Our co-ops are exposed to concepts that complement their classwork, challenge their understanding and are applied to real world problems…This provides a challenging and rewarding environment that encourages students to push their boundaries and explore their true interests and potential.

— Diedre Larkin
Etegent Technologies, LTD, Cincinnati, OH

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

MARKETING

Marketing to Students
University Job Database
Career Fair
Social Networking
Information Sessions
Marketing Internally
Student Ambassador
Marketing Summary

HIRING CO-OP STUDENTS

Interviewing
Extending the Offer
Post Hire-Pre First Day
Responsibilities

ORIENTATION

Co-op’s Mindset
Social Tension
Career Development
Employer Mindset
Training
Areas of Training
Mentoring

EVALUATION

Informal Feedback
Formal Feedback
Mid-Term Feedback
End of Term Employer Report

PERMANENT HIRED

Justification for Hire

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Cooperative education is a structured method of combining classroom-based education with practical work experience. Employers, students and educators cooperate in the training, practice, review and reflective elements of learning.

This employer manual was written specifically to aid employers in creating a successful co-op program that serves the needs of their organization, the student and university in a collaborative fashion. We have focused on key areas and attributes that have been identified by over 200 diverse co-op employers, which may aid in the establishment and maintenance of a successful co-op program. Anecdotal information is provided by these employers who are currently managing high quality co-op programs providing real world examples of best practices.

“Duke Energy strives for well-rounded employees and this includes the co-ops. We have the co-ops work in a variety of departments throughout their program. But rather than have their mentor change from term to term, we maintain a common coordinator throughout their co-op experience in order to assist in the student’s progress and professional development.”

— Ashley Wolff
Duke Energy, Cincinnati, OH
An effective co-op program allows:

- Employers to partner with colleges and universities for their short term and long term needs
- Students to be immersed in an experiential learning environment
- Students and mentors to collaborate on real world problems in a discipline-specific environment

“While working at Project H, I was under the direct supervision of Emily Pilloton - a 28 year old phenom who has been written extensively about in GOOD mag, Dwell, and the NY Times… 
I feel like I gained a lifetimes worth of knowledge in my short three months at Project H.”

— Jince Kuruvilla, Industrial Design Transportation Option Co-op student at Project H Design
Marketing is essential in developing a successful co-op program. Successful marketing will lead to attracting students who fit your specific needs and culture. Your needs may include identifying permanent hires, evaluations of potential employees and cultivating students with work specific competencies.

**MARKETING TO STUDENTS**

Students need to know who you are, what you do and specific opportunities for experience. Without a concrete interest in the company and potential opportunities the student will continue to look elsewhere. So how does an employer present their value to the university, college departments and ultimately the students? What are the key attributes of co-op that are attractive to the students?

**UNIVERSITY JOB DATABASE**

The university maintains a database of current co-op employers. Students can view a short company summary and co-op job descriptions. Students view this information while researching potential co-op employers. This information should be carefully constructed to entice student interest. Information should include your website or other social media links that students can view.

**CAREER FAIR**

Career fairs provide an excellent opportunity to present your company to the student body. Students meet with company representatives first hand to discuss who you are and what you have to offer to students. Participation in these fairs is a great opportunity to reach out to students.

**SOCIAL NETWORKING**

Student exposure to your company can be accomplished in a variety of formats. More and more students are socially connected. They may choose to follow you online through Twitter™, LinkedIn™ or a Facebook™ account. Consider marketing your co-op opportunities utilizing these venues.

Students need to **know the basics of your organization** such as:

- What are your products and/or services?
- Who are your primary customers/clients?
- Where do co-ops fit into your organization?
- Are future career possibilities available within your organization?

“We really make an effort to engage with the students through a variety of venues (job fairs, information sessions, employer panels, student associations) as recruitment is still a ‘face to face’ business.”

