

CO-OP EMPLOYER GUIDE

If you are an employer seeking highly motivated employees trained for success in their field, Cooperative Education is for you. Cooperative Education (Co-op) is an academic course that allows students to apply classroom theory in a real world work environment. Since co-op students have taken prerequisite coursework in their chosen field of study, this program allows both student and employer to utilize the benefits of that academic training.

Specifics of the Co-op Program

Students who participate in co-op typically do so for the length of one semester. Students are required to complete 75 hours of employment per academic credit. Most of the co-op courses are 3 credits, which would equate to 225 hours of employment. This averages 15 hours per week in a 15-week semester. Students may be employed full or part time, but time spent in professional development toward their field of study must equate to 225 hours by semester's end.

Employer Roles and Responsibilities

As an employer for the co-op program, your responsibilities are as follows:

- Establish a work schedule for the student
- Review the objectives that the student and instructor have set up for the semester. These are always designed with the employment setting and the student's skills in mind. As a supervisor, you can discuss changes or additions if needed. This should be done at the start of the semester.
- Mentor the student as you would any employee. Give specific assignments and provide feedback about positive performance as well as areas for improvement.
- Be prepared to communicate the student's progress to the course instructor. This can be done with a scheduled visit by the instructor, phone call, email or form (depending on the instructor's requirement).

Advantages of Cooperative Education for the Employer

The Co-op Program offers many advantages to the employer, including:

- Continuous supply of part-time or full-time employment candidates.
- Recruitment of candidates trained in a specific employment area.
- The opportunity to screen and recruit potential permanent employees before making a commitment.
- A work force to handle entry level tasks, allowing more highly trained and experienced employees' time for higher-level tasks.
- Reduction in recruitment and training costs.

Mechanics of the Program

Cooperative Education at CSM strives to fill the employment needs of community, business and government, while securing a professionally satisfying work experience for the student. The following sequence describes how to get started as a co-op employer:

1. Identify your employment needs and contact the Career Services Sr. Associate Director Lisa Warren, 301-934-7533, to review your staffing and the qualifications and skills you are seeking.
2. The Career Services staff will seek out co-op candidates who meet your requirements. Candidates will be referred to you for your review.
3. After review of résumés or interviews with the candidates, make your selection for employment and directly contact the student.
4. The student you select will notify Career Services and register for the course.
5. The student will provide learning objectives that relate to the tasks of his/her position. You will be able to review the objectives and provide input if you wish to do so.
6. The student's co-op instructor will contact you during the semester to assess the student's progress at the work site.
7. As the semester nears completion you will be asked to complete an employee evaluation form that addresses the student's initiative, dependability and other work habits.

Current Employees for Co-op

Many co-op students choose to complete this academic course under the supervision of the employer for whom they currently work. This employee may ask to use his/her current position as a co-op experience. If you agree to the student's request, you would only need to fill out an evaluation at the end of the semester. The student is responsible for registering for the co-op course.

Compensation

Co-op students bring valuable skills to the job and quickly become productive. Co-op students are often paid at a rate equal to that of other employees performing similar tasks at the same level of productivity.

Length of Employment

Length of employment varies with each situation. If the student you employ was part of your organization before taking this course, his/her employment would not end with the semester. If you have selected a co-op student to fill a short-term personnel need, you are not obligated to keep a student beyond the semester for which he/she was hired. It would be advantageous for all concerned to document, in advance, the length of time you plan to employ the student. In order for the student to complete the co-op requirements 225 hours must be completed in the

course of the semester (approximately 15 hours/week). If your employment need continues and the student has demonstrated abilities that would be an asset to your organization, you may certainly retain the student as a full or part time employee.

Termination of Employment

On occasion, termination of employment may become necessary. This may be initiated by either the employer or the co-op student and may occur for a wide variety of reasons ranging from incompatibility to lack of adequate work. The college requests that the employer notify the student's co-op instructor if the need for termination appears imminent.

Contact Information

One of the distinctions of Cooperative Education is recognition that no two students, supervisors, or employment settings are alike. This program is designed to meet the unique needs of both student and employer, while maintaining the integrity of co-op as an academic course. If you have questions about this program, as it relates to your specific employment environment, please call Career Services at the College of Southern Maryland. Department staff will be happy to discuss how co-op can best meet your specific and individual employment needs.