

Cooperative Education at RIT

RIT is a world leader in cooperative education. With nearly 3,000 students and 1,300 employers participating annually, RIT's program is one of the largest and oldest in the world.

What is co-op?

Cooperative education, or co-op, is a program that adds meaningful, paid work experience to your traditional academic course of study. For some students co-op is a required component of the academic program. Students in other academic programs have the option of participating and several academic areas offer other forms of experiential education instead of co-op. Cooperative education is a distinct educational program. Here's why:

- Co-op employment is directly related to your field of study
- Co-op employment is full-time, productive work
- Co-op employment is paid
- Co-op employment increases in complexity and challenge according to your academic level and experience
- Co-op employment includes formal evaluation and documentation of your performance

Why is co-op of value to me?

Co-op gives you the opportunity to:

- Enrich your educational experience by applying what you've learned in class to a real world work setting and bringing what you've learned on co-op back to the classroom
- Participate in meaningful, productive work that makes you a more attractive candidate for full-time employment after graduation and helps you earn a higher starting salary than students without co-op experience
- Explore different employers and work settings helping you further refine your career choice and employment goals
- Develop additional job content skills and enhance vital personal skills such as written and oral communication, teamwork and analytical ability
- Earn a salary to help you finance your educational expenses
- Take a welcome breather away from the normal "grind" of classroom work

Why do employers hire co-op students?

Employers benefit from co-op in a number of ways:

- Co-op students are flexible, highly motivated employees who join the work force at relatively low cost to the employer and can contribute in meaningful and productive ways
- Your presence can free up regular employees for other projects and activities
- Your abilities and potential for permanent employment can be assessed on the job
- Your new ideas and enthusiasm are often professionally stimulating to regular employees
- You serve as the employer's "good will ambassador" to other RIT students and faculty, facilitating recruiting and other relationships

How long does a co-op assignment last?

A single co-op block work assignment is the same length as an academic quarter. A double block work assignment is two consecutive quarters of work. The specific start and end dates of each co-op assignment are negotiated with the hiring employer but generally students must work a minimum of 10 weeks (or 350 – 400 hours) to qualify for single block co-op credit and 20 weeks (or 700 – 800 hours) for double block credit.

Depending on your academic program, co-op may be a pre-scheduled part of your course sequence or you may, within some general guidelines, be free to co-op when you wish. Specific calendar information for this academic year is included in your co-op folder.

How do I get started?

You will be invited to attend a co-op orientation to learn about the services and support available to you through the Office of Co-op and Career Services. Check your e-mail and our web site www.rit.edu/co-op/careers for specific times and information. For some students orientation information may be included in other academic department courses or seminars

Is anyone going to help me find a co-op job?

Every co-op student is assigned a Program Coordinator in the Office of Co-op and Career Services. The Program Coordinator works with the students in your academic department and provides one-on-one advisement and support to you in your job search. Contact information for your Program Coordinator as well as the specific requirements and information concerning co-op in your academic department is included in this handbook.

How do I find out about co-op job opportunities?

Use **RIT Job Zone**, the online job information service available through our web site at www.rit.edu/co-op/careers. After registering, you will be able to review and apply online to co-op job postings and on-campus interview opportunities. (*See the RIT Job Zone handout in this folder for detailed information*).

We highly recommend that you also develop job leads and apply for jobs *on your own*. This is especially important if you have some unique employment goals and interests. (*See the Job Search Timeline handout for helpful information*). Your Program Coordinator can help you develop your job search plan and provide you with helpful information to use in reaching out to prospective employers.

Do I receive credit for co-op?

Yes. You register for the appropriate co-op course in advance of completing your co-op assignment. This course will appear on your transcript with an "S" grade when you have met all of the work assignment requirements. Co-op does not take the place of other academic courses and is most often offered in addition to the normal sequence of courses in your program.

Do I pay tuition for co-op?

There are no tuition charges while you are on co-op unless you decide to take other academic courses on a part-time basis. You are considered to be a full-time student while on co-op and are eligible to utilize all the facilities and services of the Institute.

How much can I earn while on co-op?

Your employer determines your compensation level. Salary rates are based on a number of variables and most often include the following: your academic course of study, year level, prior co-op experiences, and established company pay schedules. There may be room for negotiation based on circumstances. Many employers will offer you basic benefits while on co-op including paid holidays and sick time, relocation expense reimbursements, assistance in locating housing, and service time credit should you join the employer after graduation. Check our web site for the latest co-op salary data provided by academic program.

What type of work qualifies for co-op?

