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Overview of Cooperative Education and Internship Programs

The Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) Cooperative Education and Internship Programs are experiential education programs through which students provide support to industry professionals, while gaining practical experience in their fields of study. As students gain experience, they take on larger and more challenging tasks. This provides students with meaningful experience and worksite supervisors with the ability to focus their attention on other crucial, higher level responsibilities.

Cooperative Education Program

The Cooperative Education (Co-op) Program is a *multiple* term work experience related to a student's field of study. Employers find the Co-op program beneficial because it provides a relatively longer time frame for students to work with and learn about the organization, which enables them to contribute in a significant way to the company's success. As Co-op students gain experience, they are given more responsibility, reflecting their increasing knowledge and ability. Permanent employees can be relieved of some of their tasks as a Co-op student's contribution increases. The result is that permanent employees have more time available to concentrate on their most pertinent responsibilities.

Many employers choose to use Co-op as a recruitment tool in identifying future permanent employees. Co-op allows employers to temporarily hire students to work for their company and in the process decide if they would be a good long term fit for the organization. At the same time, employers do not need to make any commitment to employ students beyond their Co-op, enabling the employer to have greater flexibility in meeting their personnel needs.

Through the Co-op program, students can work part or full time throughout the academic year and summer term; as long as they meet the minimum requirements (Undergraduate students work three full time terms or the equivalent; Graduate students work two full time terms or the equivalent).

Because Co-op is an academic program, the start and end dates during each co-op term follow the university calendar. Co-op terms may vary in length, depending on the time of year. Fall and Spring Co-ops should be at least 16 weeks long, while summer Co-ops should be at least eight weeks long.

Internship Program

The Internship Program is a *single* term work experience that complements a student's coursework. Employers find the internship program beneficial in getting results while filling a short term hiring need. The Internship program provides employers with flexibility because they are only committing to a single semester of employing a student. Many employers utilize the Internship program to give students a trial work period before making any longer term commitments.

Through the Internship program, students work part time during the academic year and part or full time during the summer term. During the academic year, students must take a full course load while working on an Internship. However, there is no similar course load requirement during the summer term, providing greater scheduling flexibility.

Because Internship is an academic program, the start and end dates for Internship terms follow the university calendar. Internships may vary in length, depending on the time of year. Fall and Spring Internships should be at least 16 weeks long, while summer Internships should be at least eight weeks long.

Benefits of Co-op and Internship Programs for Employers

(Source: www.ilceia.org/benefits.html)

- The cost of recruiting Co-op students' averages 16 times less than recruiting recent college graduates.
- Almost 50% of Co-op students accept permanent positions with their Co-op employers. The retention of college graduates after five years of employment is 30% greater for Co-op graduates.
- Typically, Co-op students receive lower salaries and fewer fringe benefits than permanent employees. Total wages average 40% less for Co-op students.
- The percentage of minority group members hired is twice as high among Co-op students as among recent college graduates, thus assisting Co-op employers in meeting EEO objectives.
- Co-op programs provide an opportunity to evaluate employees prior to a decision regarding full-time employment.
- The Co-op graduate's work performance is often superior to that of a college graduate without Co-op. Students are more flexible and easily adapt to a professional environment.
- Regular staff members are freed up from more basic aspects of their jobs to focus on more demanding and profitable assignments.
- Co-op programs supply students who have new ideas and fresh approaches. Co-op students bring state-of-the-art technical knowledge to their work assignments.
- Co-op graduates are generally promoted sooner (and further) than other graduates.
- Co-op programs build positive relationships between businesses and schools.

Co-op and Internship Guidelines for Employers

The IIT Cooperative Education and Internship Programs combine learning in the classroom with learning and application of students' education in the workplace. As such, they are considered "work-integrated learning" programs. All Co-op and Internship work experiences are administered and monitored by the Career Management Center (CMC) at IIT.

The Co-op and Internship programs involve a partnership between a student, an employer, and the university. This collaboration helps ensure that the work that students do is meaningful and relevant to their professional and educational goals and will add value to the students' academic programs.

