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# Introduction

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**W**elcome to cooperative education at Niagara University. Cooperative education is a work-integrated learning program. It offers qualified students the opportunity to gain professional experience related to their major through full- or part-time employment. Other work-integrated learning opportunities include:

- Discipline specific internships
- Mandatory professional training in education and social work
- Study abroad
- Service learning

While these other programs also integrate classroom theory with practical experience, co-op has two unique features. First, students earn academic credit for their work, and second, in almost every case, they receive a paycheck. The academic credits earned are applied to the student's degree as advised electives, and the related employment experience gives them the competitive edge needed after graduation. Students in education or social work can participate in co-op, but a co-op experience will not take the place of the clinical, student teaching or supervised field practicum placements that are required for degree completion.

This handbook is written primarily for students, but the policies, procedures and tips outlined will make the process of participating in co-op efficient, positive and productive for advisers and employers as well. Students will find answers to their questions, and the steps they need to take to succeed. Faculty supervisors will gain an understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and employers will learn not only how to find the best qualified students to meet their needs, but also their responsibilities to the students as participants in the academic process.

The Office of Cooperative Education is committed to working collaboratively with all involved parties to continually improve and enhance the program and provide Niagara's students with a world-class education. Suggestions for changes to the handbook are always welcome, and should be made to:

**Cooperative Education  
Office of Career Development  
Lower Level Seton Hall  
Niagara University, NY 14190  
(716) 286-8530**

**Mission:** As part of the educational process at Niagara University, the Office of Career Development provides individualized services to assist students and alumni in developing their career objectives with the goal of obtaining lifelong career satisfaction.

*Helping to shape your future.*

"Frequently Asked Questions" and the "Ethical Considerations and Responsibilities" sections are adapted from Rochester Institute of Technology's Co-op Handbook. Niagara University's Office of Career Development wishes to credit and thank RIT's Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services for its cooperation, and permission to use information from its handbook.

# For Students

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**I**n this handbook you will find answers to the most frequently asked questions and the steps you need to take to successfully participate in the cooperative education program at Niagara University. You will also find tips on career decision making, the job search, resume writing, professional correspondence, interviewing, making a good first impression, and business ethics. Remember, there are two components to earning credit through the co-op program: an academic component as well as a work component.



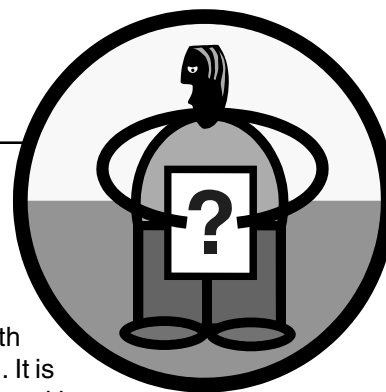
- **Academic Component** – You register for the co-op course in your major, pay tuition, and meet with a faculty supervisor. Your faculty supervisor will assign additional course work, such as a paper or presentation, and require you to reflect on and demonstrate what you learned on the job.
- **Work Component** – Go to work, learn as much as you can, do a good job, and get along with everybody.

In a nutshell, the steps are:

1. Meet with your academic adviser.
2. Complete an application at the co-op office.
3. Develop a resume and submit it to the co-op office. (Co-op will critique it and fax a copy to employers.)
4. If you already have a job, submit the job description to the co-op office. (Co-op will forward it to your academic department for approval.)
5. Interview with an employer and secure a position.
6. Register for the co-op course and pay tuition.
7. Complete the course requirements for your faculty supervisor.

No doubt you still have questions, but these are the key steps you need to take. On the following pages is a list of frequently asked questions regarding co-op. It is not a comprehensive list, but it is a good place to start. As always, feel free to stop in the co-op office or give us a call.

# Frequently Asked Questions



## Co-op Defined

### Q. What is co-op?

**A.** Cooperative education, or co-op, integrates classroom study with work experience. Cooperative education is a unique kind of education. It is different from summer employment, and different from an internship, but either or both may qualify for co-op credit.

- Co-op employment is related to your field of study.
- Co-op employment is full-time or part-time, productive work.
- Co-op employment increases in complexity and challenge according to your academic level.
- Co-op employment includes formal evaluation and documentation of your performance.
- Summer jobs or internships may qualify as co-ops if they meet your major's academic review requirements.

### Q. How can co-op benefit me?

**A.** Co-op gives you the opportunity to:

- Apply much of the theory you are learning in your course work.
- Experience a typical workday and verify your career choice.
- Earn a reasonable salary which may help you finance your education.
- Develop your technical skills and very important personal skills such as judgment, reliability, written and oral communication.
- Make contacts that may be helpful when you seek full-time employment.
- Become a more attractive candidate for full-time employment after graduation and obtain a higher starting salary than students without co-op experience.

### Q. How do I qualify for co-op?

**A.** Cooperative education at Niagara University is strictly an optional program. To participate, students must:

- Be a junior, senior, or graduate student enrolled in a degree program in the:
  - College of Arts and Sciences.
  - College of Business Administration.
  - College of Hospitality and Tourism Management.
- Have 15 NU credits in a declared academic major.
- Have advised elective credits available.
- Maintain minimum 2.0 QPA (3.0 for graduate students).
- Be approved for co-op by their department chairperson or adviser.
- Complete an application and submit a resume.

### Q. What is the length of a co-op experience?

**A.** A co-op is the same length as an academic semester. Typical co-ops are 15 weeks at 10 to 20 hours per week in duration. You may, in fact, work longer depending on your exam schedule the preceding semester and on your employer's needs. You and the employer negotiate the start date and the expected end date of the work period. You must honor the terms of employment and notify the co-op coordinator in the event of a change.