Co-op assignments should be full-time, paid work directly related to your field of study and career interests. Jobs listed by the Office of Co-op and Career Services, are approved co-op positions. If you obtain a co-op position on your own and are not sure if it is acceptable, see your Program Coordinator, faculty advisor or department chair before accepting the job. Keep in mind that if the job meets the criteria it doesn't matter if a company calls the job an internship or temporary employment.

How is my performance evaluated?

The Office of Co-op and Career Services provides an evaluation form to your employer near the end of each co-op quarter (the form used for students in your academic program can be found in this handbook). The employer is asked to review the completed evaluation with you and provide you with a copy prior to

your return to school. Some employers have their own evaluation instruments that they use in addition to, or in place of, the RIT form. Whatever process the employer uses, the evaluation is a key tool in helping you understand and improve upon your performance in subsequent co-op assignments. In addition to the employer's evaluation, you will be asked by your academic department to complete a written report concerning your co-op assignment. The report format varies depending on the academic area.

Am I guaranteed a co-op job?

It is impossible to guarantee any student a co-op since the final hiring decision is the employer's. You are not placed into a co-op position, but rather you apply and go through the hiring and selection process developing the job search skills that will help ensure your long-term career success. The Office of Co-op and Career Services does guarantee we will help you in any way we can with your search.

Can I stay in Rochester?

Many co-op jobs are located in the Rochester area and the advantages of staying in the area make this a competitive job market. While it is quite understandable and appropriate to have specific goals and preferences, it is not advisable to limit your job search to any one specific area. You will enhance your chances of landing a rewarding co-op position if you remain flexible about the type of position, company, industry, and the potential location of your work assignment.

Where will I live if I leave Rochester?

Many out-of-town employers will provide help in finding temporary housing. The assistance varies: some companies will provide a list of possible apartments and room rentals; some will pay for a hotel for a few days while you are looking; some have co-op housing already arranged. It is a good idea to check with the colleges in the area because residence hall space is frequently available, especially in the summer. It is appropriate to discuss your housing needs with an employer once an offer has been made.

Will my employer pay my relocation expenses?

Some employers, especially those located out of state, will pay for all or part of your relocation expenses. It is important to have a clear understanding of your obligation before accepting a co-op position if extensive travel expenses are anticipated.

How do I register for the next quarter while out on a co-op assignment?

While out on co-op you will receive registration information from your academic department concerning course scheduling for the next quarter. If your next quarter is part of a double block co-op, you must make sure you are registered for the second co-op as well.

Can I collect unemployment insurance after my co-op ends?

Once your co-op employment with a company has ended, you are *not eligible* to collect unemployment insurance benefits per New York State law. RIT supports employers against any such claims by co-op students.

What if I don't get a co-op job?

Certain circumstances may make it difficult for students to find appropriate co-op assignments. It is essential that you are active and aggressive in your job search and document all your efforts. Close contact with your Program Coordinator is important especially if you feel a lack of progress in your job search. A number of options are available to you in the event you don't obtain an assignment and these may be discussed with your Program Coordinator or academic department chair.

How does co-op affect financial aid?

Any earnings, whether from co-op or other types of employment, are considered when your financial aid package is developed each year. According to federal guidelines, RIT expects you will be able to save some amount of your co-op earnings to contribute towards your educational costs.

Inform the Office of Financial Aid of your plans for the next year when you complete the RIT Financial Aid Application. That will allow your financial aid counselor to schedule your financial aid for the

quarters you will be enrolled in classes. Please also remember to notify the Office of Financial Aid if your enrollment (and co-op) plans change.

With the exception of Pell Grant, you do not receive financial aid while you are on co-op. If you are eligible for Pell Grant, the Office of Financial Aid will be able to credit the Pell Grant to your student account while you are on co-op. The Pell Grant can be credited to your student account only after the Office of Financial Aid confirms that you are registered for and working on a co-op job.

Earnings from your co-op job must be reported on the following year's federal aid application (FAFSA). If your income changes dramatically from year-to-year because of co-op earnings, you should request a financial aid evaluation. It may be important to keep all documentation of your job such as tax returns and pay stubs because you may have to submit them to the Office of Financial Aid as part of any appeal. Your financial aid counselor can provide additional information about this process.

Do I have to pay taxes on what I earn?

Yes. According to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service salaries/wages paid to co-op students *are* fully subject to applicable federal income taxes. They are also subject to applicable state income taxes. Any type of personal income should be assumed taxable unless IRS regulations specifically declare it to be "excludable" (i.e., tax-exempt). There is no exclusion of co-op wages in current regulations.