Co-op Structure & Regulations:

- Students in good academic standing (2.5 minimum GPA for undergraduate students and 3.0 minimum GPA for graduate students) are eligible to participate in Co-op, including U.S. citizens, Permanent Residents and International Students in F1 student status.
- Co-op is an academic program that follows the university calendar. Work terms must coincide with university academic terms and students must begin working no earlier and can work no later than the dates determined by the CMC. Dates and deadlines are posted for each academic term on the CMC website.
- Co-op terms must cycle through the academic year and may not occur solely during summer terms. Co-op terms may be successive or alternating academic terms. The terms are determined by the employer, student, and the CMC, before the Co-op is approved.
- Students and employers must commit to multiple work terms. Undergraduates are required to work the equivalent of at least three full time academic terms and graduate students must work the equivalent of at least two full time academic terms, with one employer. Full time is defined as over 20 hours per week. Two part time sessions (10 – 20 hours per week) equal one full time session of Co-op. Working multiple terms with a single employer gives students an opportunity to take on increasingly responsible tasks as they continue to develop their skills and make viable contributions to the company.
- At the start of a Co-op experience, the employer's intention should be to employ the Co-op student long enough to meet the minimum Co-op requirement. However, the CMC understands that conditions may change during the time a student is completing a Co-op. The employer has the right to terminate a student's employment if the student is not meeting employment requirements or if unforeseen business circumstances deem it necessary to end the relationship.
- Employers are required to complete the Employer Agreement and Employer Information Forms, as well as sign the second page of the Student's Co-op Forms (a schedule that shows all coursework completed and planned, including co-op semesters, during the student's program of study at IIT). *Copies of these forms are located in the online process section of the CMC website.*
- Employers must provide an offer letter which includes the student's name, job title, work location, start date, worksite supervisor's name, salary (all Co-ops are paid

employment) and the number of hours the student will work each week. A job description is also required, for approval by the student's academic advisor, and needs to be included in the offer letter or on a separate sheet. The CMC can approve only *original signatures* on Co-op forms. Faxed and scanned documents will be verified upon submission.

- Students are required to renew their Co-ops for each academic term they plan to work and must register for the Co-op each term. A Work Term Evaluation (WTE) must be completed by the employer and student and then submitted to the CMC near the completion of *every Co-op work term*. The WTE must be submitted to the CMC for Co-op renewal. Students must also complete an on-line renewal form to request renewal. *See Evaluation Process on page 8.*
- International students in F1 status are permitted to work full time as a co-op student for less than 12 months during their program of study, and can work part time (10 – 20 hours per week) for an unlimited number of academic terms. For additional information, please click [here](#).
- International students provide their employers with a SEVIS I-20 Work Authorization which includes the employers' name and address, as well as the dates approved to work each term, for completion of the I-9 form.
- Students are permitted to take up to two courses during each academic term that they are working as a Co-op.
- Students are expected to maintain contact with their CMC advisor throughout their participation in the Co-op Program. Employers are also encouraged to contact the Co-op student's CMC advisor, if there are any concerns about the program or students' work performance.

Internship Structure & Regulations:

- Students in good academic standing (GPA of 2.5+ for undergraduates and 3.0+ GPA for graduate students) are eligible to participate in the IIT Internship program, including U.S. citizens, Permanent Residents, and International Students in F-1 status.
- Internship is an academic program that follows the university calendar. Work terms must coincide with university academic terms and students must begin working no earlier and can work no later than the dates determined by the CMC. Dates and deadlines are posted for each academic term on the CMC website.
- Internships may take place throughout the year. However, internships during Fall and Spring academic terms must be part time (10 – 20 hours per week). Summer internships may be part or full time.
- An internship requires a commitment of only one academic term. Students and employers wishing to extend the experience are advised to consider participating in the co-op program instead.
- At the start of an internship experience, the employer's intention should be to employ the intern for one semester. However, the CMC understands that conditions may change during the student's experience. The employer has the right to terminate a student's employment if the student is not meeting employment requirements or unforeseen business circumstances deem it necessary to end the relationship.

- Employers are required to complete the Internship Employer Agreement Form and sign the Internship Signature Page. *Copies of these forms are located in the online process of the CMC website.*
- Employers must provide an offer letter which includes the student's name, job title, work location, start date, worksite supervisor's name, salary and the number of hours the student will work each week. A job description is also required, for approval by the student's academic advisor, and may be included in the offer letter or on a separate sheet. The CMC can approve only *original signatures* on internship forms. Faxed and scanned documents will be verified upon submission.
- A Work Term Evaluation must be completed by the employer and student and then submitted to the CMC at the completion of the internship. *See Evaluation Process on page 8.*
- International students in F1 status are permitted to work full time for less than 12 months during their program of study, and can work part time (10 – 20 hours per week) for an unlimited number of academic terms. For additional information, please click [here](#).
- International students will provide their employers with a SEVIS I-20 Work Authorization, which includes the employer's name and address, as well as the dates approved to work each term, for completion of the I-9 form.
- Students working in internships during academic terms are required to register for a full program of courses to maintain their status as full time students. They are also required to register through the IIT Office of the Registrar for the internship after the internship application is approved by the CMC. Internships carry no academic or administrative credit.
- Students are expected to maintain contact with their CMC advisor throughout their participation in the Internship Program. Employers are also encouraged to contact the intern's CMC advisor, if there are any questions about the program or the student's work performance.