**Q. Can I work two successive semesters?**

**A.** Yes. Many students work successive semesters. Many students also co-op over the summer.

If your co-op assignment is extended and you wish to receive additional co-op credits, you must complete the following steps:

- Inform the cooperative education coordinator and your department chair.
- Provide evidence of added responsibilities or duties in your co-op assignment.
- Meet with your faculty supervisor and the department chair to determine course requirements.
- Register for the appropriate course.

**Obtaining a Co-op Position****Q. How do I get started?**

**A.** Begin by reading this handbook. If you have problems with any phase of your job search or have questions that aren't answered in this handbook, make an appointment to meet with your faculty adviser, and the co-op coordinator. You are responsible for your job search. However, the co-op office will help in any way we can.

**Q. How do I apply to the program?**

**A.** Complete an application in the co-op office, and start preparing a resume. (See sections on resume writing and interviewing). Submit your resume to the co-op coordinator for review. Schedule an appointment with the co-op coordinator to finalize your resume and to prepare for the interview process.

**Q. How do I find out about co-op opportunities?**

**A.** The co-op office notifies students by e-mail of co-op positions during the academic year. Co-op positions are also listed on the Jobs Bulletin page of the career development Web site: [www.niagara.edu/career](http://www.niagara.edu/career). The co-op office automatically forwards resumes of qualified students to employers. After the employer reviews the resumes, the employer or co-op coordinator will contact students to schedule an interview. We also recommend that you develop job leads and apply for jobs on your own. You can meet with the co-op coordinator to develop your own personal job search plan.

**Q. How will the Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services communicate with me?**

**A.** You will hear from us in a variety of ways: e-mail, telephone, academic department mail folder and/or seminars and workshops. Don't forget to check the Web site at [www.niagara.edu/career/co-op](http://www.niagara.edu/career/co-op).

**Q. What type of work qualifies for co-op?**

**A.** The co-op position must be career-oriented, related to your major, and at a level that is challenging to you. You should strive to be in a position that will give you hands-on experience that you may not have had before. Jobs, which are listed through the co-op office, are "approved" co-op positions. If you obtain a co-op position on your own and are not sure if it is acceptable, see the co-op coordinator, your faculty adviser 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.

**Q. Am I guaranteed a co-op job?**

**A.** No. For most positions, you are competing not only against other Niagara students, but also with students from other colleges. The Office of Career Development does guarantee that we will help you in any way we can with your search. By utilizing the resources available to you, you will become skilled in successfully conducting your job search.

### **Q. Can I stay in Western New York?**

**A.** Probably. Most co-op positions are in the Buffalo/Niagara area. Some full-time positions are outside Western New York and require you to take a semester off from course work. Your availability for jobs in different locations depends on your access to transportation and the flexibility of your schedule. Competition for these positions is very keen. It is not advisable to limit your job search to any one specific area. You will enhance your chances of landing a professionally rewarding position if you are geographically flexible. You should seriously consider all co-op opportunities in your career field for which you qualify, regardless of location.

### **Q. Where will I live if I leave Western New York?**

**A.** Many out-of-town employers provide some 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 concerns with an employer once an offer has been made. The co-op office can provide Web sites and contacts for housing questions.

### **Q. Will my employer evaluate my co-op performance?**

**A.** Yes. The co-op office sends an evaluation form (see example in the appendix) to your employer near the end of each semester. The employer is asked to review the completed evaluation with you prior to your return to school. Some employers have their own evaluation documents which they use in addition to, or in place of, the Niagara form. A copy of the evaluation stays with your employer and the other copies go to you, your academic department, and the co-op office.

### **Q. Do I receive credit for co-op?**

**A.** Yes. You can earn up to six semester hours for advised electives in your major for your experience.

### **Q. Do I pay tuition for co-op?**

**A.** Yes. Once registered, you are billed for your co-op like any other course.

## **Notification and Registration**

### **Q. What do I do once I accept a co-op job?**

**A.** Once you accept a co-op position, you must complete the following steps:

- Inform the co-op coordinator of your position acceptance.
- Complete a co-op contract with the co-op coordinator.
- Register for the appropriate course.
- Meet with your faculty supervisor and the department chair to determine the following:
  1. The number of times you will meet during the semester.
  2. Written requirements and due dates.
  3. Course syllabus.
  4. Grading procedures (grade of **S**atisfactory or **U**nsatisfactory).

### **As a co-op student, you agree to:**

- Meet periodically with the faculty supervisor and complete the requirements listed in the syllabus.
- Register for the appropriate co-op course and credits.
- Work a minimum 150 hours (or hours determined by department) during the semester that co-op credit is requested.
- Immediately inform cooperative education and faculty coordinators of any problems or changes in job responsibilities.
- Abide by the regulations and policies of both the cooperative education program and the employer.
- Remain at your co-op assignment for the contract period or risk loss of credits and an unsatisfactory grade.
- Follow the procedures for withdrawal from a co-op as outlined in the co-op handbook if necessary.
- Receive an unsatisfactory grade and loss of credit if an unsatisfactory evaluation is submitted by the employer.

If you are an international student, you *must* file Form I-538 with the INS and get work authorization stamped on your Form I-20 by the records office. (See “Information for International Students” section for more details.)