In 1972, a U.S. Tax Court ruled (Revenue 72-607) that work, which co-op students do, is primarily for their employers' benefit and is in return for the wages they received, so such payments represent "compensation for services," not educational grants, and thus are taxable in accordance with Income Tax Regulations (Sec. 117.4.C). These rulings apply regardless of whether students are required to co-op by their college or not.

International students are required to pay federal and state income taxes but not FICA (social security tax).

Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services

Office Hours:

8:30am-4:30pm Monday through Friday, additional hours on Tuesday --we stay open until 6:00pm fall, winter and spring quarters only.

Location:

Bausch & Lomb building (Bldg.77) on the first floor. Admissions and Financial Aid are on the second floor of the building.

Web Site:

<http://www.rit.edu/co-op/careers>.

Phone:

Phone number: 585-475-2301, Fax number: 585-475-5476, TTY: 585-475-6905

Job Search Advisement:

Program Coordinators are available to assist you on a one-on-one basis with any aspect of your job search. Your Coordinator can answer questions and develop strategies with you. Topics for advisement typically include: Co-op Preparation, Resume Review, Cover Letter Development, Interviewing Skills, Salary Negotiations, Weighing Job Offers, Employer Leads, Career Changes.

Job Listings and On-campus Interviews:

Job opportunities developed by our staff are accessed through our on-line jobs database called RIT Job Zone. A link to RIT Job Zone can be found on our main student web page. After registering as a first-time user, you will be able to search for and apply to opportunities on-line.

Walk-In Hours:

Mondays and Fridays 9:30am – 11:30am, Tuesdays through Thursdays 9:30am - 11:30am & 1:30pm - 3:30pm. These are times set aside where one of our staff members is on duty to answer any quick questions you may have. Sign up on a first-come, first-serve basis at the Office of Co-op and Career Services reception desk. Many Program Coordinators are also available in the academic department areas for walk-in appointments.

Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Services:

The Office works with all deaf and hard-of-hearing students enrolled in Bachelors and graduate level programs. Cross-registered students may also continue to use the services of NTID's Center on Employment. NCE is located in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Building, Room 2808. To schedule an appointment, call 585-475-6219 (voice/tty) or e-mail NTIDCOE@rit.edu.

Co-op Student Responsibilities

Your Ethical Considerations and Responsibilities

Co-op employers expect RIT and its students to operate according to accepted business ethics and practices. Further, RIT expects you behave at all times, whether on or off the campus, in accordance with the standards and expectations articulated in the RIT Students Rights and Responsibilities Handbook. A summary of your responsibilities as a co-op is also provided in the Co-op Student Agreement Form, a copy of which is included in this packet and for which a signature is required as evidence that you have reviewed and understand your responsibilities.

Interview Ethics

- Interview only when sincerely interested in a position with the employer
- Provide accurate information on your qualifications and interests. Never falsify data such as GPA, academic major, coursework completed or extracurricular activities on a resume or during an interview
- Notify the Office of Co-op and Career Services, at least 24 hours in advance, if you cannot make an on-campus interview appointment or employer presentation. The Office of Co-op and Career Services phone number is (585) 475-2301 – 6905 (TTY). An answering machine is on after 4:30 p.m. Leave a message on the machine if you are unable to call during normal business hours
- Acknowledge invitations for on-site interviews promptly, whether you accept or reject them. Accept such invitations only when seriously considering a position
- Notify employers well in advance if you must postpone or cancel on-site interviews

Ethics of Accepting/Rejecting an Offer

Once you accept a co-op job offer, even verbally, you ***must not*** back out, or renege on the job, to work for another employer. If you have any questions/concerns about this, discuss them with your Program Coordinator **before** taking action!

Good employer relations are vital to the success of our co-op program, and you, the student, are a critical link in this relationship. Therefore, consider carefully before accepting a co-op position.

- Discuss offers thoroughly with employers so you understand the terms and reach a mutually acceptable date to respond to their offer
- Request extensions from employers if you need more time to consider other offers. Do not ignore deadline dates you have agreed upon
- Notify employers that you are accepting or rejecting an offer as soon as you make your decision — never later than the arranged date
- Once you accept a job offer, immediately inform other employers who have offers pending. Honor your acceptance of an offer as a contractual agreement with the employer
- Cancel any other scheduled interviews or on-site visits

Responsibilities after Accepting A Job

Registration and Notification:

1. Once you have accepted a co-op job offer you need to register for the appropriate co-op course as identified by your academic department. Depending on the college this may require you register through the Student Information System (SIS) or through your academic department.
2. Report your co-op through the RIT Job Zone.

