<http://thebbc.info/>), surveyed members and analyzed the data to create a visual presentation, and created a member recruitment video.

One of the highlights of the internship was attending a professional development event hosted by Women at AID, Blacks in Government, and Young Professionals at USAID. I was inspired by USAID Acting Administrator Gloria Steele's story of rising within the agency as well as her message that there is no goal that one cannot reach. I will remember her words, "always follow your North Star," as I strive toward my education and career aspirations.

>> [see original post here](#)

//interns_in_their_own_words//

Emma Kyme • 2nd
Virtual Intern for the U.S. Consulate General Hamburg
3d • 5

This year I have had the privilege of interning for the US Consulate General Hamburg as a Youth Engagement Intern through the [U.S. Department of State - Virtual Student Federal Service \(VSFS\)](#) program. Together with my partner [Bella King](#) we have paved the way for the future peaceful relations between the US and Germany. Because I am using my internship as a "connecting experience" for the BDP Program here at [The University of Texas at Austin](#) where I am pursuing a "Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies Certificate", I was invited to make a poster and soundbite for the 2021 Virtual Poster Symposium to display all of our hard work. Attached is the link to my poster which will be available to view from April 26th to 27th! I am so proud of the work we have accomplished so far and I am excited to see how we impact the world in the future.

>> [see post](#)



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MapGive @MapGive · Apr 14, 2021

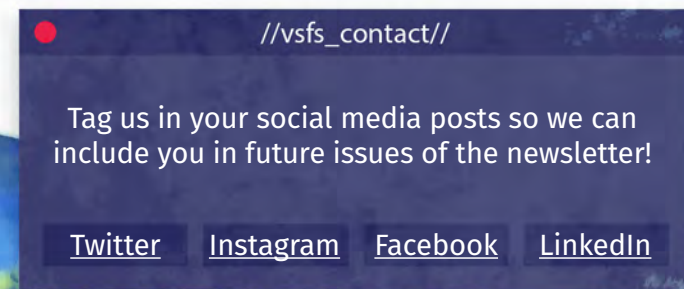
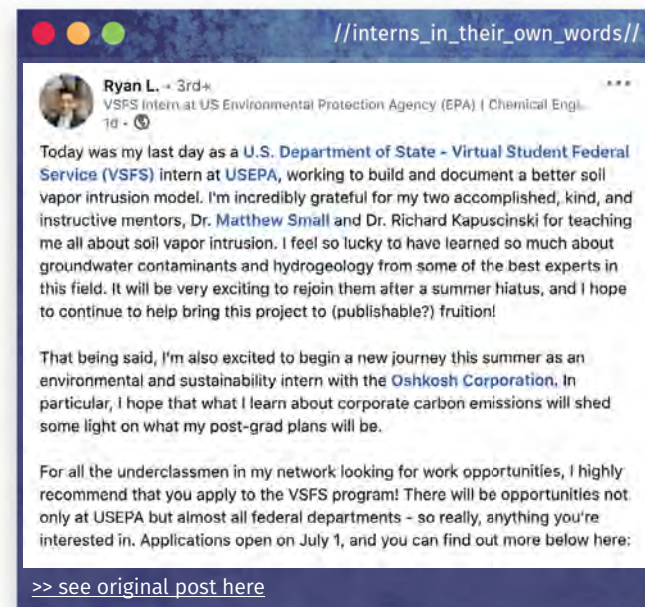
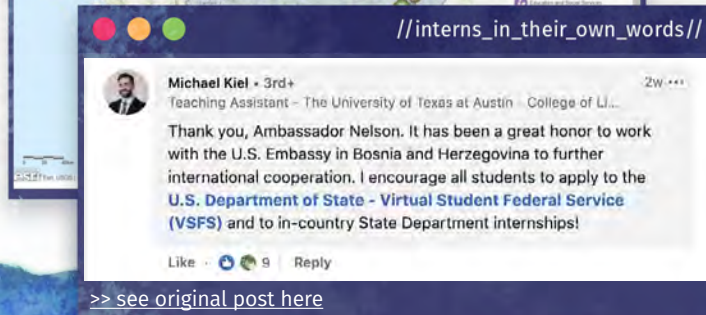
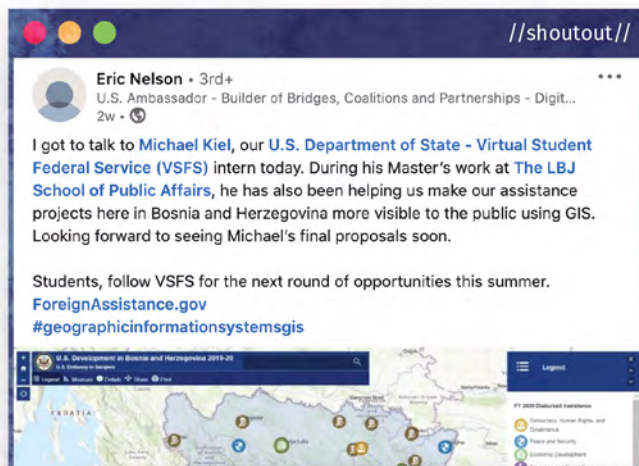
One of our @VSFSatState interns organized a #mapathon with @USC's Delta Phi Epsilon chapter and @YouthMappersTTU to map to fight epidemics in Brazil. Thank you @PatriciaLBrito1 for speaking to the group about why mapping matters for public health! Link: tasks.hotosm.org/projects/10486

