

Cooperative Education: A Human Resources Solution

By Jeanette Grill

Cooperative education, a form of experiential learning, was first incorporated into the American higher education system in 1906. Dr. Hermann Schneider, Dean of Engineering at the University of Cincinnati, wanted to improve his students' understanding of engineering. This led to a fortuitous partnership with the automotive industry, then in its infancy.



Cooperative education provided a mechanism to attract and prepare students to enter this fast growing field while feeding the industry's voracious need for automotive engineers. The idea expanded to include liberal arts students, as well as those in virtually all disciplines. Today, over 1,000 U.S. colleges and universities offer cooperative education programs.

Initially, co-op programs followed an alternating plan – one semester of classroom study followed by one semester of workplace experience. This pattern was repeated for as many as four or five work placements. While this type of scheduling worked for the traditional student and large corporations, it did not accommodate the needs of smaller employers and the increasingly complex schedules of many students. The parallel plan, a more flexible part-time arrangement, enables students to take classes while working and gives employers the ability to tailor hours to fit their company's needs.

Benefits to Employers

A survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) found that employers who hire new college graduates credited co-op and internship programs as their top two sources for hires. While ideally every student should do a co-op before they graduate, there are obvious benefits to employers:

- Co-op provides employers with a continual pool of pre-screened, high achieving students.
- Co-op offers employers a variety of different work schedules to meet specific needs and business cycles.
- Co-op maintains ongoing, positive contact between the employer and the university.
- Co-op provides an infusion of bright, enthusiastic young people who provide new ideas and new viewpoints.
- Co-op gives employers an opportunity to evaluate and cultivate future full-time employees.



Co-Op at C.W. Post

The Professional Experience and Career Planning (PEP) Co-op Program at the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University makes it easy for both employers and students to participate. It allows for both part-time and full-time participation. Nearly 99% of participating students work part-time during the school year and longer hours during the summer.

A student must have at least a 2.5 G.P.A. to participate in the program and is required to take a seminar which teaches interview skills, resume writing, and appropriate workplace behavior, ethics, communication, etc. After the student meets with a co-op counselor, his or her resume is faxed to companies requesting co-op interns. Employers interview the student and set hours and salary. A student can start anytime during the semester or summer break. Placements last a minimum of 4 months. Employers can, and often do, ask the student to stay on longer. Since the program is a non-credit program, a student is paid an average of \$8 to \$15 per hour. Some students are willing to accept "volunteer" assignments with non-profits, such as Nassau County government.



The PEP Office works closely with employers to understand their needs and refer qualified students. The Office works to keep communication open between the partners and visits students at their work sites. Employers are required to give students work that is challenging and teaches the student about their business. Co-op students are most attracted to employers that try to add value to their co-op experience by involving them in meetings, giving them special projects, asking for their ideas, and taking some time to train them in a specific skill or aspect of their business.

The C.W. Post Co-op Program places over 300 students a year in all majors with Long Island, New York City, upstate, and out-of-state employers. Over the years, the Program has worked with over 2,000 employers, many of whom go on to hire their co-op student once they have graduated.

Employer Resources

Several professional organizations can provide more information about experiential learning programs, such as co-op and internships, and they welcome employer members. They include the:

National Association of Colleges & Employers

www.nacweb.org

National Society for Experiential Education

www.nsee.org

Cooperative Education and Internship Association

www.ceiainc.org

New York State Cooperative and Experiential Education Association

www.nysceea.org

Long Island Works

www.liworks.org

For more information about C.W. Post's Co-op Program, call 516-299-2251.

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Business Alert is published by the Center for Business Research, C.W. Post Campus, Long Island University, 720 Northern Blvd., Brookville, N.Y. 11548. Not to be reproduced without permission.

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