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DOUGLAS COLLEGE
CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION

The Douglas College Co-op Program

The Douglas College Co-op program enables motivated students to integrate post-secondary academic studies with practical experience in their chosen field. Students alternate periods of full-time study with periods of full-time, paid, productive employment in business, industry, government, and the professions.

Why Co-operative Education?

Students graduating from post-secondary programs are now facing profound social, technological, and economic change. The goal of cooperative education is to help students develop the necessary confidence and employer-valued abilities to succeed in today's competitive job market. Through cooperative 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 youth to become productive members of society.

Employer Benefits

Reduced recruitment and hiring costs

- Employers enjoy access to a year-round supply of highly motivated and capable students from many different disciplines to perform specific tasks or projects. A large majority of participating organizations report that these students perform as well as, or better than, regular employees performing comparable duties.
- Employers can select from a group of applicants who have already met high entrance requirements, and who have completed some post-secondary training.
- Students are employed for work terms of 12-16 weeks and, depending upon their academic schedule, may be available for two consecutive work terms.
- Employers have access to professional coordinating staff who can arrange interviews (on campus or at the work site) at their convenience.
- Hiring co-op students is a great way for an organization to try out one or more students, with no long-term commitment, and then select the best for offers of permanent employment when they complete their educational program. Several national studies have shown that participation in such programs is a cost-effective way for employers to screen, evaluate, train, recruit, and hire career employees.

EFFECTIVE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- Employers can meet short-term needs due to vacation schedules, transfers, promotion, training commitments, peak work cycles, or special projects by hiring co-op students.

- Co-op students can be utilized to free higher level (and higher paid) full-time workers for more important tasks. Work that is routine and uninspiring for full-time, professional employees may be complex and interesting for students.
- Employers have the ability to increase effective utilization of permanent employees and an opportunity for employee development in the area of (co-op student) supervision.
- Co-op students bring enthusiasm and a host of new ideas and approaches which can have a positive effect in the workplace.
- Co-op students may be employed to work on special projects that require specific skills or expertise that are not available within the organization. This can be especially true in the case of senior and graduate level students.

Investing in our future

- Employers share in the training and development of our youth to help them become productive members of society and potential leaders.
- Employers are co-educators, providing learning opportunities beyond the bounds of the classroom.
- Co-operative education provides the opportunity for employers to have direct input into the educational process, to suggest how to make curricula more relevant and how to improve pre-employment training. For example, employers are often invited to nominate professional staff to serve on college and university advisory committees.

Student Benefits

Co-op provides students with:

- opportunities to gain relevant employment skills and realistic expectations of the workforce before graduation
- opportunities to prepare for future career options and strategies upon graduation through job search workshops and related work experience
- opportunities to acquire valued knowledge and experience and to establish valuable contacts with numerous professionals within the industry
- a learning environment to build confidence and self-esteem
- financial remuneration to help defray educational costs

Employer Responsibilities

Employer-Employee Relationship

For a co-op work term to be successful, the supervisor and the student must establish an effective relationship. For the majority of work term, the student becomes an employee of the employing organization and is expected to be treated as any other temporary employee with regard to benefits and other legal entitlements (as recognized under the Employment Standards Act).

Ideally, co-op employers:

- advise students, at the outset, on all issues regarding confidentiality in the work place 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 students with an orientation to the workplace, including an overview of the organization (e.g. mission statement, products etc.), physical layout, names and locations of 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 of the work term with the student and, on a regular basis, give the student feedback on how she or he is doing, including areas of strength and areas which require improvement
- assist students in setting realistic learning objectives, and provide relevant learning opportunities
- acquaint the student with relevant resources and materials
- participate in the work-site visit or follow-up contact by the College's faculty advisor to assess the student's progress and performance
- complete a final evaluation of the student's performance, which the employer is encouraged to discuss with the student before the end of their work-term

Student Responsibilities

Co-op students are expected to:

- conform to all the conditions and rules that apply to employees in the organization
- behave ethically in the workplace
- set goals for learning
- work on enhancing their academic, professional and personal skills
- maintain employer confidentiality
- accept feedback and suggestions for improvement in a positive manner
- prepare a work term report, the topic of which should be discussed with the employer, especially with regard to any issues of confidentiality
- achieve a satisfactory evaluation from the employer and faculty advisor

Institutional responsibilities

Douglas College is responsible for:

- ensuring the integrity of its cooperative education programs
- developing and maintaining relevant curricula

The Co-op Process/Hiring Procedure

Depending upon the co-op program, students are normally available throughout the year for four or eight month periods, starting in January, May and September. The following process demonstrates how simple it is to hire co-op students.

1. Job Descriptions

Ideally, three to four months prior to the start of the work term, employers are asked to provide job descriptions which outline duties and responsibilities, required education, and experience sought. We are happy to work with employers for last-minute requests. Employers can register on CareerHub (mycareer.douglascollege.ca) and upload their own posting or can ask the Co-op staff to upload on their behalf.

2. Student Applications

Job descriptions are posted, cover letters and resumes of interested students are sent to employers, either bundled by the Co-op department or applications are sent directly through the employer's portal for screening and interview selection.

3. Interviews

The co-op staff are happy to arrange interviews between the employers and the candidates. Interviews usually take place at the employer's place of business or on campus. Telephone interviews can also be arranged if required.

4. Placement Confirmation

An offer of employment to a student, and the conditions of employment, are normally conveyed through the Co-op office, who will confirm the student's acceptance to the employer.

