



# TEXAS LBJ School

The University of Texas at Austin

Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs

## **LBJ School Internship Policies for Summer 2020 (adopted March 24, 2020)**

The COVID-19 virus could significantly impact internship searches and opportunities for current LBJ School Master's students. To enable current students to graduate on time, the LBJ School is making the internship requirement more flexible. Please see below for these policy changes.

### **General principles:**

The LBJ School continues to believe in the educational value of the internship requirement. It is a means of 1) applying skills learned in the classroom; 2) immersing students in a professional policy environment; and 3) building a professional network for students' future careers. As much as possible, the changes below to current internship policies aim to maintain these three goals.

LBJ policies generally require internships to be full-time (~40 hours/week). However, given the current environment, we temporarily are suspending the "full-time" requirement to provide greater flexibility to students. However, unless otherwise approved by your graduate advisors, all internships should still add up to 400 hours.

### **Increased flexibility of current internship policies:**

#### 1. Virtual internship placements:

The Graduate Advisors will consider approving virtual internships for students' internship requirements. As long as a student still performs substantive policy/management work, and reports to a supervisor regularly (even if only virtually), such internships may fulfill students' internship requirements. Students who have been offered a virtual internship should consult with their Graduate Advisor prior to seeking approval of such an internship.

#### 2. Combining shorter-term internships:

The Graduate Advisors will consider approving two separate internships that, combined, total 400 hours. These internships should be linked—either in terms of policy area, the skills required, or the professional exposure they provide. Students who have secured two such internships, and who wish to combine them, should consult with their Graduate Advisor prior to seeking approval of such an internship. These internships may be traditional in nature, or a combination of traditional, remote, research, or service learning projects.

#### 3. Shorter internship durations:

The Graduate Advisors will consider approving internships that are less than 400 hours, if the student has significant, prior policy/management experience in a relevant field. Students who

wish to use this option should consult with their Graduate Advisor prior to seeking approval of such an internship. In this situation, only the actual hours worked would qualify for fellowship funding.

In certain instances, we may consider fewer hours for students who have had substantial prior relevant professional experience, but who fall short of expectations for a full waiver. Please consult directly with your Graduate Advisor. For students seeking a full waiver, see section 5 below.

#### 4. Alternatives to traditional internship placements:

The Graduate Advisors will consider counting professional experiences that are not internships as alternatives to the internship requirement. These experiences could fall in the following categories:

*Research Assistantships:* Students who participate in significant, policy-relevant research assistantship outside of their usual coursework may request that this fulfill their internship requirements. The research project may be run by a university research center (at UT Austin or elsewhere), a faculty member (at UT Austin or elsewhere), or a think tank. It should require the use of skills that the student has built at the LBJ School, and be policy-relevant. The work performed may not be used simultaneously to earn academic credit (for example, a conference course with an LBJ faculty member may not also count as a student's internship).

Students who have served as GRAs or in other research assistant capacities, whose work fulfills the above requirements, may apply to have this work count retroactively towards their internship requirement, if the work totals (or will total) to 400 hours. Students who wish to count such research experience as their internship should consult with their Graduate Advisor prior to seeking approval of such an internship.

In these instances, research assistantships are considered paid employment and are not eligible for unpaid internship funds from the LBJ School.

If you plan to pursue this alternative, please complete the normal internship application and the additional "Application for Alternative Internship" form.

*Service learning:* Students who participate in significant volunteer or service activities may request that this fulfill their internship requirements. Such work must be combined with some academic, policy/management-relevant work—which will require the supervision of an LBJ faculty member. The supervising faculty member and the student will determine the scope of the work, and the time required to perform the work will count toward the 400 hours of the internship. Students who wish to count such volunteer or service experience as their internship should consult with their Graduate Advisor prior to seeking approval of such an internship.

If you plan to pursue this alternative, please complete the normal internship application and the additional "Application for Alternative Internship" form.

*Current Employment:* Students who had significant employment in policy/management-relevant areas last fall and/or this spring may apply to have this work count retroactively towards their internship requirement if the work totals (or will total) to 400 hours. In these instances, students are not eligible for unpaid internship funds from the LBJ School.

Students who wish to count such work experience as their internship should consult with their Graduate Advisor prior to seeking approval of such an internship.

If you plan to pursue this alternative, please complete the normal internship application and the addition “Application for Alternative Internship” form.

#### 5. Internship waivers:

The current handbook policies on internship waivers remain in effect. Students with significant, high-level, relevant service or professional experience may request an internship waiver. Requests should be directed to the student’s Graduate Advisor, and will require a CV and a cover letter. Because the internship experience is a valuable learning, resume-building, and professional networking opportunity, students with less than substantial professional experience (including project and/or team management) are encouraged to complete an internship, even if a waiver could be obtained.

#### **Changes to the internship approval process:**

Students pursuing a traditional internship will see no changes to the internship approval process.