## **Financial Aspects of Co-op**

### **Q. How does co-op affect financial aid?**

**A.** Most often students carry their co-op as part of their normal full-time course load. Since you pay tuition for your co-op credit hours, you should meet with a financial aid counselor to determine if the cost is covered by your financial aid package. Any earnings, whether from co-op or other types of employment, must be reported on the following year’s federal aid application (FAFSA).

### **Q. Who determines the salary?**

**A.** Your employer. Your employer also determines benefits. The co-op coordinator can advise you or a prospective employer on typical co-op salaries.

### **Q. Will my employer pay my relocation expenses?**

**A.** Maybe. 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.

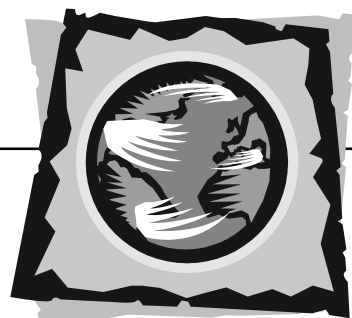
### **Q. Do I have to pay taxes on what I earn?**

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

### **Q. Can I collect unemployment insurance?**

**A.** No.

# Information For International Students



International students who want to work in the United States should first contact:

**Office of Multicultural and International Student Affairs (MISA)  
Lower Level Gallagher Center  
Niagara University, NY 14109  
(716) 286-8405**

International students often encounter more difficulty in securing co-op jobs than do full-time residents or U.S. citizens. Many employers use co-op as a means of recruiting for full-time positions, and they don't wish to give a co-op position to someone who will not be able to work at the company on a long-term basis. All jobs with the federal government require citizenship. Also, companies that have contracts to do work for the government require U.S. citizenship (in some cases, they will allow permanent residents) for their positions.

In order to acquire practical training in the United States, it is not enough to be equal to your American competitor. Rather, your qualifications must be superior to your competition. You should put extra effort into writing a resume and cover letter that highlight your appropriate skills and experience. Other countries have different, acceptable styles of resume writing and interviewing. The co-op coordinator can help you prepare for the U.S. market.

In order to co-op in the United States, you must have a social security number. Applications are available at the Social Security Office, 5540 Niagara Falls Blvd., Niagara Falls, New York, 14304 (716) 297-2880. Take your passport, I-94 and I-20 or IAP-66, a letter from MISA office, and a letter from the employer. The process takes from four to six weeks to complete.

According to the regulations of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for students with F/1 Visas, all work-related educational experience falls into one of the two categories of practical training:

- **Curricular practical training** — practical training in the field of study which is an integral part of an established curriculum. This may be a mandatory or optional co-op, internship or practicum, but must satisfy curriculum requirements and must be credit-bearing.
- **Optional practical training** — one year of work in an occupation directly related to the student's area of study, and occurs during the student's annual vacation; part-time during the academic year; at completion of all course work, but before completion of a thesis for graduate students; or upon completion of a degree.

## **Curricular Practical Training**

To be eligible for curricular practical training you must have F/1 status, nine months of full-time study completed in the United States, and the work experience must be in your field of study as part of your established curriculum. The internship or co-op must be a credit-bearing course and you must be registered for the course during period of experience.

As soon as an offer of employment is accepted, but at least one week before employment begins:

1. Make appointment with the MISA office to complete a form. Bring your I-94 card and I-20 student copy to the appointment.
2. Bring letter from employer stating position, description, start and ending dates, and hours.
3. Bring proof from your academic department (curriculum card and/or letter).

You may be authorized for whatever amount of curricular practical training your degree requires; however, you will be ineligible for optional practical training at the end of your studies if you are **authorized for more than 364 days of curricular practical training.**

## **Optional Practical Training**

Optional practical training may be obtained either during the time you are studying for your degree or after you have completed your studies. You must obtain employment in your field of study, have F/1 status, and have completed at least nine months of full-time study to be eligible. A total of 12 months of optional practical training is allowed for F/1 students.

International students who desire to work in the United States should:

1. Make an appointment with the MISA office to complete the necessary forms.
2. Apply to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, in writing, for the specific time of employment. The application fee is \$175. Two passport-style photos are required with your application. The processing time is four to six weeks.

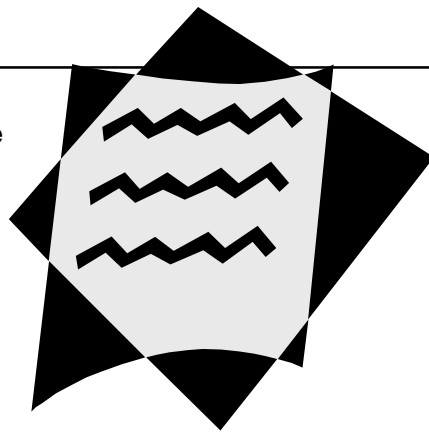
Part-time optional practical training is available prior to completion of studies as well.

Processing time is minimally six to eight weeks. Unpredictable circumstances can sometimes delay the process further. You must apply within the 90 days prior to completion of your degree or you may be ineligible.

**All international students MUST have written authorization from either the international student adviser or from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services BEFORE beginning to work off campus. Students who work without authorization lose their student status.** For further information regarding the Immigration and Naturalization Service's policies on employment, federal and state taxes, obtaining a social security number, and special co-op employment needs of international students, consult with the MISA office.

# Resume Writing

Part of the hiring process includes submitting a resume. You have only one opportunity to make a good first impression. Your resume should show the employer not only your education and experiences, but also your attention to detail, and your ability to communicate in writing.