International Student requirements:

International students *must* file form I-538 to INS and get work authorization stamped on your I-20 by a foreign student advisor in the Center for Student Transition and Support. Omission is considered to be one of the most serious violations of INS rules and regulations. (*See Information for International Students handout for more details*).

Documentation Required For Employment

Federal law requires all employers to check candidate identity and establish work eligibility. When students report to work they should have at least the following:

- An original social security card (to establish eligibility to work)
- A state issued photo drivers license (to establish identity)
- International students must go to the Center for Student Transition and Support prior to starting the co-op position

Security Clearances, Non-disclosure Agreements and other Pre-Employment Testing

You may be employed in work settings that give you access to confidential information. Certain government organizations and corporations doing work for the government may require that you obtain an appropriate security clearance. In all cases the hiring organization will inform you of this requirement and initiate the necessary steps for your clearance. Denial of clearance occurs most often for the following reasons: conviction of a felony; active, recent or extensive use of drugs; withholding information on a clearance application. Security clearances may take anywhere from 6-9 months.

In other settings, may be asked to sign an agreement form that protects the employer from unauthorized disclosure of confidential information. You are bound by this agreement's terms in all cases. Information you gather on such a co-op cannot be used in any projects, term papers, or reports unless your employer agrees that you may use this and signs a release giving you permission. The release must be appended to the project, paper, or report. Obviously, sensitive information may not be shared with other employers.

Employers increasingly utilize pre-employment tests to help gauge a candidate's employment potential. These tests may include skills testing, physical and/or psychological exams, and may often include drug testing. You should be aware that new medical procedures could detect drug usage up to a month prior to the test. It is in your best interest to inform the medical personnel if you are taking any prescription or over-the-counter medication.

If you have questions or concerns about security clearances, non-disclosure agreements or any related employer requirements please see your Program Coordinator.

Responsibilities on the Job

The following are expectations both RIT and the employer have of you during the work assignment:

- You must report to work regularly and punctually. Be an enthusiastic and productive employee. If you must be absent from work, call your employer prior to your starting time that day
- Be sure to abide by work regulations as defined by your employer
- You are expected to dress appropriately for the work environment and employer expectations
- You are expected to conduct yourself in a professional and businesslike manner
- Consult your supervisor if you are unsure of procedures or expectations on the job or about any conflicts or concerns related to the work place
- You are encouraged to periodically seek feedback from your supervisor concerning your job performance
- When you complete a project, advise your supervisor and ask for additional work
- Inform your Program Coordinator immediately of any problems or concerns on the job that can't be addressed by your immediate supervisor or the organization's human resource department

Working with Others

Whatever work environment you find yourself in, your ability to communicate with and work well with others will contribute greatly to both your short- and long-term success. Try to adhere to the following:

- Observe others and the unofficial hierarchy in the department
- Don't over-react to a situation
- Don't gossip
- Your colleagues may express their like or dislike for another employee. Try to avoid personality conflicts - you do not have to like a person to work well with them
- Show older, more experienced employees you are aware of their expertise. Show them respect and interest in what they have to say
- Be enthusiastic
- Be a good listener
- Ask questions and check to see that you understand the answers
- Be thorough in what you do
- Don't suggest making changes right away -- gather facts
- Be pleasant when you come to work each morning
- Make decisions based on facts, not on another's opinions
- You will constantly be meeting new people – try extra hard to remember their *names*, and bear in mind it is essential you make *good first impressions*

Employer Responsibilities

Employers play an integral role throughout the co-op process. Below are several typical activities the employer contributes toward the co-op job search and on-the-job experience:

- Employers are asked to submit a brief job description to the Co-op Office when co-op openings become available
- Employers assume responsibility for actually selecting and hiring co-op students to fill co-op positions.
- We ask the employer to orient the student to the position, the work environment, and the company
- Employers should inform students about their work assignments and the compensation package prior to each assignment
- If at all possible, employers should notify students, well in advance of the next co-op period, of the availability of future work assignments
- If problems arise on the job and cannot be resolved satisfactorily, the employer is asked to contact your program coordinator
- Near the end of each quarter, the co-op office will e-mail your employer an evaluation form. Your employer is encouraged to discuss your evaluation with you and give you a copy of the evaluation
- The employer is asked to guarantee employment for a minimum of 10 weeks unless otherwise negotiated or unless severe business conditions make it impossible to continue the student's employment