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Seattle U Students Adjust Summer Plans due to COVID-19 Crisis

Andru Zodrow, News Editor

It's a sentence that has become ubiquitous: COVID-19 is disrupting people's lives. In a normal year, many Seattle University students would be preparing for internships in the city, or deciding whether to volunteer or travel. COVID-19 is impeding some of these efforts and forcing others to adapt.

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers 61% of graduating seniors have participated in an internship or professional development program since 2013. However, colleges and students have now been rattled by a crisis that has forced many of these programs to shut down.



Johns Hopkins hosted a web conference in late April detailing productive ways for students—many of whom view internships as a vital part of their future job prospects—to navigate a summer with few opportunities. However, no college or employer has found a perfect solution.

Sophomore Psychology major Sofia McMillan articulated her worries about a lack of available internships this summer, saying she has received little information from the university encouraging professional development since the start of the pandemic.

"I generally only receive emails from the psychology department, but what I get there in regards to career development is generally meant for seniors who can work full-time and indefinitely. I have not noticed many other ways that Seattle U has tried to encourage professional development during this time," McMillan said.

Sophomore Economics major Anthony Verdugo also spoke about his own experience of the process moving online.

"I think it was a pretty rocky process as far as the communications between the school and the students," Verdugo said. "I understand that it's hard in the middle of a pandemic to give information."

He went on to address the complicated nature of navigating employment and school in the midst of the crisis. Verdugo will be interning remotely while living in Seattle this summer.

"I'm pretty fortunate that Liberty Mutual has continued to offer an internship that I got in the fall of last year, so I'll be doing that internship online," Verdugo said.

Fourth-years students who will graduate into an uncertain job market, are plowing ahead. Senior nursing student Peter Hoang spoke about the opportunities, goals and obstacles he will navigate in the coming months.

"As a senior nursing student about to graduate in a couple weeks, my plans include studying for the NCLEX, which is the national nursing board exam," Hoang said. "I am also currently applying to residency programs in the Seattle area."

Hoang is also hoping to make the most of his summer in a non-professional context.

"I also want to take time to relax and enjoy Seattle as much as I can in accordance with social distancing state policies," Hoang said.

It is likely that a great deal of students this summer will have to focus on personal, rather than professional, improvement. The National Association of Colleges and Employers's mid-April survey found that 16% of summer internships had been canceled, with another 23% in immediate consideration of being axed. Most remaining internships were moved online.

It is unclear what the ramifications of this lack of opportunity for students will be. Even for the students that can intern online, there are still negative impacts.

"You pick up a lot of subtle clues about how to behave in that profession, how to communicate like an engineer, how to work in teams like a nurse," education professor Matthew Hora told the New York Times.

If there is one winner in the midst of the transition to online internships, it is the companies who are already well acquainted with technology and the infrastructure needed to work remotely. Emily Cardner of the software company MongoDB spoke to Marketwatch about her company's move to online internships.

"As a software company, many of the tools we already use are the same, whether you're in an office or working remotely," Cardner said.

For internships that involve community outreach, there are few effective ways to pivot online effectively. McMillian spoke about how the COVID-19 crisis will make it difficult to engage in social work in the coming months.

"I think the only thing that was super disappointing was that a lot of the internships I applied to were based on community interaction and aid—and most, if not all of them, were canceled, which was really disappointing," McMillan said.

It will be an irregular summer for college students, and it is clear there will be dwindling internship opportunities for students that will impact the job force in the coming years.