

# Co-op Tip Sheet for Employers

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## **Program Overview**

For more than 90 years, the hallmark of a Rochester Institute of Technology education has been the practical, paid work experience provided through cooperative education. RIT's co-op program is the fourth oldest and one of the largest in the world. More than 3,000 students complete at least one co-op assignment each year and are employed by more than 1,200 employers throughout the U.S. and overseas. Co-op is one of the most effective means for employers to identify and acquire key talent.

## **How do co-op students benefit my company?**

- Co-op students produce immediate and valuable results at relatively low cost.
- Students bring fresh perspectives, ideas and knowledge to your workplace.
- Your employees, with the help of co-ops, can take on new tasks and assignments.
- You can recruit the most promising students to full-time assignments upon graduation.
- Co-ops act as goodwill ambassadors for your organization when they return to campus.
- Co-op opens the door for developing other valuable partnerships with RIT.

## **Why partner with RIT?**

- RIT is one of the nation's top comprehensive universities, setting the national standard for career-oriented education.
- You gain easy access to a highly-qualified, career-focused talent pool. Our reputation for excellence is built on an academic portfolio designed to meet the needs of business and industry.
- RIT's Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services responds to your staffing needs with personal, individual attention and offers a complete range of solutions and services to assist you.
- RIT's quarter system allows our students to begin work at four different times during the year.

## **Before Hiring a Co-op Student**

### **Does your position fit the definition of co-op?**

Cooperative education at RIT is defined as full-time, paid work experience directly related to the student's field of study. Students work directly for the employer and are held to the same standards and expectations as other employees. Co-op is designed to be a learning experience for the student as well as a productive working assignment for the employer. Consequently, the experience should emphasize real-world tasks and responsibilities that grow with the student's increased knowledge, skills, and experiences.

### **How do I determine how and where a co-op student would fit into my organization?**

- Outline some of the projects and activities with which a co-op student will be involved. These should be related to the student's academic major and career interests. Our office can help you with this.
- Try to develop a position that would involve a variety of tasks and projects.
- In order to broaden the student's perspective, it would be helpful to provide an opportunity for interaction with employees in various parts of your organization.
- Initial assignments are critical since they may be the student's first exposure to their chosen field and your organization. Their experiences go a long way in forming opinions and attitudes about your organization, your industry, and their career field.

### **What are some important considerations in becoming a co-op employer?**

- Plan for appropriate supervision and mentorship of the co-op student.
- Review potential job responsibilities to determine they are appropriate to your needs as well as the needs and abilities of RIT co-op students.
- Establish an appropriate pay and benefit structure, which may include assistance to the student in relocating to your area and obtaining safe and affordable housing.
- Remember that hiring a co-op student entails a commitment on your organization's part to a close and productive relationship with the student and RIT.

**Do I need to sign a contract with RIT?**

- No. Just provide a job description and RIT's Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services will post your position online and assist you in identifying the most appropriate student candidate pool.
- The hiring decision is always determined by each employer on a one-to-one basis with the student.

**Who determines the salary for the co-op student?**

- As the employing organization, you do. We provide guidelines of salaries paid to current co-op students and can assist you in determining an appropriate wage.

**Does the employer assist with housing or relocation cost?**

- Employer housing assistance ranges from providing housing recommendations to arranging subsidized living quarters.

## After Hiring a Co-op Student

**What are the components of a successful co-op experience?**

When you bring a co-op student into your organization be ready to provide appropriate orientation, supervision and performance evaluation as outlined below.

**Orientation**

- Discuss and clarify employer and student expectations for the co-op experience.
- Treat the co-op student as you would with any new employee.
- Provide a thorough orientation to your department, tour of your facilities and overall organization.
- It may be helpful to assign a mentor or "buddy" to assist the co-op in the new work environment.
- Provide information on how co-op students fit into the organizational structure of your organization.
- Co-op students are subject to the same procedures, regulations, etc. that govern your other employees.

**Supervision**

The co-op student will be able to work independently once the orientation/training period is complete. However, your student will need at least the level of supervision that you would provide for any employee:

- Assign a specific supervisor.
- Be accessible for questions, direction or assistance with problems.
- Contact the Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services with any questions or concerns.
- Be sensitive and supportive to the goals of your organization's co-op program.
- Pay particular attention to adjusting the co-op student's workload as his/her skills grow.

**How is the co-op student's performance evaluated?**

Provide frequent feedback for the co-op student about performance. In addition, towards the end of each academic quarter, you will receive an e-mail message from our office with a user name, password and Web site link to a Co-op Student Evaluation. We ask that you use that evaluation to:

- Provide formalized performance feedback for your co-op student.
- Realistically assess your co-op's strengths and weaknesses.
- Make recommendations for the co-op's further professional and academic development.

The e-form needs to be submitted to the Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services upon completion in order for the student to receive credit for the co-op experience. Print a copy of the evaluation to use with the student when discussing their performance during the co-op. You may also want to print a copy for your records.