THE VSFS CONNECTION
Newsletter for the Virtual Student Federal Service

ISSUE 01
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CONNECTING STUDENTS TO FEDERAL INTERNSHIPS
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The VSFS Interns have ROCKED The first 90 days of their Respective Projects

The passion that students bring to projects shows that virtual work is real work. Check out page 9 to read about VSFS Intern Emmitt Sklar's fantastic 90 days. Please tell us about your awesome internship experience here, so we might share your story!

Designed by VSFS Team Interns, Deanna Cannon and Ingrid Piña
The U.S. Department of State marked the 10th anniversary of the Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS) during the 2019-2020 school year. Nearly 9,000 college students have worked remotely for over 50 federal agencies since the program began, making VSFS the longest-running virtual internship program in the world.

VSFS began as the Virtual Student Foreign Service with 44 in-person summer interns who agreed to continue working for the State Department, albeit virtually, for the school year. The United States Agency for International Development became the second federal agency to host virtual interns, starting in the 2012-2013 school year. By the summer of 2017, so many other agencies were involved that VSFS was rebranded as the Virtual Student Federal Service.

Setting New Records

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a record number of federal employees submitted virtual internship projects and a record number of students sought out these public service opportunities. Many projects specifically addressed the public health crisis, giving students an opportunity to contribute to the government’s response. Nearly 8,000 students applied from 922 schools. Federal employees from 57 agencies selected over 2,500 interns to work on some 800 projects.

The collaboration between government employee mentors and students creates real-world impact, and generates the success of the program. Interns design graphics, develop websites and apps, translate texts, conduct research, write social media content, and more. With VSFS, a world of impact is at your fingertips.

No matter how you look at it, VSFS is a great opportunity for students looking to intern with the federal government. We thank our project mentors from across government for being part of the VSFS family!
The VSFS Timeline

Having led the virtual internship scene for 10 years, VSFS is just getting started!

- 2009: 1 Agency 44 Positions
  - The Office of eDiplomacy under Richard Boly volunteers to take on VSFS.
- 2011: 2 Agencies 214 Positions
  - Demand for virtual interns increases
  - Bridget Roddy becomes the VSFS Coordinator.
- 2013: 8 Agencies 511 Positions
  - VSFS welcomes domestic U.S. Dept. of State projects and integrates USAID projects.
  - Nora Dempsey joins, and the VSFS team grows from one to two people.
- 2015: 20 Agencies 738 Positions
  - VSFS applicants apply via USAJOBS for the first time.
  - VSFS changes name from Foreign to Federal Service.
- 2017-18: 33 Agencies 1,200 Positions
  - 15 VSFS alumni go on to become Foreign Service Officers.
  - The U.S. Intelligence Community participates transparently, creating unique opportunities for virtual interns.
  - Roddy and Dempsey speak about engaging and empowering the next generation at the 2018 Global Summit of Open Government Partnership (OGP) in Tbilisi, Georgia.
- 2019-20: 55+ Agencies 2,600+ Positions
  - Australia’s Innovative Research Universities partners with VSFS.
  - For the 2020-21 program year, VSFS has a record number of applicants—nearly 8,000.
  - With the COVID-19 pandemic causing many workspaces to move online, private companies reach out to VSFS for advice on managing virtual internships.
  - Amongst federal agencies, VSFS converts 200 canceled in-person student internships into virtual ones.

We’re also doing more to marry technology with global service. That’s why today I am pleased to announce that over the next year the State Department will be creating Virtual Student Foreign Service Internships to harness the energy of a rising generation of citizen diplomats. Working from college and university campuses, American students will partner with our embassies abroad to conduct digital diplomacy that reflects the realities of the networked world.

— Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, at the May 2009 New York University commencement ceremony
Interns have been busy getting wonderful work done for their mentors!

Sophia Athan • 3rd+
U.S. Department of State Intern, Bureau of Global Talent Management
1w • Edited • 0

Today on International Human Rights Day, I had the honor of working on an event featuring Ambassador Sam Brownback, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, State Diplomat in Residence Sebron CB Toney, and USAID Development Diplomat in Residence Alexius Butler. All three speakers highlighted their personal experiences in the field and how different government agencies work tirelessly to end gender-based violence globally.

As a U.S. Department of State - Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS) intern, I was tasked with developing presentation content and branding, moderating discussion, and publicizing this event to potential USAID and State Department candidates in our region.

As DIR Toney noted, Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”

I couldn’t agree more and am looking forward to future opportunities to interact with government officials dedicated to ending gender-based violence everywhere.

Andrea P. • 3rd+
VSFS Intern at U.S. Department of State | MBA Student | Corporate Mento...
2m • 0

My first month as a HECCFAA U.S. Department of State - Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS) intern has been more than I could’ve imagined. I have met Ambassadors, Diplomats, Representatives, Pathways interns, Civil Servants, and more.

