CALHOUN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

EMPLOYER'S GUIDE TO COOPERATIVE LEARNING

BEST PRACTICES

CALHOUN COOP PROGRAM

NOTES

CALHOUN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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RE: Thank you for joining Co-Op!

We would like to formally welcome you as a partner employer to Calhoun's Career Services Cooperative Learning program. At Calhoun Community College, we prepare our students for competitive careers. Our goal is for our students to earn the credentials that match *or exceed* industry expectations and are prepared to be productive employees. The opportunity you are offering our students as co-ops is extremely invaluable.

On behalf of the Career Services department, I would like to thank you for choosing to conduct business in the Tennessee Valley and for partnering with Calhoun!

Sincerely,

Director of Career Services and Cooperative Learning

Calhoun Community College

CONTENTS

WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

UNDERSTANDING CALHOUN'S WORK-BASED LEARNING (WBL) DEFINITIONS

COOPERATIVE LEARNING (CO-OP): Cooperative Learning is a structured, educational strategy integrating classroom studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic or career goals. It provides progressive experiences in integrating theory and practice. Co-Op is a partnership among students, educational institutions, and employers with specified responsibilities for each party.

Calhoun Community College's Cooperative Learning Program affords students the opportunity to acquire on-the-job experience before graduation by combining studies at Calhoun with related work experience. This Program allows the student to work on a part-time basis (a minimum of 20 hours per week) in a job directly related to his/her academic major while attending school on a full-or part-time basis.

INTERNSHIP: Similar to a Co-Op, interns work in a position directly related to their field of study for a limited time period. Internships tend to be unpaid, but the experience is invaluable and helps to build a resume. College credit may be available to students participating in an internship.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP (RAS): Registered Apprenticeships are workforce training models that combine paid on-the-job training and related instruction. RAs are industry-driven and flexible in design with employers at the foundation of every program.

BENEFITS OF A CO-OP

★ Benefits for the Employer:

- Provides a motivated workforce.
- Provides an opportunity to train potential employees specific to the organization.
- Provides full-time or part-time employees.
- Provides an opportunity for the employer to influence the college program.
- Provides a reduction of costs in recruitment and training.
- Provides a source of performance appraisal for the student and for the college.

★ Benefits for the Student:

- The in-field work experience helps the student determine whether or not they want to continue in the chosen career early enough to choose another career.
- Allows the student to gain experience in the career in an environment different from the classroom.
- Enhances the student's critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Enables a student to pay a portion of their college expenses.
- Allows the student to contribute to the economy.
- Gives the student a competitive edge for full-time employment after graduation.
- Promotes maturity and the development of interpersonal skills.
- Provides an opportunity for the student to work with state-of-the-art equipment and use the most current procedures.

★ Employer Partnership Perks:

- College partnership advertisements
- Access to early event registration
- Annual Co-Op Appreciation Breakfast
- Remind text notifications for instant updates

CONDITIONS OF AGREEMENT

The goal of the Co-Op program is to create a productive and beneficial experience for everyone: students, employers, and the college. The requirements for participating companies help keep the program excellent!

All Co-Op students are enrolled in a Co-Op class each semester. If your company would like to consider covering the cost of this class for the students who work for you, Career Services would be happy to help you set up a Co-Op scholarship! Contact us for more details.

Requirements for Co-Op Companies:

1. Designate a point of contact to maintain coordination with Calhoun Community College
2. Provide job descriptions in advance of the Co-Op assignment
3. Establish work schedules consistent with the Co-Op student's class schedule to enable the Co-Op to both fulfill their obligation to the company and to complete their coursework, degree, and/or certificate program
4. Orient the Co-Op student to the company's mission, policy, and procedures
5. Select Co-Op students referred by College in compliance with EEO principles
6. Process all personnel actions and keep necessary records related to the student's employment
7. Provide meaningful work assignments related to the Co-Op student's academic studies or career goals to learn and be productive
8. Pay students in accordance with established company pay scales, consistent with industry standards
9. Designate a mentor/supervisor for the Co-Op student during the work period
10. Support completion of projects assigned by the College as part of the Co-Op experience
11. Conduct appraisals and evaluations with the mentor/supervisor, the Co-Op student and the Calhoun instructor (or designee)
12. Counsel Co-Op students regarding their performance by discussing behaviors to continue and areas that need improvement
13. Notify the College in writing of any change in the Co-Op student's employment status
14. Commit to the Co-Op student completing their degree/certificate before offering to hire them into a regular position

By participating in the Co-Op program, companies agree to abide by these conditions

The office of Career Services and Cooperative Learning strives for program excellence, too. In order to serve our Co-Op students and companies, we'll make sure we're here to help.