— Chuck Clevenger
Seapine Software, Mason, OH
INFORMATION SESSIONS

On-campus information sessions provide you with the opportunity to showcase your organization to a group of interested students. This informal forum works especially well when there are alumni or current co-ops that can relate their personal experiences and value. Students appreciate the opportunity to speak one-on-one with the company representatives and find this a valuable and easy method to learn what a company really has to offer. Many companies meet later in the day (4–6 p.m.) and provide food and refreshments for students, which tends to improve attendance. This gives your organization a chance to meet students who have already expressed an interest in your organization and invite them in for interviews if desired.

MARKETING INTERNALLY

It is important to publicize the co-op program within your organization. From senior management to potential mentors and supervisors, wide range support is essential for a successful program. Since managers play a large role in the individual mentoring and are directly responsible for their growth and development, they must understand the overall goals and general co-op philosophy. Co-op terms should provide a progressive range of relevant experiences to stimulate growth and discover student potential. Since managers are asked to provide student evaluations and feedback to students, they need to understand the overall goals and objectives if they are to support the program once implemented. To help validate the co-op program internally co-ops could be asked to summarize their experience and present the highlights to senior management. This process establishes accountability to students and demonstrates to managers that senior managers are supportive of the co-op program.

STUDENT AMBASSADOR

Word-of-mouth, from previous co-ops is one of the best, if not the best method, in getting great students. Invite former co-ops to attend information sessions and career fairs. Interaction among former co-ops and potential co-ops creates a synergy that sparks student interest. Utilize ambassadors to make presentations to student organizations and classes.

INCREASING YOUR PRESENCE WITH UNIVERSITY FACULTY AND STUDENTS

Consider volunteering to be on a discipline-specific advisory board. This can provide a network with faculty members by increasing their knowledge of your specific needs and opportunities. Another opportunity is to sponsor a senior project. As part of their curriculum, seniors are required to complete a capstone project for senior year. Consider providing expertise, funding, project ideas and/or facilities for completion of these capstone projects. This will increase your organization’s presence among students and enhance your recruitment efforts.

MARKETING SUMMARY

Communication is critical in the success of the co-op program. By creating and maintaining a robust working relationship with the university, you will be able to match and align the best students with your specific interests. With these strong relationships come improved quality co-op placements and potential future employees.

“Our students hear about us mostly through word-of-mouth and their co-op advisors. If the students have a great experience with us, they spread the word to other students and that keeps the momentum going with the next class of students.”

— Paul Mishurda
Veteran’s Administration
Medical Center, Cincinnati, OH
hiring co-op students

Some companies hire students for the primary purpose of a short-term project, while others look at long-term strategies for recruitment of graduates.

In small to mid-size organizations the hiring manager typically conducts the interviews, and can solely determine the right student hire based on their needs and the overall needs of the organization. However, in larger organizations, the human resource department will coordinate and manage the hiring process. While the specific hiring managers will understand the particular job skills and requirements, the HR manager will typically coordinate the various open positions and act as the co-op coordinator to facilitate the process logistics. Together, the HR department and managers can formulate the appropriate job description that meets both departmental and corporate needs.

“DRT prefers to employ co-op students beginning in their sophomore year, in order to pursue a long term co-op experience. The first co-op term is dedicated to learning the DRT internal operating systems. Spending time on the manufacturing floor observing the different types of equipment helps them understand our manufacturing process flow. The co-op then works next to a manufacturing engineer who continues to guide them through the learning process. They will enter BOMs in the system, do process sketches in CAD software, create and update Excel spreadsheets, and eventually create part manufacturing instructions.”
— Julie Smith
DRT Manufacturing Co., Dayton, OH

In many instances the supervisor is the role model for the co-op student. In order to ensure a sustained learning experience for the co-op, supervisors must plan meaningful and challenging work assignments. It is important for both the supervisor and the co-op student to clearly understand upfront the terms learning objectives in order to have a positive experience. Problems may arise with both the employer and student when expectations are not clear. Since a negative experience can tarnish both the individual’s perception and the company’s program, it is important to manage and communicate prior to and throughout the co-op term.

Prior to hiring a co-op student, it is important to understand that there are areas in which the student may need additional developmental support. These areas could include time management, project management, interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, leadership abilities, empowerment and transition from an academic environment to a professional environment.