## Style Tips

- Keep your resume to one page.
- Arrange category headings to highlight your most notable experiences. Employers devote as few as **5 seconds** to each resume. Be sure your resume is reader-friendly. Leave white space.
- Boldface or italic type, underlining, and the use of some words written entirely in capital letters can highlight important parts of your resume.
- Make good use of spacing.
- Print your resume on good quality white, buff, or gray bond paper.

## Dos & Don'ts:

### DO:

- **DO** make it **error free, attractive** to the eye, **brief**, and to the point.
- **DO** use **action phrases** rather than complete sentences or paragraphs.
- **DO** familiarize yourself with the skills required for the type of work you are seeking and emphasize these or related skills in your job descriptions.
- **DO** stress your advancements and/or increased responsibilities if you have worked for one organization for a long period of time.
- **DO** highlight outcomes, results, and achievements.
- **DO** develop and maintain a consistent, orderly presentation throughout your resume.

### DON'T:

- **DON'T** use abbreviations, have any typographical or spelling errors.
- **DON'T** list previous salaries, supervisors, or reasons for leaving.
- **DON'T** use personal pronouns such as "I" or "my."
- **DON'T** list names of references on your resume — have a separate reference sheet available.
- **DON'T** use brightly colored paper or include a photograph.
- **DON'T** list personal data.

Sample resumes for different majors are available in the Office of Career Development's "Get Hired" book.

**NAME**

Number and Street Name  
City, State Zip Code  
(Area Code) Telephone  
E-mail Address

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**EDUCATION**

**INSTITUTION – City, State**

Degree (written out) – major field of study, month year  
GPA: (if 3.0 or better)  
Dean’s List (note if more than one semester)

**EXPERIENCE**

mo./yr. – mo./yr.

**ORGANIZATION – City, State**

**Job title**

- Use action verbs to describe duties and accomplishments
- Trace growth of responsibilities
- Internships/co-op and volunteer work can be included
- Use present tense in describing current position, past tense for all others
- Quantify whenever possible
- Give your most significant accomplishments first
- Give more space to items of most significance

**SPECIAL SKILLS**

- Language fluency, computer or other job-related skills

**HONORS/ ACTIVITIES**

- State award, position/office held, organization, dates involved
- Highlight special achievements
- Clubs, intramural athletics, student organizations (office held)
- A brief description of duties can be included **if they relate to your career objective**

**SPECIAL PROJECTS**

- Select projects that can demonstrate **job-relevant** skills or accomplishments

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

- Volunteer and philanthropic work (office held)
- Mention significant projects if they relate to your career goals

**RESEARCH**

- Should be brief and include unique aspects

**PERSONAL DATA**

- **Should not be included** on a resume

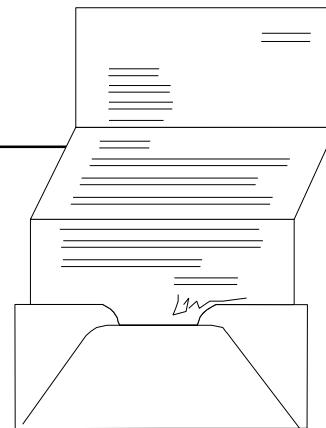
**HOBBIES/ INTERESTS**

- Generally not included but could be used, if related to your job objective or goals

**REFERENCES**

- Available Upon Request

# Professional Correspondence



## Cover letters

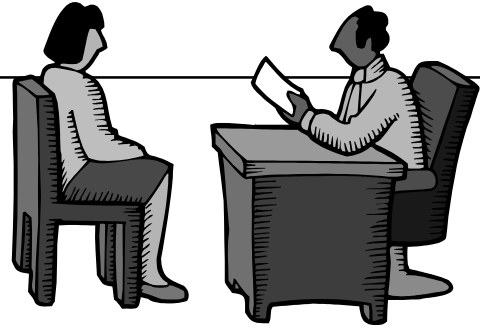
If you are sending your resume to an employer on your own, it should be accompanied by a cover letter. Correspondence to employers should communicate your enthusiasm for a specific position, or area of interest. Stress your skills and previous accomplishments.

- **Address your letter to a specific individual.** Make sure the name and title are accurate. If you are uncertain, look at reference materials in the library or contact the company directly. If the name is not available, “Dear Sir or Madam” should be used.
- **Be clear, concise, and error-free in your writing.** The cover letter not only states your interest in a position, but also demonstrates your written communication skills. Keep your statements positive and highlight work-related accomplishments and skills. Check grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- **Don’t overuse the word “I.”** Too many “I” statements can lose the reader’s attention. Edit your sentences and give examples of your experiences.
- **Use high-quality stationery and envelopes.** Use an acceptable business letter format and the same paper that your resume is printed on to present a professional appearance. Send the original and be sure to keep a copy of each letter for yourself.
- **Tailor your letters for each position and employer.** Avoid using generic letters. Focus on the employer’s needs – tell them what you have to offer, not what you hope to gain from the company or the position.
- **No more than one page.** Do not overwhelm the reader with a lengthy letter or excessive repetition of the resume content.
- **E-mail or faxing letters.** If you are e-mailing a letter to an employer, you should send the resume and letter in the body of your message in addition to sending it as an attachment. You can paste your letter and resume from a text (ASCII) format, or send it as a Microsoft Word attachment. A good tip is to first e-mail yourself the letter and resume to check the appearance and presentation. If you are faxing or e-mailing a letter and resume, indicate to the employer that the originals will follow by mail ASAP.