Students wishing to take advantage of one of the internship policy changes outlined above should start by consulting with their Graduate Advisor. Additionally, they should complete the “Alternative Internship Application” form (found at the end of this memo) and submit it along with their Internship Approval Form.

#### **Changes to the internship evaluation process:**

Students pursuing a traditional internship will see no changes to the internship evaluation process. Students taking advantage of one of the internship policy changes outlined above also still will need to fill out an internship self-evaluation form, and their supervisor still will need to submit an evaluation form of the student. In the case of research internships, this will be the supervising faculty member/research center staff member. In the case of service/volunteer internships, it will be the person supervising the service/volunteer activity. Students combining two internships for a total of 400 hours should submit two self-evaluations, and acquire an evaluation from each of their two supervisors.

We would also like to collect budget estimates (total costs incurred) at the end of each student’s internship so we can better assess our underlying models we use to calculate unpaid internship awards. In your self-evaluations, please include this data.

**Impact on internships taken for academic credit:**

Current policies on taking internships for academic credit remain unchanged. Any approved internship (even if taking advantage of some of the flexibility outlined above) is eligible for academic credit. Students should consult their Graduate Advisor for details, since the MPAff and MGPS handbook rules on criteria for earning academic credit for an internship are different.

**Impact on internship fellowships:**

The internship policy changes outlined above will strain the LBJ School's internship fellowship budget. To maximize equity, fairness, and opportunity for all LBJ students, the following policies apply, regarding eligibility for summer internship funding:

1. Virtual internships are eligible for internship fellowships—students will be expected to apply based on their physical location (not the location of the organization at which they are interning).
2. Combined shorter-term internships are eligible for internship fellowships—each internship requires its own separate application, based on the physical location of each internship. Each internship is eligible only for the duration of the full-time equivalent of the hours worked. [Example: a 200-hour internship is eligible for 5 weeks' worth of fellowship funding in the physical location of the internship.]
3. Shorter internships (of at least 300 hours) are eligible for internship fellowships—but only for the duration of the full-time equivalent of the hours worked. [Example: a 320-hour internship is eligible for 8 weeks' worth of fellowship funding in the physical location of the internship.]
4. Research assistantships should be paid for by faculty supervisors through their individual research accounts.
5. Service/volunteer internships are eligible for internship fellowships—students will be expected to apply based on their physical location during the summer.

As with all internship fellowship applications in the past, the LBJ School will prioritize support for unpaid internships. We encourage students who consider themselves financially stable to not apply for unpaid internship funding. This will allow the LBJ School to more equitably assist the maximum number of students.

**Tips for student planning:**

In these uncertain times, we want to offer some tips and advice on your internship planning. First, know that we are fully aware of how tentative many of your plans suddenly may have become. We understand, and will do our best to be extremely flexible and to work with your individual situations. Your Graduate Advisors are here to help, and to find solutions that best fit your academic and professional goals, which are paramount.

If you have secured an internship, but are unsure whether the organization will cancel its programs, feel free to reach out and ask what their plans are. Many places will not have thought about what to do with summer interns yet (they have other things on their minds). Remember that you can offer to work for them remotely, and fulfil your internship requirement virtually. Also, if they no longer provide funding, you can apply for internship fellowship funding from the LBJ School. If virtual work is not an option (which may be the case for certain internships), then start working on your B-plan (see below).

If you have not secured an internship, but have ongoing applications in/conversations ongoing with organizations, you should also get in touch with them to ask what you can expect. Again, you can always offer to perform the work remotely, and you can apply for internship fellowship funding from the LBJ School. If they say that a remote internship is not doable for them, start working on your B-plan.

The B-plan: (and C-plan...and D-plan): If all of your carefully prepared internship plans start to crumble, don't panic! Contact your Graduate Advisor, to talk through other options. Given the increased flexibility in the internship requirement, you can start working on some potential B-plans:

1. Approach faculty at UT with whom you share academic/policy interests to see if there is a research internship you could set up with them;
2. Get in touch directly with organizations or individuals whose work you have been following during your LBJ career, and offer to help them remotely/virtually in some capacity over the summer. If you can locate a specific project on which they are working and to which your skillset is well-suited, you stand a good chance of having your offer of free labor being accepted.
3. Explore the many service and volunteer opportunities available locally in Austin, and think about which ones would connect to your policy/management interests. The connection can be using your skills (but in a different policy area), or acquiring a new one (budgeting or program evaluation, for instance), or understanding the local aspects of a larger issue (refugees' problems specific to Austin, for instance). Then, think of how you could make that link more robust, and which LBJ faculty members could help you with that endeavor.

The next few months could be stressful. But we at the LBJ School are here to help you navigate the many dilemmas you may face. We want to ensure that you still get the highest quality education that you expect from our school, while also acknowledging that the coming months will require a lot of compromise. Please let us know how we can help each of you in your academic and professional goals!