MapGive @MapGive

#OpenMapping is a meaningful way to bring students from across the United States and other parts of the globe together. Student Kaitlyn Matyuch said, "I love hearing how mapping can help others." @VSFSatState

8:20 PM · Apr 14, 2021

>> [see original post here](#)



Virtual Federal Internships Open Doors: A Longhorn's Story

By VSFS Intern Ingrid Piña

I'm a digital creative interested in language and international relations. For a while, this sentence felt like an oxymoron until I interned remotely with the U.S. Department of State through the [Virtual Student Federal Service \(VSFS\)](#).

My interest in diplomacy began when I studied abroad after graduating from high school with the U.S. Department of [State's National Security Language Initiative for Youth](#) program. I studied Mandarin Chinese in Kaohsiung, Taiwan for a year. As part of the program, I visited the American Institute in Taiwan. I only met male Foreign Service Officers who led with qualities different from mine. This made it difficult to see myself in their position. While I was inspired by the possibilities of diplomacy, I doubted I would ever engage in that career field.

Returning to the U.S. to begin my freshman year at UT, my "international relations" major seemed to clash with my creative interests. I registered for the wrong classes, struggled academically, and was ready to abandon my interest in international conversations.

VSFS saved my first semester. VSFS is the world's longest-running remote internship program! Since 2009, nearly 10,000 U.S. citizen college students have worked on projects for more than 70 federal agencies during their academic year. Students apply in July; project mentors make selections in August; and students begin working on projects in September.

Scrolling through the VSFS website's [project page](#), I was amazed to see a videography position with U.S. Embassy Beijing. The intern was to produce a web series on American culture. I feel so lucky that the Beijing project mentors **Alys Spensley** and **Gwendolyn Shafer** saw something in me, something they felt belonged in the realm of international relations, something I couldn't see in myself at the time.

My mentors were female diplomats, and they were just as excited as I was about storytelling. With each phone call stretching 7,000 miles between Austin and Beijing, they helped me see myself in international relations again. When they recommended that I continue this path of digital content creation with the State Department, I realized my creative skills were not conflicting with a future in international relations. Rather, through creative communication, I can better

contribute to international conversations!

Without the flexibility of a VSFS internship, I couldn't have made this real-world exploration. Working about 10 hours per week, on a schedule of my own choosing, from wherever I was in the world--no similar avenue to discover the breadth of opportunity within federal agencies exists. VSFS internships open doors to students for whom access matters, and continue to open doors to further opportunities for me. VSFS gave me experience on my resume, and inspired confidence within me to pursue and secure a traditional, semester-long in-person internship with the Office of Taiwan Coordination.

I feel lucky to have also secured a virtual internship during my sophomore year as a visual storyteller intern for the VSFS team. In just a few months, I've interviewed more than 20 VSFS advocates. As interns, mentors and alumni tell me about their VSFS journeys, I've realized that I'm not alone in my story.

I encourage students to apply in July for a VSFS internship for the upcoming school year through the [USAJobs website](#). VSFS is a nine-month internship program open to U.S. citizens who are high school graduates and who are enrolled in a higher education program. Participants can be part-time or full-time students in undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate certificate or degree programs. You can add your email address to the "Keep Me Informed" section on the State Department's [careers website](#) career to be notified when the announcement opens.



Ingrid Piña is a sophomore at University of Texas at Austin majoring in International Relations and Digital Arts and Media.

