Best Practices for Successful Co-op & Intern Hiring

We can identify Ohio State candidates and the methods most successful in reaching them, but we also hope that you will consult with us as you strive to develop or enhance your company’s co-op or internship program.

Appealing Opportunities

Students tend to pursue positions and companies they know more about. **Successful recruiters provide information that addresses typical student concerns:**

- **What does this company do:** What products do you make/what services do you provide?
- **Location of position and relocation assistance:** “Can I afford to get there? Will you help me find a place to live? Can I afford to pay double rent if I can’t sublease my campus apartment?”
- **Candidate qualifications:** “What do you expect me to know when I start?”
- **Specific responsibilities the co-op or intern could expect:** “What will I be doing on a daily basis? Which skills will I be using? How will I be contributing to the company?”
- **Career paths:** “What kind of career could I pursue with this employer?”
- **Social opportunities:** “Will there be other students? Will I have a social life?”
- **Recreational opportunities:** “What do people do here for fun...skiing, softball, biking?”

Competitive Compensation

Employers should plan to pay students a competitive wage in accordance with the job requirements and each student’s experience level. The normal practice is to provide increased compensation for each work term, reflecting increased responsibility, improved performance, and productivity. Other compensation variables include student rank (Sophomore vs. Senior, for example), cost of living, and industry standards.

ECS publishes current co-op and intern wages as well as full-time salary data on our website. ([ecs.osu.edu/statistics](http://ecs.osu.edu/statistics))

Meeting Basic Needs

**Student employees have different needs than full-time employees.** Students in your co-op or internship candidate pool may have just recently moved out of their parents’ homes for the first time. They are still developing their niches in university life. Many will be refining their prioritizing skills—taking on much more responsibility by taking classes and living on their own.

Students have special concerns about housing, relocation, and social activities in addition to work issues. A lonely student whose financial resources are stretched to the limit is not a good candidate for retention.

**Successful employers commonly provide the following support to student hires:**

- **Relocation Assistance**
  At a minimum, students moving from home or campus should receive a relocation allowance. Other forms of assistance commonly offered are hotel stays until housing arrangements are made, rent subsidies, and other financial support.

- **Housing**
  If housing considerations have not been previously discussed (location, cost, support), doing so at the time an offer is extended will increase the probability of acceptance. It is crucial to provide relocating students with help finding affordable short-term housing. Transportation, utilities, and rental deposits may require cash outlays beyond a student’s financial resources. Access to affordable housing is critical to students who are counting on co-op earnings to finance their educational expenses.

- **Workplace Safety**
  Every co-op or intern is entitled to a safe work environment, and it is the employer’s responsibility to provide it.

Extending Offers

It is the employer’s responsibility to provide a written offer to employment. The offer should specify the minimum number of work periods required, the starting date, the wage, the location, and person to whom the student will report.
Extending Offers

The letter should also inform the student of any pre-employment conditions (physical exams, security clearance). We suggest that the offer letter inform students to obtain student health insurance if they are not covered by a parental policy. No student is to be asked to sign a “non-compete” agreement. Students may be expected to sign confidentiality or non-disclosure agreements.

First Day

Help the student have a positive first day

Work hours, lunch, breaks, and meetings; dress code; expectations – tasks, deadlines, professionalism; where/whom to go to for help; payroll procedures, time sheets and pay periods; department overview and role in supporting total organization; company policies, safety and computer training; and confidentiality issues should be discussed on the first day. A tour of the facility should be given and introduction of the work team to the student—someone should invite the student to join them at lunch.

Developmental Tasks are Well-Defined Duties

Employers with the most satisfied co-op and internship students, as well as the highest percentage of conversion to full-time employment at graduation, have challenged students with assignments that allow them to work with engineers who give them hands-on, real-life engineering tasks at the earliest opportunity.

Additional Tips for Enhancing Your Program

• Plan specific assignments that add value for you and can challenge a student.

• Carefully select the engineering manager who will serve as a mentor/supervisor to the student. Make sure that the manager has the interest, time, and patience to serve in this role. Assign a back-up supervisor, too.

• Have clearly defined “first day” and “first week” tasks. Plan orientation for the first week for the student to become acclimated with the facility, HR policies, dress code, parking, lunch, working hours, introductions to staff members, safety training, and confidentiality issues. Prepare work station and IT logins/access for student.

• Provide interns with a handbook and/or website.

• Encourage team involvement by sponsoring social or professional development events.

• Hold new-hire panels in which new grads discuss their background and answer student questions.

Additional Tips for Enhancing Your Program

• Bring in speakers from the company’s executive ranks.

• Allow time for interns to network with other employees of your company.

• Clearly define goals and expectations for the student for the work term along with deadlines.

• Determine the type of work to assign to the student should there be downtime with the major project (i.e. testing, data analysis, drafting, lab clean up, etc.).

• Schedule the student for any relevant training sessions offered through the workplace.

• Conduct focus groups/surveys to see your organization as the students see it.

• Showcase intern work through presentations/expos to allow students to demonstrate their achievements to all employees.

• Review the performance evaluation that will be submitted at the end of the student’s work term.

Three Most Common Challenges Ohio State Engineering Student Interns and Co-ops Face

• Lack of work assignments/lots of down time. Students often only have one project to work on at any given time and can give 100% attention to that project. Typically, they are not working on several different projects at the same time like a full-time employee. Therefore, students often can complete a task much faster than a full-time employee. Be prepared to offer backup projects to students in case they finish a project earlier than expected.

• No company orientation was given on the first day. Students typically have limited knowledge of your corporate structure and company history when they begin their work assignment. By taking the time to review company history, structure and culture, students will better integrate into your company culture.

• Minimal mentoring/feedback from direct supervisor. It is crucial that the direct supervisor has enough time and patience to mentor the student worker. If the direct supervisor cannot provide continued feedback, then another employee within the company should serve in this capacity. Formal feedback is best achieved by weekly check-in meetings in addition to the midterm and end of term performance reviews. The more informal (casual) the feedback, the less students tend to recognize it as feedback.