Cooperative Education
Best Practices Guide for Employers

The Purdue Cooperative Education (Co-Op) Programs, run by the Office of Professional Practice (OPP), are academic programs that allow for a mixture of classroom learning and industry experience. Co-Op students rotate each term between classes and work sessions, with the option of conducting 3 or 5 work sessions. Students graduate from the Co-Op program with 10-20 months of work experience in addition to their degree. The Co-Op program is explained in detail in this document with the hope that you will consider starting a Co-Op program at your company.

Sincerely,

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Why should employers participate in the Co-Op program?

Employers choose to participate in the Co-Op program for many reasons. Here are some of them:

1. Recruitment of top university talent:
   - Co-Op is a program that attracts the best and brightest students. By participating in our Co-Op programs you are able to recruit this talent into your organization.
   - Many companies do not realize how much they actually spend on recruiting. Recruiting efforts require personnel hours for fairs and interviews, travel expenses, display and handout printing expenses, and event registration costs.
   - Recruitment is not an exact science. It is very difficult to anticipate exactly how a candidate will perform based upon a resume and a short interview. This variable is removed when hiring the company's Co-Op students since their job performance has already been seen.
   - Co-Op students talk to their classmates about their work experiences. This is a free form of advertising that is often overlooked by companies. Co-Op students tend to get an in depth understanding of their company and are able to convey that knowledge to their peers. These students might also be willing to volunteer their time at recruiting events while they are on campus taking classes.

2. Improved employee retention:
   - Co-Op students that return to their employers after graduation tend to stay at the company for longer than their counterparts. The student is less likely to have false expectations of their new position, which lessens their potential to become discontent with their job.
   - The increased employee retention noted above also leads to a decrease in the need for additional recruitment in the long term.

3. Improved work performance:
   - Co-Op students require little to no training when starting a fulltime job with their employer after graduation. In most cases, they are able to start off with much more responsibility and productivity than their peers.

4. Lower labor costs:
   - Co-Op students typically earn a percentage of a full-time starting salary, with that percentage increasing as they return to subsequent sessions. As the student progress throughout their sessions, they can be given fulltime employee tasks. Since Co-Op students are highly motivated, it makes them a great investment in the productivity of the company.
   - Co-Op students do not typically receive benefits that fulltime employees do. Benefits can account for up to 35% of personnel costs, which a company will save when employing Co-Op students while receiving the work performance of a fulltime employee.
What does a Co-Op student do?

There is a wide range of responsibilities that can be assigned to Co-Op students. Purdue’s Cooperative Education Program currently serves multiple colleges on campus including Engineering, Krannert School of Management, Science and Technology, as well as some disciplines in Agriculture, Liberal Arts, Pharmacy, and Health & Human Sciences. Common job responsibilities for Co-Op students are described below. Companies may choose one single approach or a combination of several.

1. Assistant to a position:
   • If a company is growing but is not willing to hire an additional full-time employee, a Co-Op student can help ease the strain on employees. The relationship dynamic between the employee and the Co-Op student can be beneficial to both parties.
   • Co-Op students can often bring new perspectives and innovative views, which has many benefits to the company.

2. Project work:
   • While first term Co-Op students may not be able to independently complete projects, they can aid regular full-time employees in completing many items on a project checklist.
   • Possible tasks include, but are not limited to: data gathering, data analysis, statistical analysis, experiments, comparison studies, vendor interaction, and project proposal writing.

3. Trainee:
   • This role can vary based on company need, but the goal is to train Co-Op students throughout their sessions so they can function as a full-time employee immediately after graduation.
How should a Co-Op program be run?

Below is a comprehensive list of best practices based on information gathered by the Purdue Office of Professional Practice from observing many successful Co-Op employers.

1. Job descriptions:
   - Detailed job descriptions should be created for each session. These should include general expectations and outcomes, as well as level of work to be completed.
   - Work assigned should increase in difficulty as the student progresses through their sessions.
   - The main purpose of job descriptions should be to guide the Co-Op manager in assigning appropriate tasks and to provide a guideline for the Co-Op student to know what is expected.
   - The Co-Op supervisor should conduct at least one mid-work session performance feedback meeting with the Co-Op student in addition to a performance review at the end of the session.

2. Salary:
   - There should be a plan in place for salary progression between work sessions.
   - Starting salary should be competitive in order to attract students, but final salary should be low enough to ensure an attractive full-time job salary.
   - Benefits vary between companies. Paid holidays and insurance are not commonly offered. However, seniority (work sessions counting toward seniority for full-time employment), relocation and housing assistance are more common benefits.

3. Program maintenance:
   - Develop supervisors to mentor students and develop their technical skills.
   - Periodically review job descriptions as the program evolves.
   - Regularly update salary schedules based on when salaries for full-time employees are updated.
   - Build a working relationship with OPP and Co-Op coordinators.
How to start participation in the Co-Op program?

Here are the main instructions on how to start a Co-Op program at your company:

1. Contact OPP:
   - When employers express interest in the Co-Op program they are immediately entered into Purdue’s Co-Op employer database.

2. Submit a work plan:
   - Employers are required to submit a brief paragraph for each work session. Work plans are expected to show progression of responsibilities throughout sessions. Sample work plans for specific disciplines available upon request.
   - Program coordinators will review and approve work plans. There is a potential for a site visit if requested by the employer or deemed necessary by the coordinator.

3. Employer approval:
   - Once the program coordinator approves a company, they will sign a Statement of Understanding with the Office of Professional Practice. Once signed, the company may begin recruiting students.

4. Recruitment:
   - Most employers choose to recruit students during Co-Op Days in February. OPP organizes a job fair and interviews for companies during Co-Op Days.
   - Employers may choose to post a position at any time through OPP. They may also request resumes at any time, and OPP will set up interviews for employers free of charge.