Role of the Co-op Office

The Co-op Office:

- facilitates employer-student contact;
- ensures fair and equitable treatment of employers and students through the job posting and interview process;
- assists employers through all aspects of the co-op process;
- prepares co-op students to optimize the work term opportunity;
- works with employers and students in monitoring and evaluating the work term;

- encourages students to experience a range of employing organizations during their Co-op program;
- monitors the placements, usually through on-site visits, ensuring that both the employers' and the students' needs and expectations are being met.

Workplace Issues

Salaries

Salaries are generally set by the employer within the salary structure of that organization. The co-op staff can provide current salary ranges for its Co-op program.

Benefits

Benefits are the responsibility of the employer, and must be provided under the terms and conditions of the Employment Standards Act.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality issues should be discussed and agreed within the first week on the job. 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, belongs to the employer.

Problems in the Workplace

Should any unusual circumstances arise during the work term; e.g. behavioural problems or medical emergencies, employers should contact the faculty advisor, who will help to facilitate a resolution. Should employers consider dismissing a co-op student, they are urged to consult the faculty advisor as early as possible to discuss their concerns.

Lay-offs and Strikes

If employers foresee a lay-off or a strike that will directly affect the co-op student, they should notify the faculty advisor as soon as possible.

Repeat Work Terms

Should students return to do another work term, the employer should consider giving them increased responsibilities, and their salaries should be increased accordingly.

Work Term Report

Co-op students are required to complete a written report of each work term. The reports, depending upon the program, may be a report required by the company, a technical report, a report of the work term experience, or any combination of these. 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 the employer's evaluation are used in assessing the success of the work term, as recognized on the student's transcript.

Role of the Supervisor

Planning for the work term

Ideally, before the student reports for work it is important to do some planning about the work that this student will do, and how she or he will fit into your organizational culture and climate. You can expect your student to be bright, idealistic, and eager to become involved as quickly as possible in work that is educational, career-related, and challenging. Co-op employers generally find that time spent clarifying the student's role, explaining behavioural norms, and welcoming the student as a member of a team is rewarded in the student's performance and loyalty. A set of guidelines is offered for your consideration on the following:

FIRST DAY ON THE JOB: ORIENTATION

Ideally, a meeting should be scheduled with the student as soon as possible after he or she reports for work. This meeting should cover the following topics:

- Introduce the student to all members of your group, with an emphasis on "key players"
- Explain reporting responsibilities (the chain of command) within the group
- Explain office policies on work hours, lunch and break periods, and if appropriate and not previously covered when the student was hired, the salary and benefits for the position, as well as any overtime policy that might apply.
- Discuss the standard for dress within the group.
- Invite the student to attend department staff meetings and other activities, if possible.
- Make the student feel welcome in the group, and assure her/him that you and your entire staff will try to make this experience as productive and mutually beneficial as possible. Encourage the student to utilize your "open door" and to bring in any questions, problems, or concerns that he or she may encounter, within reason

- Discuss, at least in general terms, the work that you plan to have the student carry out and, if some one other than yourself, the person who will assign and review the work and supervise the student
- Tell the student about the organizational policies regarding proprietary information and / or government classified information and security clearances that may be required. If proprietary/security information is involved in the work of your group, advise the student that any reports, logs, or journals required by the college must be approved by you before being submitted to the student's faculty advisor
- If the student is new to your area, you may consider offering information and advice on housing, public transportation, special events, and cultural and social opportunities

LATER IN THE FIRST WEEK ON THE JOB

Assist the student to identify at least five learning objectives to be achieved during the work term. These objectives are required for the student to earn credit based on the work experience. The learning objectives should be specific, measurable, and achievable by the end of the work term. They should be mutually agreed between you, the student, the faculty advisor, and the person in your group who is responsible for the student's day-to-day activities (if that is someone other than yourself). At least one learning objective should relate directly to the student's work assignment, and should be mastered by "doing it" on the job. An additional learning objective could be completed (learned) through observation, and a third through the student's independent study or research. The learning objectives may also be used as the broad base for more specific performance objectives for the work term.

Set a tentative schedule of short meetings with the student throughout the work term to review her/his performance and progress on the learning and performance objectives. Make sure that there is a clear understanding of how his or her work will be evaluated, when it will be evaluated, and by whom.

Discuss the student's work assignments with her or him and provide avenues for direction and assistance whenever the student needs help. Be sure that the student understands that there is no such thing as a "dumb" question in your group; that everyone is available to provide answers and help when needed within reason.

If warranted by the size and culture of your group, assign a mentor, buddy, or partner to consult and counsel the student on a day-to-day basis. Ideally, the mentor should not be the supervisor or lead person, nor someone directly associated with the student's work assignment. A mentor serves as a "sounding board" for the student, and should be someone of similar age and background who has the respect of the group. The student should be able to perceive the mentor as a confidant who can identify with the student's concerns and help the student to gain professional and personal acceptance within the group.

CONTINUING WITH THE WORK-TERM

The faculty advisor will arrange a formal meeting (work-site visit) with the supervisor, at your convenience, to review and evaluate performance and expectations

Two to three weeks before the end of the student's work term the Co-op staff will email the employer an evaluation. It is recommended the supervisor review the completed evaluation with the student at that time.

NEAR THE END OF THE WORK-TERM

If the student has performed well, and you would like to have him/her back for additional work terms, then make that invitation clear. At the same time, you might discuss possible future work assignments and a tentative set of learning objectives for the next work term. If this is the last work term prior to the student's graduation, and you foresee a possible career for her/him in your organization, please arrange for the student to talk with your human resources staff to ensure timely follow-up.