## Thank-You Letters

It is important to send an employer a letter of appreciation after your interview. Thank the interviewer for his or her time and reiterate your key strengths and skills for the position. It is wise to send a thank-you letter within 24 hours.

# Interviewing



## Before the interview

- Review sample interview questions.
- Schedule a practice interview with a professional in the career development office.
- Assemble your interview attire.
- Research the company.
- Prepare questions to ask the employer.
- Locate the interview site, including parking, traffic problems, etc.

## During the interview

- Arrive 15 minutes early. Do not take anyone with you.
- Be professional and courteous with **everyone** you meet. Watch your reception etiquette. Turn off cellular phone and pagers.
- Read company literature while you wait.
- Greet the interviewer by surname (example: Mr. or Ms. Smith); shake hands firmly.
- Sit down only after offered a chair.
- Do not touch, or put anything on, the interviewer's desk.
- Decline anything to drink.
- Do not smoke, even if the interviewer smokes. Do not chew gum.
- Use body language to show interest. Lean forward slightly in your chair, relax, and don't fidget.
- Smile.

## Answering Questions

- Listen carefully. Be sure you understand the question. If it isn't clear, ask for clarification.
- Respond only to the question posed. Be comprehensive in your answers, complete and responsive, but don't volunteer anything that is not directly related to the issue at hand.
- Emphasize your strengths by focusing on your skills, experience, and accomplishments that would make you an asset to the employer. Offer examples when possible. Don't criticize previous employers, teachers, co-workers, etc.
- Speak clearly. Use complete sentences, avoid one-word answers.
- Be enthusiastic and optimistic. Be excited about your career and confident about your ability to do the job.
- When asked about your weaknesses, admit harmless personal flaws, but include your plan/progress toward overcoming them.
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the company by asking meaningful questions.
- **Be sure to thank the interviewer for his or her time.**

### **After the interview**

- Evaluate your performance and presentation during the interview:  
What errors did you make?  
Which questions gave you the most difficulty?
- Send the interviewer a thank-you note within 24 hours. Restate your interest in the job and summarize key points. Keep the thank-you letter brief and to the point.

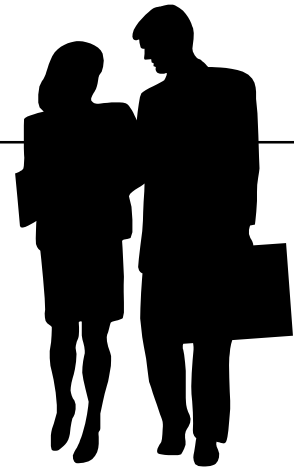
### **Sample interview questions**

- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- What can you tell me about yourself?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What extracurricular offices have you held?
- How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
- How has your college experience prepared you for a career?
- Why should I hire you?
- What do you know about our company?
- Why do you want this co-op job?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- How do you work better, independently or with others?
- If you were hiring an intern for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and subordinates.
- Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision, but didn't have all the information you needed.
- What is the biggest mistake you've made?
- What were your best subjects in school?
- Tell me about one of your most important accomplishments.

**Review these questions and your possible answers to them.  
Schedule a practice interview with a professional in the  
Office of Career Development.**

# Ethical Considerations and Responsibilities

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## Student Responsibilities

Co-op employers expect Niagara University and its students to operate according to accepted business ethics and practices. While Niagara University's co-op program is flexible enough to be of maximum value to all concerned, there are some basic regulations and responsibilities that ensure success.

### Interview Ethics

- Interview only when sincerely interested in a position.
- Provide accurate information on your qualifications and interests. Never falsify data such as GPA, academic major, course work completed, or extracurricular activities on resume or during an interview.
- Notify the Office of Career Development and Cooperative Education, at least 24 hours in advance, if you are unable to make an on-campus interview appointment or employer presentation. The office number is (716) 286-8530 or 286-8500. Leave a voice message if you are unable to call during business hours.
- Acknowledge invitations for 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 interviews.

### Ethics of Accepting/Rejecting an Offer

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 you accept a co-op position. Once you accept a co-op offer for a given semester, you must **not** back out, or renege on the job, to work for another employer.

- Discuss offers thoroughly with employers so you understand the terms and reach a mutually acceptable date to respond to their offer.
- Request extensions if you need more time to consider other offers. Do not ignore deadline dates you agreed upon.
- Notify employers that you are accepting or rejecting an offer as soon as you make a 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**

Accurate records are as vital to our co-op program as are good employer relations. You are expected to comply with the following:

- As soon as you reach an agreement with an employer for cooperative employment, contact the cooperative education program to register for the appropriate course and sign a work agreement. If you locate a potential co-op job on your own, it is wise to check its acceptability for co-op with your department or co-op coordinator before accepting the position.
- Please let us know your salary and your immediate work supervisor's name. The information is used confidentially to compile co-op salaries for your specific department and college.
- If you are permanently or temporarily laid off, notify the co-op coordinator immediately.
- Most departments require that co-op students complete additional course requirements. It is your responsibility to contact your faculty supervisor to discuss those requirements.

## **Documentation Required for Employment**

Federal law requires all employers to check identity. 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 consult with the director of Multicultural and International Student Affairs prior to starting a co-op position.

## **Responsibilities on the Job**

The following are some typical expectations both Niagara University and the employer will have of your work behavior.

