

## *A Timely Approach to Virtual Internships*

The air is filled with new clichés: “unprecedented times,” and “the new normal.” Indeed. Yet these new times implore us to think creatively or at least differently about our patterned approaches to everyday things. Take virtual internships, for example. While many may have been reluctant to give credence to virtual internships for their lack of hands-on guidance and supervision, now may be the opportune time to gain a different perspective on virtual internships and their benefits.

Page eight of the [TU Internship Coordinator Handbook \(PDF\)](#) faculty handbook for university internship coordinators outlines explicit guidelines for internships conducted in a remote environment, with clear emphasis on vetting the site and projects, the site supervisor’s expertise, and requirements for communication between the supervisor and the intern. In addition to those parameters, consider these benefits for students:

- Accessibility for underrepresented populations
- Little to no expense incurred for commuting (while reducing carbon footprint), extra professional attire or additional workplace expenses (such as meals out)
- Increased consultation with faculty coordinator (i.e. advice about work-based projects)
- Development of in-demand skills: time and project management; organization; research and analysis; communication across multiple platforms; Internet literacy; global and intercultural literacy through distant and diverse workplaces

Further, students become more self-directed, learn to complete projects independently without constant supervision, thus gaining more confidence in their own work production.

Yes, there are inherent pitfalls with virtual internships. There are pitfalls with the internship around the corner, too. It behooves us as faculty and staff to practice due diligence with every intern and every internship site, remote or nearby, and clearly establish and uphold TU’s expectations for excellence in experiential learning.