Hiring International Students

International students in F1 status are eligible to participate in the Co-op and Internship Programs through Curricular Practical Training (CPT). *Employers do not need to sponsor international students in order to hire them while using their CPT.*

Upon graduation, international students are eligible to be hired through Optional Practical Training (OPT). *Like CPT, hiring an international student using their OPT does not require sponsorship.* International students in F1 status are eligible to work on OPT post-graduation for 12 months. International students who complete Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math (STEM) degrees are eligible for a further OPT extension of 17 months.

Evaluation Process

The Co-op and Internship Programs are academic programs. Students are expected to apply concepts learned in the classroom during their Co-op or Internship experience. Likewise, they are expected to apply the knowledge gained while working to their coursework, creating deeper understanding. Each student's performance during Co-op or Internship must be evaluated at or near the end of each work term.

Student performance is measured in the form of the Work Term Evaluation (WTE). This form allows students to provide feedback on the overall work term and employers to provide performance feedback on students. With the majority of our students majoring in engineering/computer science, the WTE covers the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) 'A thru K' criteria for accreditation:

- (a) an ability to apply knowledge of mathematics, science, and engineering*
- (b) an ability to design and conduct experiments, as well as to analyze and interpret data*
- (c) an ability to design a system, component, or process to meet desired needs within realistic constraints such as economic, environmental, social, political, ethical, health and safety, manufacturability, and sustainability*
- (d) an ability to function on multidisciplinary teams*
- (e) an ability to identify, formulate, and solve engineering problems*
- (f) an understanding of professional and ethical responsibility*
- (g) an ability to communicate effectively*
- (h) the broad education necessary to understand the impact of engineering solutions in a global, economic, environmental, and societal context*
- (i) a recognition of the need for, and an ability to engage in life-long learning*
- (j) a knowledge of contemporary issues*
- (k) an ability to use the techniques, skills, and modern engineering tools necessary for engineering practice.*

We know that the work experience obtained through their participation in the co-op and internship programs helps strengthen students' professional development. The ABET criteria helps students prepare for a successful career, contributing to the success of an organization from day one. As a result of obtaining 'real world' experience through our programs, students have developed the ability to transition into a new position faster. They also develop a clearer understanding of not only their position but also of how their role adds to overall effectiveness of the organization.

In order to make the student's Co-op or Internship a worthwhile academic experience, it is very important that the worksite supervisor and student each complete the appropriate portions of the WTE. Upon completion, the worksite supervisor and student must discuss the results, giving each other feedback on the experience. Providing students with feedback is crucial in making co-op and internship worthwhile academic experiences through which students create deeper understanding of themselves and their fields.

Salary Information

The CMC recommends paying co-op and internship students a salary proportionate to the completion of their degree. For instance, it is recommended a bachelor's degree candidate who has completed 75% of their degree program be paid a salary that is approximately 75% that of an entry level employee with similar responsibilities. Following this type of payment scale will enable employers to increase the salary of Co-op and Internship students as they gain experience and make greater contributions to the company.

As stated in the *Co-op and Internship Guidelines for Employers*, Co-op students must be paid for their work. Contact the CMC for salary information from previous semesters.

Co-op and Internship for International Students

International students on an F-1 visa are eligible to participate in the Cooperative Education and Internship program at IIT when they meet the required criteria to maintain their student status with the USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services). It is extremely important for all international students to follow all of the required USCIS policies and the IIT requirements in order to maintain their student status.

Students can participate in Co-op or Internship after completing two (2) full time semesters of study (excluding summer) in the US. International students can participate in the Co-op or Internship program under the Curricular Practical Training (CPT) classification of the USCIS. This means students can work in an approved co-op or internship while pursuing a degree. To meet the USCIS standards, the job must be related to the student's academic major, and the student must be registered as a Co-op or Internship student with the university and be in good academic standing. In addition, students can work full- or part time. The USCIS definition of a full time Co-op is working more than 20 hours per week. Part-time Co-op must be at least 10 hours and no more than 20 hours, per week.