It is also beneficial to create specific guidelines for your organization in regard to co-op compensation and benefits (if any). This avoids any discrepancies as the co-op continues through the program for both the student and the supervisors. Include items such as: travel, housing, expense reimbursement, FLSA status, holiday pay, vacation pay, transportation reimbursement, and personal/sick days. Creating these guidelines helps companies employ competent students with uniformity between majors, class years and across departments eliminating any potential discrepancies.

The supervisor will be the most important person in the company’s co-op program. He/she will guide the students’ training and performance throughout the work term. The supervisor is often “the role model for the co-op student.” Therefore, it will be important from the beginning for the supervisor to have complete buy-in and preparation to facilitate a successful co-op experience.
INTERVIEWING

Resumes, portfolios, and other credentials will be made available through the university’s on-line database. The co-op faculty advisor will also work with the recruiter to screen students according to their individual needs. Employers are encouraged to interview students on-site, as it lends credibility to the company’s products/services and culture. Facilities for interviewing are also available on-campus, which are well suited for out-of-town employers who wish to conduct direct interviews.

Although not as ideal as face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, Skype or other remote access methods allow the company to connect and assess the student’s capabilities and interests.

EXTEND THE OFFER

The employment contract is between the student and the employer. Because students have little experience in the hiring process it is important that employers clearly state the offer of employment, including start date and salary. Many companies follow-up this initial contact with a formal acceptance letter sent to the student. Salary surveys are conducted by the university and can assist the employer in determining appropriate and competitive compensation.

POST HIRE-PRE FIRST DAY

Once the co-op student has accepted an offer of employment, the student should be notified of the following: where and when to report to work, directions to the appropriate office, parking availability, contact person and information for questions, name of student’s supervisor and any other pertinent information that will be critical for the co-op’s success.

Creating a checklist of managers responsibilities will help managers track their efforts and ensure accountability.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Co-op responsibilities can vary depending on the student’s experience and grade level and academic discipline. First time co-ops certainly need more support, training and supervision that a fifth term co-op. Successful programs have the students engaged in real, meaningful projects. Responsibilities should be commensurate with experience. Increasing the responsibilities throughout successive terms allows a progressive path in skill development. When possible, the co-op experience should involve rotations in broad disciplines or departments which will aid in the understanding of the broader issues facing a project or a department.

Set short-term and long-term objectives for the student. If a student has down time from their immediate tasks, they are then able to focus work on their long-term project. Check with the student often to make certain they are receiving enough relevant work. As all jobs have some routine work it is expected that students should contribute to that objective. However, students will quickly want to expand into work that has meaning and value. Allow students to take advantage of learning and training opportunities throughout their co-op. Co-ops should receive projects that are increasingly more complicated, eventually leading to the co-op owning a project or process.

“...In creating meaningful work for the students, it took a bit of encouragement from management to the senior engineers to assign the co-ops more than paperwork and time-studies to perform. At first, we as a company underestimated both the desire and the abilities of the students and in hindsight, didn’t give the initial group of students justice with regard to their assignments. One aggressive manager took a few students and got them on the shop floor and had them start designing tooling fixtures and programming CNC production work centers. Once this was a demonstrated success, the other engineers were willing to utilize their co-ops in a more meaningful way. The important thing that we recognized was that these were very bright and capable young engineers that did not know how we “always did things.” Frankly, the students didn’t care. They were a fresh set of eyes and once the group saw the value of that they were immediately on board with giving them meaningful and valuable assignments and allowing them to contribute to our company in ways we had not even expected. Only then did we realize the true value of this co-op program.”

— Donna Prentice, TECT POWER
CO-OP’S MINDSET

The co-op student’s mindset is filled with hope, anxiety, expectations, fear, nervousness just to name a few. The ability to gently guide the student will undoubtedly leave a lasting impression. Students must adjust to career-oriented work. Many co-ops have had various working and life experiences, but few have had work experiences related to their chosen career. Self-questioning and doubt often linger in the students mind. “Have I made the right career choice? Will it be fulfilling? Can I contribute to the field in a meaningful way? Will I be successful?”

