

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

STUDENT HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative Education is the integration of classroom and laboratory study with planned and supervised periods of relevant and meaningful employment. While on Co-op assignment, students work as regular employees of a Co-op employer. In addition to wages, students earn academic credit for the knowledge and skills acquired from their successful work experience and employer references for future job searches.

This handbook will discuss Cooperative Education in detail and serve as a resource for students in Co-op arrangements.

Academic Quality

The academic quality of the Cooperative Education experience is maintained through pre-arranged learning objectives (a list of tasks to be performed by each student on the job), through regular conferences between each student and a faculty coordinator, and through an evaluation system. A Co-op student's grade is based largely upon successful completion of the learning objectives as judged by both the faculty coordinator and the job supervisor. Students are also required to keep a work activities log for the first 40 hours of each credit placement and to submit a final summary paper. Both record a student's use of skills and academic preparation, and both should document the student's ability to solve problems which occur. The student also evaluates the position as a training site for future Co-op placements.

Procedures Summary

A Cooperative Education arrangement begins when a job is identified by either the Co-op Office, faculty, employer, or in some cases, the student. The learning objectives develop from the specific job responsibilities defined by the employer.

Students interview with employers and are selected by the employers for positions. Once a student is hired, the Co-op Office prepares a **Training Agreement** that includes the job tasks and credit request and submits it to the appropriate division chairperson for approval. Next, the student and the faculty coordinator review and sign the training agreement. Last for signing is the **Course Outline** which documents how the coordinator will determine the student's final grade. (See Appendix for Training Agreement and Course Outline samples.)

After the student begins work, the faculty coordinator makes two visits to the job site -- one at mid-course and one at the end of the course -- to visit the employer to assess the student's progress. Before the end of the work period, the student submits the activities log, final summary report, and any assigned projects to the faculty coordinator for evaluation.

When the final grade has been reported, the Records Office enters the course title, credit, and grade on the student's transcript. The student receives a final grade report at the end of the term.

CO-OP PLANS

Parallel - for students with Part-time Jobs

Students attend the college on a full-time or part-time basis while working a Co-op job. The majority of the students work 15 to 20 hours per week.

Alternate - for students with Temporary Full-time Jobs

Students alternate periods of full-time study with periods of full-time Co-op employment. These periods may cover a full semester or a summer period of approximately 12-16 weeks.

Career Advancement - for students with Permanent Jobs

Students attend the college on a part-time basis in pursuit of a degree or certificate while participating in planned and supervised learning experiences with their permanent full-time employer.

EARNING AND USING CO-OP CREDITS

Earning Academic Credit

Students may apply up to eight hours of academic credit through Cooperative Education to the two-year programs. Baccalaureate degree students may apply a maximum of twelve credit hours in Co-op courses toward their degrees. However, not all programs of study have elective hours or substitution possibilities where Co-op credit can be applied. Credit hours beyond the number allowed for a degree are called "additive," meaning that they will not count toward the number required for graduation, but they will document evaluated work experience for future employment purposes or for second degree credit purposes.

Credit is awarded on a variable basis, depending upon the number of hours worked during any Co-op assignment. A "rule of thumb" is that 80 hours worked during any one work period equates to one (1) credit hour. Thus, a three (3) credit hour Co-op course would require a minimum of 240 work hours.

The Use of Co-op Credits Varies

- 1) Besides being introduced to the world of work, students gain marketable experience; graduates with Co-op experience who are seeking permanent employment have an advantage over other entry-level applicants.
- 2) Co-op credits can be used as general elective credits or as suitable substitution hours in many WVU at Parkersburg programs.
- 3) Co-op credits can be used as substitutes for required courses or independent study courses in some WVU at Parkersburg programs.
- 4) Co-op credits may be transferable to other colleges. (Students who wish to transfer Co-op credits should check with an advisor at the transfer college.)
- 5) Additive Co-op credits may be earned. These are credits which students may wish to accumulate beyond the number that can be applied to a degree. Additive Co-op credits can be useful. These credits appear on the student's transcript, and attaching credit to a job certifies that the job is educationally sound. Many graduates return to school for a second degree, and additive Co-op credits could apply toward a second degree.
- 6) Students from other colleges and universities may earn Co-op credit provided they are in good academic standing and have the required transient documentation.
- 7) Co-op hours are tuition hours. The cost of tuition hours is published in the college catalog.