- Report to work regularly and punctually. Be an enthusiastic and productive employee. If you must be absent from work, call your employer prior to the starting time that day.
- Be sure to abide by work regulations as defined by your employer.
- Dress appropriately for the work environment and employer expectations.
- Conduct yourself in a professional and businesslike manner.
- Consult your supervisor if you are unsure of procedures or expectations on the job or about concerns related to your job.
- Seek feedback from your supervisor concerning your job performance.
- Advise your supervisor and ask for additional work when you complete a project.
- Call the co-op coordinator or faculty supervisor if you need advice on how to handle a situation on the job.

## The Employer's Perspective

Employers understand the advantages of hiring co-op students and are eager to work with you. However, from the employers' perspectives, any new hire involves some risk. Employers want students that are positive and motivated to do a good job. Your performance affects the university's ability to develop contacts with employers who will participate in future co-op programs. It's important to understand the responsibilities and prerogatives of the employer. In this section, we will discuss (1) employer responsibilities throughout the co-op process, (2) wages and benefits, and (3) pre-employment testing.

Employers play an integral role throughout the co-op process. Below are several of the 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 openings occur.
- Employers assume responsibility for actually selecting and hiring co-op students to fill co-op positions.
- Employers are asked 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 the co-op coordinator.
- Near the end of each semester, the supervisor is asked to complete a one-page evaluation form on the co-op student's work performance (see the appendix). The employer is encouraged to discuss the evaluation with the co-op student.
- The employer is asked to guarantee employment for a minimum of 10 weeks, unless otherwise negotiated or severe business conditions make it impossible to continue the student's employment.

### Wages and Benefits

Wages and benefits are determined by the employer and will vary. Out-of-town employers may help in finding suitable housing, and some offer help with travel expenses and may pay a slightly higher salary to students who relocate. Most employers do not extend to co-op students all the benefits provided permanent employees. For any specific questions on wages or benefits, see the co-op coordinator.

### Pre-Employment Testing

As part of the screening process, many private employers and government agencies require that you pass pre-employment tests. These may fall into any of several categories.

- **Security Clearance** – This is usually a requirement for employment at defense-related and other government organizations. The process includes completion of a lengthy application, followed by an investigation of your background by government agents. You must be absolutely truthful on the application form. Denial of clearance will likely occur for any of the following reasons: conviction of a felony, current use of cocaine or other hard drugs, or withholding information on a clearance application. The security clearance may take six to nine months.

- **Technical Tests** – These tests gauge your abilities, such as programming in a specific computer language, mathematical skills testing or problem solving.
- **Psychological or Personality Tests** – These attempt to measure job-related personal traits.
- **Physical Exams** – Administered by a company doctor or nurse. This may include drug testing.
- **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.

The tests can detect traces of cocaine, marijuana, heroin, barbiturates, alcohol, and approximately 20 other drugs. Some employers have recently added statements, information or questions regarding drug use to their application forms. Others may advise applicants in the interview that drug screening is required.

### **Nondisclosure Agreements**

You may work in research, product development and improvement, or marketing activities, which may generate patentable and/or confidential information. You may be asked to sign an agreement form that protects the employer from unauthorized disclosure of such 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. If you have questions about signing an agreement, please discuss it with the co-op coordinator.

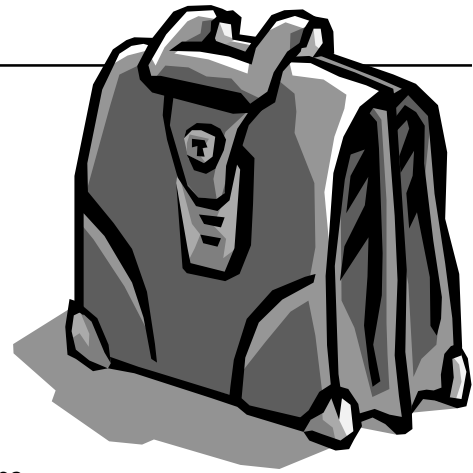
# Your First Co-op Job

## First Day Dos and Don'ts

Below are listed several useful tips to make your first co-op job more beneficial to you and your employer.

### DO

- **DO** get a good night sleep and eat a good breakfast.
- **DO** smile and introduce yourself to co-workers.
- **DO** take time to listen to people during the first day. However, don't be **TOO** quiet or afraid to ask questions if you don't understand something.
- **DO** wear attractive and appropriate office attire. It's better to be overdressed the first day.
- **DO** bring any forms sent to you ahead of time and identification to complete employment verification forms. You will need a government-issued picture ID (driver's license) **and** social security card, birth certificate or passport.
- **DO** bring something to write on and with (paper and pen). Depending on the type of company, either a notebook or briefcase might be appropriate.
- **DO** adjust your expectations and maintain a positive attitude.
- **DO** acknowledge your mistakes and accept responsibility. Look at it as a learning experience and don't make the same mistake again.
- **DO** become a good team player. As the "new kid on the block," your goal is to gain acceptance. Dedication and effort are two things you can demonstrate to your new co-workers and supervisor on your first day.
- **DO contact the co-op coordinator to address and discuss any work anxiety or site problems.**



### DON'T

- **DO NOT** arrive late! First impressions can set the tone for your entire work period.
- **DO NOT** get involved in office gossip and politics.
- **DO NOT** use company time or equipment for personal calls or tasks.
- **DO NOT** miss opportunities to observe and learn from others. If you don't know how to do something, ask and watch your new co-workers or supervisor.
- **DO NOT** sit and wait for work – tell your supervisor when you finish a project and need more work.
- **DO NOT** leave problems or concerns until they are too painful or difficult to deal with.
- **DO NOT** go over co-workers' heads. Respect the chain of command in your office.