SOCIAL TENSION

At the same time the co-op is making adjustments in the new workplace, another concern is present: the people problem. A new person has entered the group and a certain amount of testing is done on both sides. The group wonders what the new person will be like and vice versa. Part of the student’s tension is caused by the expectations of self to be mature and independent while struggling with self-doubt and personal insecurity. A sense of belonging and feeling comfortable with the surroundings contributes to growth and increased productivity.

Some of the areas that the student will be adjusting to include:

- Adjusting to work routines and deadlines
- Company organization culture
- Planning and time management
- Communication (non-verbal, verbal, and written)
- Communication direct (in-person) vs indirect (email, text)
- Accountability and responsibility
- Self-Assessment

“At the conclusion of each quarter we connect with students and ask for feedback on our program. Overwhelmingly, students have praised the ‘On-Boarding’ orientation of our program, as it provides them with an early opportunity to gain insight into our company. Students are introduced to our culture, resources, processes and expectations, as well as given the opportunity to interact with other students (from a variety of disciplines) and meet our upper-level management...Each co-op is assigned a mentor—an LPK guide who assists in their professional transition and is available to them to provide portfolio development, professional communication and feedback on their performance.”

— Steve Bowling
Libby Perszyk Kathman (LPK), Cincinnati, OH

orientation
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

At the same time the co-op is making adjustments in the new workplace, another concern is career development. Work is a major part of our culture and comprises a large segment of our definition of success. A co-op student enters the work world with dreams, aspirations, self-achievement, and recognition. What is often missing is the patience, wisdom and guidance necessary to translate the dreams into reality.

EMPLOYER MINDSET

There are two sides to orientation. On the organizational side, the goal is socialization of the new employee into the company culture. This is usually a matter of ensuring the employee conforms to the organizational structure while making an individualistic contribution. From the individual’s side, the goal is personalization, a matter of influencing what the organization does and how it does it. The objective then is to have these two goals collaborate rather than conflict. The leadership by the supervisor is needed to effectively communicate and reinforce these goals over an extended period of time.

“Etegent Technologies has been involved with the Co-op Program at the University of Cincinnati for 15 years and we have found that a large majority of our co-op students remain with us through their entire co-op experience. So, why do our co-ops stay with us? The most common response we hear is that they get the opportunity to do work that is technical and meaningful...The fact that over half of our engineering staff is composed of former co-ops or graduate student consultants/interns is testament to the quality of the engineering career experience Etegent Technologies provides.”

— Diedre Larkin
Etegent Technologies, LTD, Cincinnati, OH

Some concerns that should be addressed:

1. Company/department - history, organization, culture policies and standards
2. The city/community - housing, transportation, things to do
3. The job - objectives, training, expectations, performance

To integrate socially

• Formal introduction to co-workers
• Group norms and practices
• Awareness and tolerances of differences, change and acceptance

To provide support

• Identify role within the organization
• Review individual goals and objectives
• Review conflict resolution

Provide opportunities to

• Allow individual contributions
• Allow mentoring and shadowing
• Be appreciated

Stimulate growth by

• Presenting challenges
• Progressively adding responsibility
• Providing feedback
• Encouraging independent thought
TRAINING

The idea that training is needed for a new employee should come as no surprise to an employer. What type of training can be generally categorized as:

1. what is the job
2. how it is to be performed
3. why

The co-op student is in a transition stage of learning, moving from a structured, dependent and formal environment to one that is more informal, tasking them to be more independent and responsible. As such, they need more action-oriented learning. Learning by doing, in addition to listening and observing, is critical in their ability to apply that knowledge to reality. Creating an environment conducive to learning, along with the actual training, will allow the student to develop habits and methods to continue their professional maturation.

AREAS OF TRAINING

The specific areas of training are dependent upon the job and the educational background of the student. Listed below are three general categories of training:

1. Technical training. This pertains to the specific, job related tasks that are to be performed. Examples are computer design skills, accounting practices and regulatory or safety considerations.
2. Process training. No matter what the particular skills are, there are generally specific ways or methods a company may desire to perform a specific task. Examples include planning, decision-making, problem solving, research and investigation, and conceptualization.
3. Personal development training. This area includes the interpersonal skills needed to effectively work in a group such as communication, self-assessment, developing self-confidence, time management, and interpersonal relations.