STANDARDS FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION

To be eligible to register for a Cooperative Education course at West Virginia University at Parkersburg, a student must:

- 1) Complete the Co-op Program application;
- 2) Complete a minimum of 12 WVU-P semester hours in courses numbered 100 or above;
- 3) Have a 2.8 cumulative grade-point average; and
- 4) Complete an orientation with the Cooperative Education personnel.

Specific deviations from these eligibility criteria may occur with permission of the appropriate division chairperson or the executive dean of academic affairs.

CRITERIA FOR EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION

Any employer who can provide full- or part-time Co-op employment and meet the following requirements is eligible to participate:

- 1) The job must provide learning experiences directly related to a student's program or career objectives.
- 2) The scope of the job should provide meaningful and challenging learning experiences in order to meet the learning objectives established.
- 3) The position established should be relatively secure so as to provide a full term of employment.
- 4) The employer must be willing to enter into a **Training Agreement** with the student and the college.
- 5) The student's job supervisor must agree to evaluate the student and the student's degree of accomplishment in meeting the stated learning objectives at the end of the prescribed training period.
- 6) The employer must provide a safe and healthy working environment.

EVALUATION

The grade a student earns for a Co-op experience will be based on a number of criteria. Employers and faculty evaluate student performance in achieving the objectives listed on the **Training Agreement**.

Employers fill out an Employer's Evaluation Report which comments on the student's general work habits. Along with the Employer's Evaluation, the faculty coordinator will consider the Activities Log, the Summary of Work Experience, the On-Site Visit Reports, and any special projects assigned.

The student and faculty coordinator must discuss the weight given to each of these criteria at the beginning of the course. The percentages will appear on the Course Outline; both the student and the Co-op coordinator must sign this document.

Students may elect to take the course as a Pass/Fail or as a graded course on the standard A-B-C-D-F scale. A Pass/Fail has no effect upon the student's cumulative grade point average while a letter graded placement does change the GPA. Students should discuss this option with their faculty coordinator and indicate their choice on the Course Outline.

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

During the Co-op period, students are considered to be employees of the company or agency for which they work. Students are subject to employers' rules and regulations and will be advised by the employer of the policies governing working conditions, hours of work, holidays, and any other matters concerning employment. Failure to meet an employer's requirements may lead to a low evaluation, termination of employment, and, in some cases, a failing grade.

Special attention should be given to attendance. Because an extended absence from a Co-op job may require re-scheduling, students must notify both the employer and the Co-op Office as soon as such an absence becomes a possibility.

When students are on the job, they must conform to the employer's schedule. For example, students should not ask an employer for time off because the college has time off during a break.

In the case of being temporarily laid off or permanently discharged, students must notify the Co-op Office immediately. The same action is required if for any reason students feel they must resign from their Co-op job. Failure to notify the coordinator may result in either no credit or a failing grade.

Students are expected to practice ethical behavior during their placement. Unethical behavior can result in employment termination and a failing grade for the Co-op course.

CO-OP PROCEDURES

The following descriptions relate the procedures to follow as a student involved in the Co-op program.

