



Best Practices for a Successful Co-op

Northeastern University
College of Engineering

Thank you for being an employer partner, and for your efforts in providing our students with a quality learning experience while on co-op. We have prepared this “check list” to help guide your hiring, onboarding, student engagement, and evaluation processes. Faculty co-op coordinators are here to support both employers and students throughout the entire co-op process and to help you make the most of the co-op experience. Remember that we are a resource for you, so do not hesitate to be in touch with questions, feedback or any concerns that may arise.

EXTENDING A CO-OP OFFER

- ☐ Generate an offer letter that includes the following:
 - Start and end date
 - Compensation and name & address of third-party payroll company if applicable
 - Any additional benefits if applicable *
 - Non-compete and non-disclosure agreements if relevant
 - Supervisor’s name and email address
 - Location of co-op and whether on-site or remote
- ☐ Provide tax withholding paperwork for federal, state and local taxes (please refer to our [Co-op Employer Guide](#) for more information)

***Note:** There is no expectation that students will be paid any benefits for vacation or personal time off; co-op employees may be eligible for paid sick leave pursuant to state law.

ONBOARDING YOUR CO-OP STUDENT

- ☐ Provide student with a workspace (if on-site) and company computer or laptop with any software applications required to complete assigned tasks.
- ☐ Review office policies and expectations. Make no assumptions! This should include the following:
 - Work hours
 - Dress code
 - Process for sick time/ doctor’s appointments
 - Internet & cell phone use
 - Lunch/breaks
 - Flextime and/or overtime
 - Schedule and method of payment
 - Plan for ongoing communications (remote vs on-site)
 - Employer handbook (if applicable)
 - Main contact for workplace concerns on the job (including sexual harassment or discriminatory practices)
- ☐ Develop a training plan for the student.
- ☐ Clarify who the student will report to and preferred method of communication.
- ☐ Schedule regular check-in meetings.
- ☐ Introduce the student to the team and explain how each members’ role fits into the overall company objectives.
- ☐ Consider designating a mentor or buddy other than the student’s direct report who will serve as “go-to” for work expectations on the job.
- ☐ Explain how the student’s work will be evaluated and by whom.
- ☐ Establish learning outcomes with the co-op student to provide a roadmap for the student and manager for the term of the co-op, and to assist in evaluating the student’s performance at the end of the co-op placement.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If working with students remotely, please refer to these additional resources:

- [Flexible Co-op Hiring During Unprecedented Times](#)
- [Employer Tips for Working Remotely with Students flyer](#)

BEST PRACTICES FOR A SUCCESSFUL CO-OP

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & FEEDBACK

- Offer students the opportunity to participate in team meetings, social events, and/or group activities to help them integrate into the team.
- Provide a mid-cycle performance assessment to help students identify areas for improvement.
- Encourage student ideas and input on company projects. This involvement allows students to take ownership of independent projects during downtime.
- Provide opportunities for lunch or other meet ups with colleagues and, if possible, a member of the high-level management team.

EXPECTATIONS OF MANAGER

- Establish and clarify work expectations for the student.
- Schedule regular meetings with the student to share constructive feedback.
- Complete an online assessment of the student's performance when you receive Northeastern's email prompt. Please include specific examples for each ranking you give the student. We do refer to this information during our individual discussions with students upon their return from co-op.
- Plan to review the online assessment with the student before they complete their co-op, to provide valuable feedback.
- Offer to review the student's resume to best reflect their experience, and to develop work samples for future employment, where applicable.

EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENT

- Students are expected to work the full duration of their co-op placement dates.
- Students are expected to comport themselves with the utmost professionalism; reply to communications (emails, slack messages, etc.) professionally, report to work on time, work independently and collaboratively when needed and dress in accordance with company culture. For some of our students, their co-op is their first full-time work experience or first work experience outside their home country. Therefore, some students may feel shy or unsure about what to ask and what is expected from them, so we encourage employers to initiate that conversation.

- Students are expected to prioritize their co-op responsibilities; with few exceptions, our students do not take any coursework during their co-op, and certainly are not permitted to take classes or engage in non-related co-op activities during established work hours.
- Students are encouraged to take initiative and ask questions when they do not understand, ask for additional projects, or volunteer for additional activities when they have completed assigned tasks.
- Students are encouraged to network with their colleagues and join work-related professional development and social activities; we encourage students to connect with colleagues on LinkedIn, to volunteer for projects, groups, or events, and to get to know their team outside the office, when applicable and appropriate.
- Students may be expected to complete several reflections and online assessments throughout their time on co-op. Their responses are used to guide discussions with their advisors, provide an outlet for students to connect what they learn in the classroom and apply it to industry, and deepen their critical thinking and self-directed learning skills.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- Co-op coordinators serve as instructors and advisors for students and can be a pivotal resource in remedying any issues on co-op. Additionally, co-op coordinators can serve as a resource for employers in offering best practices and supporting both the student and employer for any issues on the job.
- If a student is not meeting the expectations set for them, Northeastern encourages employers to reach out to their designated co-op coordinator in addition to following the organization's usual HR protocols.
- On rare occasions, termination of a co-op does occur; but as with any employee, it should be the last resort. Please involve the designated co-op coordinator to address any concerns before moving to the organization's termination process.

Please also refer to our [Co-op Employer Guide](#), for additional information and resources.



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