MENTORING

Mentoring is a training methodology that is done on an ongoing basis, one-on-one with the student. A mentor is able to draw upon their past experiences to transfer key points of knowledge to the student. Some factors necessary for effective mentoring:

• Understand the student’s individual needs, goals, plans and self-assessment
• Promote a positive outlook of the upcoming term, tempered with realistic attainable expectations
• Share own knowledge and experience to assist the student in key areas
• Listen to the student’s words and observe their actions
• Help the student self assess
• Confront poor performance with specific feedback and changes needed

“We sponsor a variety of enrichment opportunities to encourage informal interaction within our organization. Our co-ops are invited to participate in these learning experiences, including outside speakers, co-op based projects, community outreach events and a variety of other opportunities designed to provide cultural, intellectual and creative stimuli.”

— Steve Bowling
Libby Perszyk Kathman (LPK), Cincinnati, OH
Evaluation of student performance is essential for a successful co-op program. A variety of methods are available for evaluation, both formal and informal. Students are receptive to feedback and that feedback will improve their performance as a growing professional. Students view their supervisors as their “teacher.” Students are looking to their supervisor to actively give them direction to help them succeed.

Traditional co-ops have had little professional exposure and are not accustomed to feedback. Students are accustomed to grades but not to a one-on-one performance evaluation. Data has revealed students may not recognize informal feedback. Employers are encouraged to structure feedback so students recognize this as valuable, actionable information and understand all feedback is relevant. Surveys completed by employers have indicated students would like more feedback regarding their performance.
INFORMAL FEEDBACK

Informal feedback is sometimes not perceived by the student as feedback. The more casual the feedback the less students tend to recognize it as feedback. Feedback can come from a variety of sources. The student’s supervisor should initiate feedback. Group peers and their specific team or department may also offer feedback. Informal feedback shows up as comments or a light-hearted nudge. When using informal feedback be clear with your intent. The more direct, the more likely the student will perceive this to be an area of focus. Positive feedback should be given freely. Areas of growth should be presented in a private setting where the student is not embarrassed. Feedback should be delivered as often as possible to encourage the student to continue to develop.

FORMAL FEEDBACK

Formal feedback should be a prepared and delivered in a private meeting with the co-op to discuss student’s strengths and areas for growth. It should be designed so the manager achieves his desired objective. For example: What do you want to tell this student and why? Present positive feedback first and then discuss areas for growth. End the discussion with positive reinforcement. Students should have clear objectives of what areas for growth need to be addressed. Use specific examples of student behavior whenever possible so students have clear idea of what areas need improvement.

MID-TERM FEEDBACK

A mid-term evaluation session gives the student opportunity for improvement in any areas that need more immediate attention. The best method is generally a one-on-one meeting so the student clearly understands the intent of this feedback. It is helpful if it is written down in the form of goals for the remainder of the co-op term. Goals can be adjusted to help correct and improve student performance.

This meeting is an opportunity for two-way communication. Supervisor to student and student to supervisor communication should occur. Supervisors should encourage open discussion. Prompt the student for their feedback about their co-op experience. Students may be reluctant to share information that was not positive, but it is important for supervisors to understand the obstacles the co-ops may be encountering. Supervisors may need to gently prod students for feedback and discussion.

“I was asked to attend a weekend photo shoot for the finished phase of Google Headquarters in Chelsea Market, which would one day be displayed in the firm’s marketing ads as well as design magazine columns. Although many design co-op students tour job sites during their internships, I knew when upon arriving on the site of this historic city landmark and entering the vibrant complex covered with Google’s infamous logo coupled with the primaries this experience was rare to many.”

Kelly Bolger, Interior Design Co-op student at HLW International LLP
The university provides an end of term online evaluation that is easily accessible. It contains both quantitative and qualitative data. Employers are encouraged to write specific comments about student performance. This report should reflect actual student performance. If the student is not doing well the ratings should match the student performance. Students need to hear and understand what the supervisor perceives to be their strengths and areas for growth. Fair, firm and consistent evaluation is essential. This feedback is integral for their professional growth.