## Working with Others

The importance of interpersonal relations cannot be stressed enough. Whatever work environment you find yourself in, your ability to communicate and get along with others will be a necessary skill. Think about the following suggestions:

- Observe others and the unofficial hierarchy in the department.
- Don't over-react to a situation.
- Don't gossip.
- Research ideas before you suggest them.
- Maintain your sense of humor; it is a rare and appreciated commodity!
- Your colleagues may express their like or dislike for another employee. Remember, not everyone feels the same way. You do not have to like a person to work with them.
- Show older, more experienced employees you are aware of their expertise. Show them respect and interest in what they have to say.
- Let time work for you — don't be in a hurry to make a place for yourself.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Be a good listener.
- Ask questions and make sure that you understand the answers.
- Be pleasant when you come to work each morning.

## Withdrawing and Termination

Once students accept co-op positions and begin to work, it is expected that they will honor the co-op work agreement with the employer and the university. However, in the event that a student must drop the co-op course and resign from his or her co-op position due to a serious circumstance, he or she must follow the steps below.

### Dropping and withdrawing from a co-op

- Students must consult with their faculty adviser about dropping or withdrawing from a co-op course **before** giving notice to their co-op employer.
- Students will need to obtain the appropriate forms from the records office and be aware of the university deadlines for both drop/add and withdrawal from courses.
- Failure to either complete the co-op assignment or withdraw in a timely manner will result in a grade of "Incomplete," and a delinquent tuition bill.
- After speaking with their faculty advisers, students are asked to inform the co-op coordinator of their decision.
- Students should give notice of resignation to their supervisors.

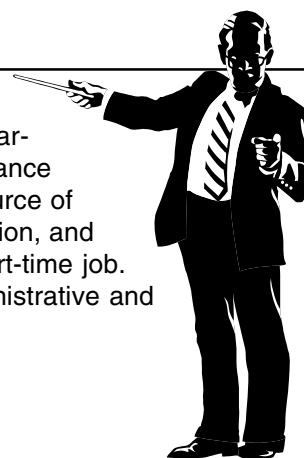
## **Termination**

- **If you are permanently or temporarily laid off**, notify the co-op coordinator and faculty supervisor immediately. If you have not completed the minimum number of work hours required, the co-op coordinator will assist you in finding an alternative co-op position. You should also discuss this situation with your faculty supervisor.
- **If you are terminated due to work performance or professional conduct**, you should notify the co-op coordinator and faculty supervisor immediately. You should discuss the circumstances relating to the termination with both the co-op coordinator and faculty supervisor. Students terminated due to work performance and professional conduct will earn an unsatisfactory grade, as well as loss of academic credit, and risk their participation in the co-op education program.

## **Stay HIRED and don't get fired!**

Following employer regulations and appropriately addressing problems at work are ways of making your co-op a positive experience. If you are experiencing problems and have concerns about your co-op, please discuss them with the co-op coordinator immediately. Contact the coordinator by calling (716) 286-8530.

# For Faculty



**F**aculty involvement is vital to the success of the program. As scholar-practitioners in their fields, they are well-positioned to assess the relevance and value of a possible co-op experience, and they are often the best source of employer contacts. They coach students in the specific tasks of their position, and they ensure that the co-op is a learning experience rather than just a part-time job. Additionally, for the program to be effective, faculty must fulfill both administrative and mentoring roles.

## Administrative Tasks

Each academic department decides how best to administer its work-integrated learning experiences, but there are several tasks that are common to all.

- **Syllabus.** Every department must have a syllabus for its experiential education courses. This should describe the learning objectives, the duration of the experience, grading policy, and requirements for papers, outside readings, and/or presentations.
- **CORR Forms.** If a department anticipates that a student will apply for a co-op in the upcoming semester then the chair needs to submit a course offering room request (CORR) form to the records office.
- **Position Approval.** Before a job can be considered a co-op it must pass an academic review. All potential co-op jobs should be submitted for approval through the co-op office to the appropriate academic department chair. One hundred-fifty clock hours per semester equates to three credit hours. Three hundred hours equates to six credit hours.
- **Student Approval.** The academic department is responsible for ensuring that the student is qualified to participate.
- **Registration.** To ensure the student has a legitimate position, the records office will not register students for a co-op without a completed contract. Once the contract is completed, the faculty supervisor or academic adviser approves the student's registration.
- **Supervision.** The department chair assigns a faculty supervisor for each student. It is the supervisor's responsibility to assess student learning, communicate with the employer, and submit a grade at the end of the semester.

## Mentoring Tasks

The dean, department chair, academic adviser, faculty supervisor, and co-op coordinator must work as a team to coach and guide the student. Faculty members are uniquely qualified to do this in several ways.

- **Advising.** Faculty advisers know their students. They can assess their students' strengths and areas of challenge and help identify the right experience for them.
- **Job Coaching.** In many cases, a student may be exposed to new situations on the job. The faculty supervisor can be a great resource to help the student work through unfamiliar tasks.
- **Supervision.** Over the course of the semester, faculty supervisors meet with their students to check their learning and offer assistance. They also communicate with the employer to monitor student performance.

**NOTE:** Examples of the Position Approval Form, Cooperative Education Application, Cooperative Education Contract and Employer Evaluation are shown in the appendix.

# For Employers

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**T**hroughout this book you will find a wealth of relevant information. This section highlights the benefits to employers, and the procedures you need to be familiar with in hiring a co-op student.



