

DEVELOPING YOUR CO-OP OR INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

What is Cooperative Education?

Cooperative Education is a structured method of combining classroom-based education with practical work experience. A cooperative education experience, commonly known as a “co-op,” provides academic credit for structured job experience. Cooperative Education is taking on new importance in helping young people to make the school-to-work transition, service learning, and experiential learning initiatives.

What is an Internship?

Internships are typically comprised of college or university students who work for a company in a temporary position emphasizing on-the-job training. Internship opportunities usually vary with the level of responsibilities and duties assigned. They may be for college credit or not for credit, short or long term, and part or full time. (When classes are in session, students are advised to work no more than 20 hours per week).

Internships (summer or semester) and co-ops are vital experiences that complement a student's formal education with paid practical work experience directly related to the student's academic major. Internships and co-ops give students the opportunity to combine the theories learned in class with paid practical experience related to their major. Students have the opportunity to develop the work skills that most companies look for in the graduates they hire and they may gain up to a full year of professional work experience. Co-ops and internships give employers the opportunity to assist in the student's development, supplement their workforce with emerging talent, and enhance their long-range recruiting efforts by evaluating students' potential for employment at graduation.

Benefits to the Employer

- Provide pre-professional personnel who are open to training and highly motivated.
- Meet seasonal needs and release professional staff from work that can be delegated.
- Good public relations on the campus when co-op / internship students have positive experiences with your organization.
- Opportunity to evaluate prospective future employees without any obligation to hire them.

Typical Co-op Assignments

A typical assignment requires a commitment of two semesters (eight months) that can be satisfied in a variety of ways. Students can work four months, return to classes for a semester, and then complete the remaining four months. Students may also opt to work during the Spring-Summer semester and either the Fall or Winter semesters to fulfill the eight months. Two summers do not constitute a co-op experience.

Typical Internship Assignments

A typical assignment can run from 8 weeks to several years. Multiple internships are possible throughout a student's college attendance.

Student Eligibility

Students should be in good academic standing at the University with a preferred GPA of 2.75, and completed the basic mathematics and science courses. Students should also have completed between 35-55 credit hours towards their degree program to be considered for an assignment. Transfer students may apply during their first semester at the university.

Commitment from Management

For a successful program, everyone involved must cooperate, from HR, to supervisors, to co-workers, to management. Co-op and internship programs require funding, time, resources, and personnel to be successful.

If you choose a multiple-work-term arrangement, you as the employer must make the commitment for the student to fit into your organization's goals with program assignments over the work terms.

Issues to be considered in creating and sustaining a quality program:

- Salary
- Funding for recruitment efforts
- Time and funding to train program coordinators / supervisors
- Involving management from the top down
- Using staff to train, supervise and mentor students
- Involving students as an integral part of the organization
- Providing meaningful work assignments

Assignment Planning

- Develop quality and meaningful work assignments for students. Students say that having a well-defined project with associated daily tasks is something they value in a co-op or internship position.
- Determine eligibility requirements, including appropriate undergraduate majors, preferred grade point average, skills needed, and work/school rotations.
- Put the job description in writing. (Post on Handshake)
- If multiple work terms are desired, plan for the second and third work terms to build upon and exceed the responsibilities of the previous work term(s).
- The student is required to consult with his or her supervisor before beginning work to create learning objectives for the work term — to which the supervisor must agree. Be prepared to suggest learning objectives appropriate to the student's assignment in your organization.
- Provide the student with an orientation to organizational policies, procedures, and utilization of resources, as well as job-specific training.
- Plan for effective supervision. See more on supervision below.
- Have students participate in training and professional development opportunities available to other employees.
- In addition to the supervisor, assign a mentor who can provide additional guidance to the student.
- Provide consistent and appropriate feedback to the student throughout the work assignment.
- Have students give written and verbal reports on projects that are in progress or have been completed.

Salary Factors for Employer Consideration

Major / career field: Co-op and internship salaries tend to resemble salaries of entry-level employees in the same field. This is particularly true for technical majors.

- GPA: Top students in any major may require higher salaries if your organization wishes to be competitive.
- Academic level (sophomore, junior or senior level).
- Whether the work assignment is the student's 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc., with the employer. Most organizations give students a raise each time they return for subsequent work assignments.

Benefits

Students who participate in the Cooperative Education and Internship Program must be enrolled with the university during their work terms. This allows students to remain covered by the same health insurance that covers them while they are enrolled in courses.

Employing organizations vary in the extent to which they provide benefits (sick days, vacation time, tuition reimbursement, etc.) to co-ops and interns. Your organization should provide any benefit information, depending on your legal requirements, your internal policies, and the standards in your field.

Supervision

- Provide a positive experience that encourages the academic, professional, and personal growth of the student.
- One of the primary reasons students choose to co-op or intern is to learn — a supervisor should be interested in ongoing teaching and coaching.
- The supervisor should be committed to and enthusiastic about students' co-op or internship program and should understand the program requirements and the time commitment.
- The supervisor should have good interpersonal skills, technical expertise, and the ability to help students understand their contributions toward the overall objective of your organization.
- A supervisor should be able to provide the student with on-going feedback, and create an environment where the student is able to work and learn.

Educational/Experiential Learning

Co-oping is not just a job service. CECS evaluates each employer's suggested co-op position thoroughly before placing a student in it. In that evaluation, we look for the total educational/experiential learning package not just a salary and the number of hours that a student will be working. We require each student to submit a work report each semester that they work. Work reports are often shared with department heads so that they can let their faculty know of their students' work experiences.

More Information

For more information about Internships, read 15 Best Practices for Internship Programs by National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)

www.nacweb.org/Knowledge/Recruiting/Best_Practices/15_Best_Practices_for_Internship_Programs.aspx