Feedback obtained from the employer report is extremely valuable to the student and the university. Students value employer input and this evaluation helps students identify their areas of strength and their areas for growth. The university utilizes this data in aggregate form to assess how student workplace competencies grow over progressive co-op terms. Data is analyzed and presented to discipline-specific faculty and may be used by faculty to drive curriculum adjustments. In order to strengthen student learning it is important supervisors take the time to complete a student evaluation for each co-op.

Finally, immediate and direct feedback is necessary for co-ops who show up late, are unproductive or show any other unprofessional behavior. Students must be held accountable for being prompt and contributing to your team. Do not hesitate to contact the student’s faculty co-op advisor and keep them apprised of any unprofessional behavior. Prompt action with clear expectations will help students perform at an acceptable level.

“In addition to the initial and final reviews with the co-ops, we found that a mid-term touch point helps us re-align the initial goals and objectives if needed. The students have a formal opportunity prior to their final review to give feedback. Our philosophy is that there should be no surprises that come up during the final review.”

— Ashley Wolff
Duke Energy, Cincinnati, OH
permanent hire

Highly trained co-ops are prime candidates for permanent hire positions. Employers have an advantage in hiring a co-op because they have identified students who have successfully integrated into their culture. Employers can recognize future leaders, based on actual performance as a co-op student. The co-op program provides the opportunity for employers to hire graduating students who have already been assessed and proven to be productive in your organization’s culture.

Employers who wish to retain co-ops after graduation all have one thing in common: the intent to permanently hire co-ops was one of the recognized goals of the co-op program. Students need to know on the front end the company’s long-term goals.

Employers should have clear objectives to measure the success of their co-op program. These may include: students returning for multiple terms, students accepting a full time hire, completed student projects, and overall performance rating from student’s end-of-term evaluation.

“I gained many invaluable skills, and even got to lead my own team of student volunteers, teaching them how to install wall base and windowsills! However, the best part of my Habitat experience was working alongside both volunteers and the homeowners themselves, and building friendships that will last a lifetime!”

— Sydney Moeller, Interior Design Co-op student at Habitat for Humanity
Employer Manual Acknowledgements

The Professional Practice Program at the University of Cincinnati places over 5000 students per year. Data collection, analysis and reflection of the student/employer interaction helps drive the needed change in order to stay current, compelling and relevant. The critical data for change comes from these evaluations.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the employers, supervisors and mentors who have guided students through this experiential learning process. Your direct feedback to the students and to the Division of Professional Practice is invaluable.

Hundreds of employers have contributed to this publication, many of whom filled out surveys, attended conferences and symposiums, and completed evaluation forms all of which provided feedback to this committee. While it is not feasible to mention each employer individually we would like to acknowledge their contributions and thank them for supporting the University of Cincinnati's co-operative education program.

We would also like to acknowledge the following employers for contributing specific employer best practices.

- DRT Manufacturing Co., Dayton, OH; Julie Smith
- Duke Energy, Cincinnati, OH; Ashley Wolff
- Etegent Technologies, LTD., Cincinnati, OH; Diedre Larkin
- LPK (Libby Perszyk Kathman), Cincinnati, OH; Steve Bowling
- MRSI (Marketing Research Service, Inc.) Cincinnati, OH; Jason Ebbing
- Seapine Software, Mason, OH; Chuck Cleveinger
- TECT Power, Whitesboro, New York; Donna Prentice
- Veteran's Administration Medical Center, Cincinnati, OH; Paul Mishurda

University of Cincinnati, Center for Cooperative Education Research and Innovation, grant for publication

Employer Manual Development Committee
Published 2012

- Darnice Langford
  Professor
  Associate Director
  Center for Cooperative Education Research and Innovation

- Maureen Schomaker
  Adjunct Assistant Professor

- James Tappel
  Adjunct Assistant Professor

- William Walters
  Adjunct Assistant Professor

Editorial Services
- Lisa Barlow
  Adjunct Assistant Professor
References