HIGHLIGHTING VSFS INTERNS



SHAYNA CANTY

Sophomore, Business Management,
Eastern Gateway Community College

CONTENT CREATOR OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL VISITORS, BUREAU OF EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

As a content creator for the Faces of Exchange initiative for a second year in a row, Shayna determines the best way to highlight the impact the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) had on the lives of exchange alumni. The IVLP office paid for her to attend the Global Ties conference in Washington, D.C., in January 2020, where she presented her content. A conference attendee was so impressed with her work, she contracted with Shayna for freelance assignments at a rate of \$20/hour.

"I've always wanted to travel and learn about different cultures, but I've never had the means to do so," Shayna said. "VSFS gave me the perfect opportunity to do both! Because of my internship, I've enhanced my communication skills, gained experience in journalism, received my first contract job, and so much more!"



HUNTER ZHAO

Graduate student, Human Rights and African Studies, Columbia University, Hunter is joining the U.S. Department of State as a Rangel Fellow in 2021.

RESEARCHER EMPLOYEE AFFINITY GROUP GENDER AND SEXUAL MINORITIES AT USAID

Hunter makes recommendations based on research about how USAID can update its hiring practices to create an inclusive environment for LGBTQI employees.

"I now have a better understanding of how diversity works in the workplace," Hunter said. "It's not so easy that you can hire a bunch of people from diverse backgrounds. If you're not ensuring that the work environment is accommodating and inclusive, you'll end up losing people."



POOJITHA TANJORE

Sophomore, International Relations, College of William & Mary and University of St. Andrews

WRITER U.S. CONSULATE HAMBURG, GERMANY

Poojitha uses her German language and English writing skills to increase awareness of the U.S. businesses and exchange programs within Germany.

"My greatest takeaway is being able to use my language skills to connect with others, advancing diplomatic initiatives and sister-city relationships," Poojitha said.



MARISA TISCAREÑO

Sophomore, Business, University of Texas at Austin

RESEARCHER BUREAU FOR RESILIENCE AND FOOD SECURITY

"My fellow interns and I got to share the work of three USAID missions in Ghana, Guatemala, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the 2020 Information and Communication Technologies for Agriculture (ICTforAg) International Conference. I love getting to work with these international groups," Marisa said.



ROSE DESSAINT

Ph.D. student, Psychology, University of West Georgia

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIST PRESIDENTIAL MANAGEMENT FELLOW PROGRAM

"I'm currently working on a virtual meet and greet event, where I will connect different agencies with current [Presidential Management] fellows to help with the hiring process. Bringing the best candidates to work in the federal government, ensuring we have a better and brighter future, is an amazing experience," Rose said.

U.S. EMBASSY IN SINGAPORE

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: CODING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

VSFS interns lead labs to train, test, and deliver artificial intelligence prediction models that classify large sets of texts by keywords.



DANIELLE GREEN

Graduate student, Strategic Intelligence, University of South Florida
Green is receiving course credit for the internship.

"The project for machine learning and artificial intelligence coordinated the time and talents of some of the brightest minds in the nation. Being surrounded by passionate people who are driven by wanting to make the nation a safer place is an inspiring experience," Danielle said.

Junior, Statistics and Data Science, Loyola University Chicago

RACHEL GORDON



"Project mentors Howard Peng and Jameson Hohbein's examples and guidance have deeply encouraged me and helped me learn to lead others, solve problems, and build meaningful connections," Rachel said.



DIANA LIU

Graduate student, Software Engineering, Harvard University Extension School

"I've found comfort in sharing a common set of national security goals with a steadfast group of colleagues and knowing that we are in this effort together. Because of this unity and strong leadership, we've met goals that many could have seen as impossible," Diana said.



TIPS & ADVICE For Interns

Don't be afraid to ask for extra guidance if you need it.

Alex Kremer, VSFS Intern at USAID

Stay in touch with your VSFS mentors after you graduate. We love hearing from you, and when you'd like to reach out to us for references and recommendation letters, it'll help us provide better testimonies about how your VSFS experience contributed to your growth.

Joseph Truong, VSFS Mentor at USAID

Ask for assignments that will allow you to grow personally and professionally.

Danielle Carnes, VSFS Mentor at USAID

Tap into the opportunity. Having a VSFS mentor, they know so many different people within whatever agency they're in. They can match you with people that share your interests and career goals.

Hunter Zhao, VSFS Intern at USAID

It's hard to sometimes know how the activity you might be doing in your virtual internship is going to make a difference. Don't be afraid to ask, how does what I'm working on lead to part of your success outcomes for that agency for that year?