Thanks to the HECCFAA team for letting us be part of this journey and sharing your knowledge and time with the interns. A special thanks to Camelia Validejuly and Isabel Romero for organizing the virtual coffees and being the point of contact for this internship. Another special thanks for the wonderful HECCFAA intern team Karina Aquino and Yaritza Marin for your help. I am excited to know what the next months will hold! #internship #statedepartment #careerdevelopment
Samantha Salvatori • 3rd+  
Communications Professional | Nonprofit Lover | University of Nebraska  
2mo • 📣

🎉 We've launched!

One of my first projects this fall for my internship with the **U.S. Department of State - Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS)** was to coordinate a social media campaign featuring State Department employees with ties to Nebraska, South Dakota, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. Our first post went live last week and I couldn’t be happier with how it turned out! 😊

We will be sharing new stories every two weeks for the next several months and I can’t wait to see what comes next! Feel free to follow the State Department page here on LinkedIn or check out our DIR Central Facebook page at ![https://linkd.in/du47VX](https://linkd.in/du47VX) to never miss a post. 😊

#iamdiplomacy #diplomacy #M0diplomacy #ForeignService #internship

David Johnson • 3rd+  
Third-year Law Student  
1mo • Edited • 📣

Although there are many challenges in the COVID-19 world we are living in, there are also opportunities. One I have the privilege being a part of is a virtual internship working on legal issues for the U.S. Embassy in Romania.

This morning I got to have a great and interesting conversation with Ambassador Zuckerman and my colleagues Andrea Fabián-Checkai, Aubrey Collins, and Emily Erwin discussing careers in government and U.S.-Romania relations.

**U.S. Department of State - Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS)**  
#internship #stateDepartmentInternship

Aubrey Collins • 3rd+  
Virtual Legal Intern at US Embassy Bucharest, Romania  
1mo • 📣

I had an incredible opportunity this afternoon to meet with Ambassador Zuckerman and my colleagues at the U.S. Embassy in Romania.

Even during the uncertain time of COVID-19, incredible work is being done around the world on issues such as human trafficking and combating corruption. I am so grateful for these opportunities and for the chance to make a positive impact.

**U.S. Department of State - Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS)**  
#internationallaw #internship #humanrights

Tag us in your social media posts so we can include you in future issues of the newsletter!

Twitter - @VSFSatState  
Instagram - @vsfs_us  
Facebook - @VSFSatState  
LinkedIn - VSFS
From his dorm room in Davidson, NC, Emmitt Sklar works with Foreign Service Officer Jonathan Wedd and Supply Clerk Sofonias Habtemariam at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The college senior is the “Addis Ababa Auction Ambassador,” helping move in-person auctions for excess material and appliances online using a State Department auction platform. This is an especially challenging task because Ethiopia doesn’t have much of an online shopping culture and there is an eight-hour time difference between Davidson and Addis Ababa.

Wedd thought of the project after working remotely due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

"Why not have a teleworking intern too?" he said.

"Not being familiar with the platform myself, I knew I needed an intern who was self-motivated to learn a new system, and who could think of creative ways to attract bidders and convince them to trust the online platform."

Sklar was up to the task.

Sklar’s analysis of the initial online auction results impressed Wedd, and allowed the Embassy to implement changes to auction parameters and strategize for the next auction with confidence.

Beyond this exceptional outcome, Sklar, Wedd, and Habtemariam have made real-life connections. Through sharing stories and experiences with his mentors, Sklar feels that he’s learned about the complexities of the job and the embassy itself.

“I hope my experience working within the embassy to accomplish real-world goals will translate to my work going forward,” Sklar said.

Sklar’s future is certainly bright, as he recently passed the Foreign Service Officer Test!

"I can see already that he will make an excellent officer, and I just hope I have the pleasure of serving in the same embassy with him someday," Wedd says.

The “Addis Ababa Auction Ambassador” project shows how VSFS interns like Sklar inspire real innovation across a virtual workspace. We’re proud of the collaboration between VSFS and Embassy Addis Ababa, and look forward to seeing what Sklar, Wedd and Habtemariam accomplish next.
We asked featured mentors, Jonathan Wedd and Sofonias Habtemariam, and intern Emmitt Sklar to share their advice on VSFS collaboration.

For Interns

Get to know the people you work with!
–Sklar

A new project can help you have a different view, so look for the unknown and the challenge will add to your life.
–Habtemariam

Know that your mentor is not perfect, and it’s entirely possible that you know how to do something that your mentor doesn’t. Play to your strengths, and don’t be afraid to deliver more than your mentor asks for.
–Wed

For Mentors

Make a weekly commitment to connect via video or voice. While a lot of work can be done via emails and shared documents, a weekly teleconference will allow you to really connect with your intern and form a deeper relationship.
–Wedd

See the program as work and a platform to meet new friends.
–Habtemariam

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