Cooperative Education/Internship Program (Co-op)

INTRODUCTION
Cooperative Education at University of Wisconsin-Stout is part of a nationwide college/university program that integrates career-related work experience with academic course work.

Cooperative Education enhances academic course work by providing a realistic look at a chosen field and adding relevancy to classroom studies. Outcomes include professional skill development, maturity and increased motivation. A successful co-op experience also greatly increases employability upon graduation.

Internships
The term “internship” may be preferred or traditionally used with some employers or agencies. In most cases the guidelines described here are applicable to a co-op or internship and the terms are synonymous. In some programs there is a difference and students should check with their adviser or program director. Internships handled through the Career Services Office will operate under the same guidelines that follow.

Benefits
Earn Credits and Salary
Co-op/intern students receive paid work experience and earn credits toward a degree.

View Careers
Working in the field helps to strengthen and refine career goals. Frequently, the realistic work experience will point out the usefulness of additional courses or the pursuit of a minor, which could improve employability.

Build a Strong Resume
In-depth work experiences are invaluable in building a strong resume and identifying references. The opportunity to meet and work with professionals is extremely helpful in job search and networking activities. Many students are offered full-time positions by the co-op employer following graduation.

Strengthen Interpersonal Skills
Important aspects of any job include developing the ability to work cooperatively with others, learning when to listen and when to speak, dealing with pressure, and developing effective communication and supervisory skills. Professionalism and maturity are additional benefits.

Gain Insight into the Hiring Process
Co-op students learn about hiring procedures including job openings, interviewing, networking, personnel policies, fringe benefits and other employment issues.

Co-op Registration and Selection
- Students must complete their profile and upload a resume in Stout CareerLink on the Career Services' website. Completing the Stout CareerLink profile and uploading a resume allows a student to apply for online co-op openings in their major or concentration. Student applicants are selected for a co-op position by the co-op employer.
- Study the Cooperative Education materials available in the Career Services office and website. Counselors are available to assist students with career goals, which relate to co-op experiences.
- Check with appropriate program director or co-op mentor for specific requirements. (Requirements may vary by major or concentration.)
- Read and sign a “Memorandum of Agreement.”

Co-op Scheduling
- A co-op experience is usually a full-time position, one semester and/or summer in length. A summer can be combined with the previous or following semester. Some employers prefer six-month positions, such as January through June, or July through December.
- Co-op/intern students are paid. Pay varies depending on the skill and experience of the student, as well as the type of business or agency.
- Some students complete two or more co-op experiences with the same employer at upgraded levels, alternating with a semester on campus. Experience with different employers is often preferred. The number of co-op experiences varies from one to several.
- A parallel co-op, consisting of combining part-time work with part-time school, is possible when jobs are within commuting distance of UW-Stout.

Credits
Credits earned per term (semester/summer) range from one to six depending on length of time and program regulations. Students should check with their program director or advisor regarding credit load.

Fees
Students must register for a co-op/internship just as they do for any class and pay the per credit fee.

A co-op student working 40 or more hours per week retains full-time student status for purposes of loan deferments and parental health insurance. All students receiving financial aid should contact the Financial Aid Office to determine possible impact on financial aid status.
Housing
Students must plan ahead to avoid conflict with campus or community rental contracts. Housing and living expenses while on a co-op are the responsibility of the co-op student. Some employers may assist with locating housing.

Evaluation of Co-op Experience
Both the university and the employer evaluate the co-op student. It is important to have ongoing communication between the supervisor and the university co-op mentor. The university co-op mentor assigns the final grade.

Long Range Impact of Co-op
Program Directors must be included in all phases of planning and completing the co-op/intern experience to ensure that program requirements are met.
Lengthy or multiple co-op/intern experiences usually extend the time required to earn a four-year degree. The extended time is generally more than offset by the salary earned while participating in a co-op experience. The experience may provide a competitive edge in the job market.

Co-op Positions
Currently, more than 400 companies and agencies are enrolled with the co-op program at UW-Stout. Due to supply and demand, positions are not always available for all students, or sometimes not enough students are available for all openings. Check with the Career Services office and register early.

University staff help develop co-op sites and make necessary arrangements; however, students may generate a co-op/intern position themselves with the help from Career Services.