Michael McCabe, VSFS Mentor at USAID

Regular check-ins and early investments pay dividends throughout the internship term. By keeping communication channels open, and engaging the interns I supervised throughout the internship period, I was able to ensure each had an experience that advanced their professional objectives while also contributing to the success of the Agency.

Danielle Carnes, VSFS Mentor at USAID

VSFS supervisors tend to participate over and over in the program because they see that it works. Think about affording even more opportunities to qualified students by expanding your offerings—and consider ways to network interns in your shop to each other and to interns in different parts of the Agency and interagency community.

Dr. Charles Kiamie III, VSFS Mentor at USAID

Like onboarding any new staff members, it is well-worth the time and effort to plan out your internship calendar and tasks so VSFS mentees are set up for success from the get-go. The bit of effort during the summer to prepare for their arrival, their deliverables, etc. yields better results than trying each week to come up with ad hoc projects and activities.

Joseph Truong, VSFS Mentor at USAID

TIPS & ADVICE For Mentors



HOW TO LIST VSFS ON YOUR RESUME & BACKGROUND CHECKS

As internships finish for for the year, here is an example of how to highlight your experience.

Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS) Intern

Name of Agency/Organization (U.S. Department of State, NASA, etc.)

September 2020-May 2021 (or other end date), 10 hours per week.

Then list your accomplishments.

If you are undergoing a background check for future employment or other participation verification, please list your experience as follows:

Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS) with **VSFS@state.gov** as the email address and **U.S. Department of State** as the official agency. The physical address is **2201 C St. NW, Washington D.C. 20520**.

Job Seekers, check out the **ABCs of SCHEDULE A: Tips for Applicants with Disabilities on Getting Federal Jobs**. [Click here](#) for details from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

TOP 5 SCHOOLS WITH THE MOST VSFS APPLICANTS*



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA - LOS ANGELES

173



GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

141



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

120



UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN


120



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

118

(College Park)

 = approximately 20 applicants

*2020-2021 School Year

Music without Limits

Exchange Program Garners Most
Diverse Applicant Pool in its History

Thanks to the outreach efforts of VSFS interns **Sunsariy Cox**, **Ryan Barker**, **Matthew Monteverde**, **Haadiya Numani**, and **Marianne Hughes**, the applicant pool for the first-ever virtual season of the American Music Abroad is the most diverse since its launch in 2011. Before the pandemic, this State Department program sent around 10 music ensembles on month-long, multi-country tours.

The upcoming 2021-2022 tour is entirely online, so the VSFS interns saw an opportunity to broaden potential participants. Together, they contacted more than 100 local governments and nonprofits that support indigenous artists and artists with women, persons with disabilities, and musicians in U.S. states and territories that have been historically underrepresented in the American Music Abroad program.

Groups that applied to the virtual program included 63 all-women ensembles; 18 indigenous artists; nine ensembles that included at least one person with a disability. The applicant groups represented Puerto Rico, Washington D.C., and 46 states, including musicians from 15 states applying for American Music Abroad for the first time.

*By VSFS Intern Marianne Hughes of the Cultural Programs Division,
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State.*

american
music
abroad

Awards Nomination & Celebration

By VSFS Intern Matt Gould

Nominate Your Intern or Mentor for an Award

Does your project mentor deserve recognition? Did you work with an outstanding intern? If so, submit a nomination for our first-ever VIAs (Virtual Intern Awards). Winners will be recognized at 3 p.m. EST on Wednesday, June 30, and will be featured in our newsletter, social media, etc. Complete the nomination form before Tuesday, June 1.

Save the Date for the VIAs

We will reflect on all that our interns and mentors have accomplished this school year (in the midst of a pandemic no less!) and how far VSFS has come in just one decade. We also take this moment to look forward to our future; what better way to celebrate our Past, Present and Future than to bring everyone together for a momentous celebration of the people who make VSFS a success.

We invite you to join us at **3 p.m. EST on Wednesday, June 30** for the first-ever **VIAs (Virtual Intern Awards)** celebration. Enjoy a virtual hour of inspiration and celebration. Keep an eye on your inbox for your official invite, and we look forward to a memorable event!

VIAS

VIRTUAL INTERN AWARDS

PAST - PRESENT - FUTURE

VSFS
VIRTUAL STUDENT FEDERAL SERVICE

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

BE PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER



VSFS
VIRTUAL STUDENT FEDERAL SERVICE