## Benefits

There are many benefits to hiring co-op students. Some of the biggest benefits include:

- Quick access to qualified potential workers before they graduate.
- Highly motivated, bright students who are eager to see the practical side of what they have learned in class.
- Flexible student schedules.
- Relatively low cost.
- Co-op students free other employees to pursue additional tasks.

## Procedures

- **Contact the co-op office.** Located in the Office of Career Development, the contact information is listed on the cover. You may also contact the academic department that offers the majors corresponding to your needs to identify students with specific skills. The cooperative education program administers the program, collects resumes, schedules interviews, and ensures regulatory compliance.
- **Sign and return an employer agreement.** The employer agreement ensures that all parties — the student, the university and the employer — have a clear understanding of their respective responsibilities. A sample form follows this page.
- **Submit a job description for approval.** The job description must include the approximate number of hours per week, the duration, to whom the student will report, the skills and knowledge the student needs to start, the specific tasks to be performed, what new skills and knowledge the student will gain, and wages if applicable. Co-op positions must be career-oriented, hands-on, professional development positions. They can be either part time or full time, during the school year or over the summer. They must allow for the student to accumulate a minimum of 150 contact hours. Routine clerical tasks, jobs with little or no responsibility, or jobs without a training or professional development component will not be approved for co-op positions.
- **Select the candidate.** Once approved for co-op credit, the co-op office will forward resumes of interested students and assist in scheduling interviews. It is the student's responsibility to register for the co-op course, show up on time, and do a good job. Halfway through the semester the co-op office will forward an evaluation to the student's supervisor.
- **Complete the Performance Evaluation.** Since students receive academic credit for their co-op experience, an evaluation is required. A sample form is included in the appendix.

## COOPERATIVE EDUCATION EMPLOYER AGREEMENT

Listed below are the procedures for participating in co-op and the employer's responsibilities.

### PROCEDURES

- **Contact the co-op office.** The co-op office posts vacancies and forwards vacancy notices to qualified students, collects and forwards resumes to employers, communicates with academic departments, and ensures regulatory compliance.
- **Submit a job description for approval.** Any position for which a student receives academic credit must undergo an academic review and be approved by the student's dean and supervising faculty member. Routine entry level jobs, clerical jobs, or menial labor positions with little or no professional training will not be approved as a co-op. The position must be a pre-professional experience related to the student's major and career goals. An effective job description should include:
  - Specific description of duties
  - Number of hours and duration. Either part-time or full-time, the student must complete a minimum of 150 contact hours in a semester/summer (200 hours for hospitality and tourism students).
  - Skills and knowledge the student needs in order to start
  - New skills and knowledge the student will acquire
  - Position title of the student's supervisor
  - Salary/Wages
- **Select the candidate.** The co-op office will forward student resumes to the employer. Employers then contact, interview, and select the student they want. Once you have chosen a student, please notify the co-op office of your selection. Students already working may be able to have their position approved for academic credit on a case-by-case basis.
- **Evaluate Candidate Performance.** Since students receive academic credit for co-op, an evaluation is required. The co-op office will send an evaluation form to the student's supervisor to complete and return.

### RESPONSIBILITIES

The employer, as a partner in the educational process assumes responsibility for the fair and ethical treatment of the students it hires. By participating in Niagara University's cooperative education program, the employer agrees to the following terms and conditions:

- Select the student and assign jobs without regard to age, race, sex, national origin, religion, handicap, color, or marital status
- Comply with the university's harassment policy as outlined in the attached document
- Designate an individual to supervise the student and to serve as liaison to the university
- Provide the student with an assignment for at least 150 hours (200 for hospitality and tourism students)
- Pay a salary which is consistent with the employer's practices and policies
- Provide training and supervision for the student in order to complete the duties as outlined in the job description
- Cover the student in its worker's compensation policy
- Notify the university immediately of any change in the student's job duties, supervisor, and/or disciplinary actions
- Not require/request the student to use his/her personal autos to transport "clients" or perform business-related services on behalf of the employer
- Not require the student or the university to sign a non-indemnity/hold harmless agreement as a condition of employment
- Evaluate the student during the semester on a form to be provided by the university \*

\* The Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requires that students have a right to see any assessment of their work. With student pre-approval, the university can request employer information such as internal evaluations and disciplinary statements.

### AUTHENTICATION

\_\_\_\_\_, as a participant in Niagara University's Cooperative Education Program agrees to the responsibilities listed above.  
(Company Name)

Name/Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

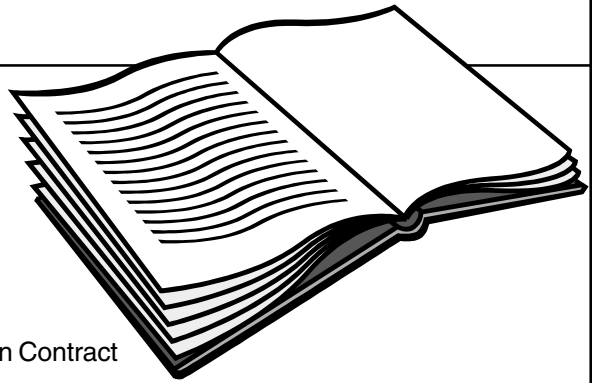
Please return a signed copy to: Office of Cooperative Education, PO Box 1946, Niagara University, NY 14109-1946

# Appendix

## Co-op Checklist

### Sample forms

- Position Approval Form
- Cooperative Education Applications
- Cooperative Education Course Registration Contract
- Employer Evaluation Form



## Harassment Policy