

INTRODUCTION TO CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION

Co-operative Education is a strong movement in the province of British Columbia. Twenty-two post-secondary institutions offer programs on the Co-operative Education model. These institutions work co-operatively to set and maintain standards for Co-operative Education and to assess and meet employer needs.

WHY CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION?

Students graduating from post-secondary programs are now facing profound social, technological and economic change. Through Co-operative Education, employers and educators share the responsibility of preparing students for these rapidly changing conditions. The employer becomes a co-educator helping to develop today's students to become graduates ready to assume productive careers in a dynamic and demanding workplace.

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

Employer/Employee Relationship

For a Co-op Work Term to be successful, the supervisor and student must establish an effective relationship. For the majority of placements, the student becomes an employee of the employing organization and is expected to be treated as any other temporary employee regarding benefits and other employment requirements as defined by the Employment Standards Act or a Collective Agreement. As such, the employer assumes responsibility, as they would for any other employee, for the period of the Co-op employment, and students accept the responsibilities of an employee.

In order to increase the student's productivity and facilitate learning, at the outset, it is recommended that employers:

- Advise the student with regard to all issues of confidentiality in the workplace and ensure that any non-disclosure agreements are signed prior to the commencement of work prepare the student's co-workers and other staff for the arrival of the student.
- Provide the student with an orientation to the workplace, including an overview of the organization (e.g. mission statement, products, etc.), physical layout, relevant personnel, safety practices, and the duties or tasks expected during the Work Term.
- Provide a supervisor for the Co-op student who will oversee the student's work and discuss expectations for the Work Term with the student and, on a regular basis, give the student feedback on how she/he is doing, including areas of strength and areas which require improvement.

Learning Environment

Assist students to set realistic learning objectives and provide relevant learning opportunities to acquaint the student with relevant resources, materials and career connection.

Evaluation of the Learning

Participate in the work-site visit or follow-up measures by the institution to assess the student's progress and performance.

Complete a final evaluation of the Co-op student's performance during the Work Term.

It is recommended you discuss with the student the topic of the Work Term Report. If the Work Term Report is considered confidential, then the employer may be required to evaluate the report – this can be discussed with the Co-op Coordinator.

STUDENT BENEFITS

Co-op students gain:

- A well-rounded education, enriched by practical application of classroom learning to gain relevant employment skills and realistic expectations of the workforce before graduation.
- Opportunities to test and gain a broader understanding of career options, often in a variety of employment settings with financial remuneration to help to defray educational costs.
- Documented practical experience, a résumé, job search skills and a network of contacts upon graduation
- Maturity and self-esteem as productive members of the workforce as well as confidence and skills developed through working with others.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Co-op students are expected to:

- Set goals for learning.
- Work on enhancing their academic, professional and personal skills.
- Represent Thompson Rivers University with a standard of performance which will enhance their career goals and maintain the University's standards of conduct.
- Conform to all conditions and rules that apply to employees in the organization.

- Exercise ethical workplace conduct.
- Maintain employer confidentiality.
- Accept feedback/suggestions for improvement in a positive manner.
- Participate in work-site visits.
- Resolve any problems or issues that may arise in a prompt, professional manner.
- Advise the employer and, if need be, their co-op coordinator of any concerns or problems with their work assignment or environment as soon as an issue arises.
- Keep in contact with the Co-op office.

Co-op students are required to:

Successfully complete a pre-employment training program prior to undertaking their first Work Term. Pre-employment training is designed to prepare students for the Work Term and covers topics such as Co-op program objectives and expectations, job seeking skills, transferring skills to the workplace, workplace conduct, developing learning objectives, job performance progress and evaluation.

Complete a report (written, verbal or portfolio) for each Work Term. The Work Term Report, depending upon the program, may be a report required by the company; a technical report; a report on the Work Term experience; or a combination thereof. Students should discuss with their supervisor their Work Term topic and any issues of research confidentiality. If a report contains confidential information, the employer may arrange to undertake the assessment or arrange for a non-disclosure agreement with the Co-op office. This report and evaluation are used to evaluate the students completion of the Work Term.

INSTITUTIONAL BENEFITS

Institutional benefits include:

- Increased enrollment as Co-op programs attract top quality, superior, well-motivated students.
- Co-op students who enrich the general educational community of the campus upon return from Work Terms.
- Well-qualified graduates who are prepared to assume a productive role in society.
- Enhanced visibility and reputation of Co-op through interactions with the community.
- Feedback from employers on the quality and relevance of program curriculum.
- Information on current research and development in employer sectors, with opportunities for collaborative projects.

CO-OP RESPONSIBILITIES

The Institution is responsible for:

- Ensuring the integrity of its Co-operative Education programs.
- Developing and maintaining relevant curricula which reflects the needs of employers.
- Providing relevant academic training for students in their chosen career field.
- Providing adequate resources to the Co-op program.
- Developing Co-op programs while meeting the needs of employers.

ROLE OF THE CO-OP OFFICE

The role of the Co-op office is to:

- Facilitate the development of Co-op opportunities relevant to the program area.
- Ensure fair and equitable treatment of students and employers through the placement process.

The role of the Co-op office is to:

- Assist employers through all aspects of the Co-op process.
- Prepare Co-op students with appropriate skills and attitudes for their Work Terms.
- Work with employers and students in monitoring and evaluating the students' Work Terms.
- Encourage students to experience a range of employing organizations during their Co-op program.
- Monitor the placements, preferably through an on-site visit, ensuring that both the employers and the student's needs are being met.
- Assess and evaluate the Work Term and the student's Work Term Report.
- Convey to employers the types of funding assistance that may be available.
- Conduct a post-employment process with students.

WORKPLACE ISSUES

Repeat Work Terms

Should students return or stay on to do another Work Term, where possible, students should be given increased responsibilities and their salary should be increased accordingly.

Employers should endeavor to encourage students in their academic career by supporting their return to the university to complete their studies.

Evaluation of the Work Term

All students and their employers are contacted and, in most cases, visited at least once during each Work Term. At the end of each Work Term the supervisor is asked to complete an employer evaluation of the student form available online via this link: https://www.tru.ca/forms/coop/student_evaluation/index.php

Confidentiality

Confidentiality issues should be discussed and agreed to prior to the job offer and acceptance. Student employees must comply with their employer's policies regarding confidentiality and recognize that the information they work with, including the results of any research undertaken, belong to the employer.

Problems in the Workplace

Should any unusual circumstances arise during the Work Term, (e.g. behaviour problems or medical emergencies); employers should contact the Co-op coordinator who will help to facilitate a resolution. Should employers consider dismissing a Co-op student, they are urged to consult with the Co-op office as early as possible to discuss their concerns.

On behalf of Thompson Rivers University and the Career Education Department – thank you for participating in this education program and contributing to our students learning and professional practice.