WE WILL:

1. Designate a representative (currently, the Work-Based Learning Coordinator) to work with the company to serve as the liaison between the College and the Co-Op student
2. Inform students of the opportunity to apply for the Co-Op program and apprise interested students of eligibility requirements
3. Inform eligible students of Co-Op program opportunities
4. Refer interested and qualified candidates to the program without discrimination
5. Correlate work and study in a manner that will expand the Co-Op student's educational development
6. Furnish the company with requested information related to the Co-Op student's field of study and academic standing
7. Monitor academic progress
8. Inform (in writing) the company of any change in the Co-Op student's progress and performance
9. Enter into an agreement among student, company, and college, which further explains each party's responsibilities

Thank you for your interest in partnering with Calhoun Career Services and Cooperative Learning to employ students as Co-Ops. We are excited to work with you!

SELECTING A MENTOR

In order for a Co-Op student to be successful in their position, it is encouraged that they are placed with a mentor. Not everyone has qualities to be a mentor; however, here are a few things to consider when selecting the right employee:

I. **Compatibility:** A mentor should have the ability to communicate effectively to a student beginning an entry-level position within their career. They should have an understanding that this is a new opportunity for the student and they are there to learn just as much as work. Flexibility and understanding are key.

II. **Contrast:** A mentor will push a student outside of their comfort zone when assigning work related to the student's career choice. While doing this, they are also providing guidance and support to assist the student even in uncomfortable situations.

III. **Expertise:** It is not always about the job title, sometimes it's simply about the person who can provide the most knowledge and expertise in a way an entry-level Co-Op can understand. A mentor should be a person a student can turn to for questions and guidance.

IV. **Trust:** Within a mentor-ship, information is usually shared in confidence. It is important that the mentor, remaining within ethical standards, provides that platform for a Co-Op student. Be the person to answer difficult questions, provide feedback both positive and negative, and help set goals.

STUDENT ON-BOARDING

Similar to a full-time employee, planning is necessary to make sure everything is in place for a Co-Op student. This can include anything from a work uniform, to desk space, to access to information the Co-Op will need to be successful within their position. Here are a few other things to keep in mind.

Prior to start date, set your Co-Op up for success:

- Involve entire team to welcome student.
- Confirm Managers/Supervisors are prepared:
  - Work station is functional and equipped (email/phone)
  - Projects Co-Op will participate in
  - Regular job duties are defined
  - First tasks checklist is created
  - Schedule meetings with training sessions

Maintain communication with Co-Op before start date:

- Communicate through "Welcome Email"
  - Exact date, time, and location for the first day
  - Arrival instructions including directions, parking, building/entrance to use
  - On-boarding packet: expectations, dress code, company policies, documentation (such as ID) to bring
  - Introduction to point of contacts with contact information
  - Schedule of first day activities

First Day = First Impression:

- Make it memorable with a company welcome bag or swag
- Assign team members to make introductions, conduct a site tour, and accompany to lunch (try to include someone close in age and experience when possible)
- Enlist mentor to help set up work station

Launch New Hire Orientation:

- Keep in mind this may be the student's very first job; jargon and company culture may be completely foreign. Review the following:
  - Values and culture (illustrated in clearly defined terms)
  - Work standards and procedures
  - Safety regulations
  - Terminology/industry jargon
  - Confidentiality agreements
  - Time-sheet (how to complete, deadlines)
  - Organizational chart
  - Communication standards
- Schedule weekly learning goals; regular check-in meetings/coffee
- Review Co-Op's class schedule and create a consistent work schedule

BEST PRACTICES

Do:

- Be flexible with student's work schedule; education is a priority
- Ensure safety training is understood and followed
- Deliver day-by-day training, supervision, and support
- Invite Co-Ops to participate in department or safety meetings just like a full-time employee
- Involve a cross-functional team in the interview process to provide a diverse group perspective
- Consistently provide meaningful performance feedback
- Work with Co-Op to develop appropriate professional and organizational goals
- Plan a rotation throughout the training process to maximize exposure to tasks and team members
- Give Co-Ops responsibility or "ownership" as they become more experienced
- Select mentors who don't mind teaching
- Ask about what the student is learning in class and apply it in the workplace
- Avoid menial tasks as much as possible
- Expect that the Co-Op will come to work with questions

Don't:

- Be afraid to challenge the student to provide critical thinking situations
- Forget that the Co-Op is still pursuing their education, so they will need guidance
- Assume all students have a certain level of knowledge
- Take the Co-Op too casually; students receive academic credit for their experience
- Have a "do as I say, not as I do" mentality

EVALUATION TIPS

Supervisor evaluations are completed each semester a student is enrolled as a Co-Op. Supervisor feedback greatly impacts the performance of the student, which can ultimately assist in helping them land a full-time position.

It is highly encouraged that you meet with the student to discuss your feedback, expectations, and future goals. Selecting "Outstanding" with no feedback on an evaluation is stating you have the "perfect employee"; however, there is always room for improvement.

1. **Offer constructive feedback.** If an issue with performance exists, address it right away and provide specific examples in the evaluation.
2. **Establish clear expectations.** Make sure the Co-Op understands their individual responsibilities and how they contribute to achieving the company's goals.
3. **Be prepared.** Collect comments from other managers and colleagues the student works with. It's important to highlight relevant examples and talking points, but still keep it conversational by letting the Co-Op provide insight.
4. **Provide details.** If a Co-Op is demonstrating outstanding work, explain with examples of why they rated outstanding. If a student is rating average work, highlight areas you would like to see improved along with a timeline to check in on those items.
5. **Focus on the big picture.** Explain the effect that the Co-Op's performance has on the department or company as a whole. This can lead to the employee feeling more valued, and as a result, motivated to improve.
6. **Be positive yet critical.** If there's a problem with performance, be direct and specific. Even the best workers need to receive critical feedback. However, even those employees with the most room for improvement should be praised for their strengths.
7. **Offer solutions.** For every piece of constructive criticism you give, be prepared to provide a solution. Let the Co-Op express any concerns or frustrations but agree on a commitment to helping achieve future goals.
8. **Follow up.** Revisit with the Co-Op each semester you complete the supervisor evaluation. Discuss the previous evaluations and highlight areas that have improved.

CO-OP TRANSFER AGREEMENT

The signing of the Co-Op Transfer recognizes a collaborative agreement that allows Co-Op students at Calhoun Community College wishing to transfer to one of the participating local universities to potentially keep their Co-Op position with the same employer. Students easily transfer their academic credits through existing agreements, so allowing them to continue in their current Co-Op role upon entering a local university of their choice will benefit all parties. The Career Services department at Calhoun Community College serves as the liaison for the student to make the transition as seamless as possible.

PARTNER UNIVERSITIES:

Alabama A&M University

Athens State University

The University of Alabama in Huntsville

University of North Alabama

TAKE YOUR CO-OP TO THE NEXT LEVEL

A. SPONSORSHIPS

Sponsorships are available for Calhoun Co-Op and Career Services events such as:

- Co-Op Breakfast
- Etiquette Dinner
- Job Fairs
- Professional Development & Training Sessions

Contact careerservices@calhoun.edu for more information!

B. CO-OP ADVISORY BOARD

Mission

To provide experience-based advice and guidance to create strategies for improving the quality of opportunities and services for cooperative learning, including in field technical training and university transfer programs that enforce individual growth within education and careers.

Interested in learning more about becoming an Advisory Board member?
Contact Career Services at coop@calhoun.edu."

C. INDUSTRY TOURS

We love seeing our Co-Op students at work. Host an industry tour in which Calhoun is able to bring faculty and/or students to your facility. If allowed, photos can be taken of the Co-Op students on site to be utilized for promoting the Co-Op program and will include your company logo.

If you are interested in hosting an industry tour, please email careerservices@calhoun.edu.

A special "Thank you" to our previous Co-Op Advisory Board contributors:
Ron Hendershot, Trevor Bragwell, and Todd Mehl.

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CALHOUN CAREER SERVICES

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FOR MORE INFO, CONTACT:
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