- 1) Application and Orientation – Students complete an application (obtained from the Co-op Office) in order to be considered for Co-op jobs which become available during the current academic semester and in the future. Next, the Co-op Office personnel give applicants an orientation to the program. The orientation includes instruction and materials for writing a resume for use when interviewing with Co-op employers.
- 2) Learning Objectives - Once a student has been placed with an employer, setting the learning objectives is an important step in the process. Learning objectives, which are developed jointly by the student, faculty coordinator, and employer, are statements that describe what the student will be able to do, how to do it, and how to evaluate the accomplishments at the end of the course. They become the foundation of the Training Agreement and the basis for the Co-op grade. The advantage for the successful Co-op student is being able to discuss the completed learning objectives with a future employer. In short, through the learning objectives, the Co-op experience documents the student's skills and abilities.
- 3) Training Agreement and Course Outline - These forms are the equivalent of a course syllabus/outline, and they must be processed in order for the student to receive credit for a Co-op experience. The Training Agreement and Course Outline are prepared by the Co-op Office. Normally, the Co-op faculty coordinator and the student meet to discuss these documents. Both must sign them to show that the student understands the responsibilities and how the evaluation will be conducted; registration is incomplete without these signed documents.
- 4) Registration and Payment for Co-op Courses Registration for Co-op courses is on-going throughout the year. The Co-op Office issues a call number (CRN) for each individual Co-op student's registration. If students are enrolled full-time (12 credit hours) and have paid their fees, there is no charge for adding a Co-op course. Part-time students, however, must pay tuition for Co-op courses. Payment for Co-op courses that begin after normal registration periods is expected at the time of registration.
- 5) Activities Log - A completed Activities Log is required. Students make entries in this log for the first 40 hours they work during each Co-op period (fall, spring, summer). The Co-op Office provides the log. When completed, it tells the faculty coordinator that students have been doing the type of work that will enable them to meet the learning objectives which are listed on the Training Agreement. In the weekly problem-solving section at the top of each page, students should describe problems they face, list the techniques for solving them, and describe their involvement in unanticipated activities. The Log documents a student's ability to cope with the complexity of the specific position and predicts the ability to cope with the complexities of work. In addition, the Log will serve as a record of the Co-op experience. The faculty coordinator will explain when it is due for evaluation and how much it counts toward the final grade.

6) Job Site Visitation -After students begin work, their coordinator will visit the job site twice. The first visitation will occur at the mid-point of the work experience (around mid-term grade time during a full semester Co-op placement). During the visit, the Co-op coordinator will discuss the student's progress toward meeting the objectives with the job supervisor. The student may or may not be present during the visit.

The second visit will occur within the last two weeks of the Co-op experience and will be for final evaluation purposes. At that time, both the student and job supervisor can be involved in the discussion if scheduling allows.

In most instances, students will be visited by the faculty coordinator. However, it is possible that they might be visited by the Co-Op Office personnel.

Additional visits may be made when and if needed. In any case, every attempt will be made to let students and employers know in advance when a visit will be made.

7) On-Campus Conferences – Students may be contacted for on-campus conferences with their faculty coordinator for informal checks on student progress. The relationship among faculty, students, and employers is important. Students and employers should benefit from the instructor's expertise, and the instructor should benefit from observing academic theories in practice.

8) Activities Summary - This is a narrative report of the student's overall Co-op experience. It should cover values, self-knowledge, and a philosophy of work which has been tested during the Co-op experience. Students may wish to discuss how Co-op has either confirmed or changed their professional goals. The criteria for writing the Activities Summary are listed in the Co-op materials and will be explained by the Co-op Office during the orientation and by the faculty coordinator. The summary is usually three to four pages, double-spaced, twelve font.

9) Completion Requirements - The completed Activities Log and Summary plus any other assigned requirements must be submitted directly to the faculty coordinator on or before the due date. No passing grade can be issued until these requirements have been completed. After the faculty coordinator awards the final grade, it will be posted electronically to the student's OLSIS account by the Registrar's Office.

Students may pick up their logs, summaries, and any other assigned projects in the Co-op Office after grades have been posted. The Co-op Office keeps these until Mid-Term of the next semester. If not claimed, they will be destroyed.

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION COURSE OUTLINE

STUDENT: «Student_First» «Student_Last»

DATE: «Date»

FACULTY: «Coordinator»

CREDIT HOURS: «Credits»

COURSE: «Course»

CRN: <<CRN>>

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

In addition to the requirements outlined in the TRAINING AGREEMENT each Co-Op student must:

1. Submit the Co-Op Activities Report (Log) by _____.
2. Submit Summary of Work Experience by _____.
3. Schedule one office conference with faculty coordinator (student must schedule this visit) between the dates of _____ and _____.
4. Other writing/reading assignments, additional activities, and conferences. (List below)

GRADING POLICY

% of Grade

Activities Report/Summary of Work _____

Job Supervisor's evaluation _____

Faculty Coordinator's evaluation _____

Special Projects _____

To be graded on a 4.0 scale or Pass/Fail (Indicate student's choice) _____

Student _____

Faculty _____

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