As an academically approved program, the length of the Co-op or Internship work experience must be equal to 80% of the academic semester. Co-op and Internship students are expected to follow all of the University class registration procedures, policies and deadlines. All students must register for a Co-op or Internship class during their work semesters. While this class does not earn academic credit, it appears on the transcript, and provides verification to employers that the student has participated in a Co-op or Internship program. There is a \$250 non-refundable administrative fee for the Co-op, and a \$150 non-refundable, administrative fee for the Internship neither of which can be waived. Upon registration for Co-op or Internship, the International Center issues a new page that is added to the SEVIS I-20 for work authorization. This page contains the student's start and finish dates for the work term and the employer's information. It is unlawful for international students to work off-campus without appropriate authorization from the International Center.

The Co-op program at IIT requires an undergraduate student to complete three full time semesters with the same employer, to meet the minimum requirements. (For a part-time Co-op student this would mean 6 part-time semesters or a combination of both) For full-time Co-op, the undergraduate student will earn 12 administrative credits, and for part-time Co-op the student will earn 6 credits. Students doing part-time Co-op must register for a minimum of 6 academic credits to maintain full-time student status. For graduate students, the minimum requirement for Co-op is 2 full-time semesters or 4 part-time semesters. Students will receive 9 administrative credits for full-time work and 4.5 credits for part-time work. Graduate students enrolled part-time for Co-op must register for a minimum of 4.5 academic credits to maintain full-time student status.

The internship program at IIT requires undergraduate and graduate students to complete one semester of full- or part-time work with one employer. The Internship must be part-time during the academic year, but can be full-time in the summer. During the academic year, students on Internship must enroll in a full-load of classes (12 credit hours for undergraduates and 9 credit hours for graduates) in addition to the Internship course.

Upon graduation, Co-op students who have completed all the requirements of the program can

apply for a certificate indicating they have completed the Co-op program. This can be used to verify their Co-op experience to employers when seeking a job. In addition, the Co-op experience can count toward the professional experience component of licensing boards.

Steps in the Co-op Process for International Students

1. Attend one of the MANDATORY "Introduction to Cooperative Education & Internships" workshops presented by the CMC or one of the "CPT Workshop for International Students" presented by both the CMC and the International Center.
2. Register with NACELink through the CMC.
3. Begin job search. Most students find their own positions, using a range of resources, including networking, job posting websites and others. CMC offers workshops to assist students with their job searches.
4. Read the Co-op and/or Internship information carefully, and complete the appropriate forms.
5. After securing a position, set up an appointment to meet with a CMC advisor. At this meeting, student must have the offer letter, job description & completed forms, for approval. *See Forms section at the end of this handbook.*
6. Once the paperwork is complete, the CMC advisor will enter a registration permit for the student. The student is then responsible for registering for the course on-line or at registration desk in the Main Building before going to the International Center for work authorization. The International Center will not issue a work authorization before the student registers for the Co-op or Internship course.
7. The CMC advisor will give students a copy of their necessary paperwork to take to the International Center.
8. Students who fail to register on time will not get work authorization.
9. The International Center issues the Work Authorization, which is printed on page 3 of the I-20. It contains the employer's information, and the start and finish dates for work. **WORKING BEFORE RECEIVING THE WORK AUTHORIZATION WILL BE IN VIOLATION OF BCIS REGULATIONS!**
10. Authorization for Co-op must be renewed every semester. Please bring your Work Term Evaluation to the CMC, and fill out the online renewal form before the deadline for each semester. Students must also submit a Work Term Evaluation at the end of the semester or term for Internships.
11. Contact your CMC advisor when you have questions regarding Co-op or Internship.
12. Contact the International Office when you have questions related to your USCIS status and work authorization.

Co-op FAQ

What is Co-op and how does it work?

Cooperative Education is an academic program which combines learning in the classroom with learning on the job. It provides the student with professional work experience that compliments classroom studies. Students typically work with practicing engineers gaining firsthand knowledge of opportunities within their chosen career field.

Co-op students work for a minimum of three full-time work terms with the same employer -- alternating terms between work and school, or consecutive terms. Students do not receive credit for co-op and do not pay tuition, but are considered full-time students while they are working. Students maintain regular full-time student benefits such as, school loans not coming due, ability to live on-campus

Who can participate in co-op?

Students must be in good academic standing, and remain in good standing. They must have completed at least - 18 hours for graduate students OR 24 hours for undergraduate students - by the time they want to start work.

What is the difference between a co-op and an internship?

While both co-ops and internships provide many of the same benefits, the difference is DEPTH of experience. Internships are one-time placements, typically during the summer and lasts about twelve weeks. Co-ops are at least twelve months in length and provides a more realistic view of what a position in your field will be like upon graduation. Since co-op positions last much longer than internships, students are often given projects of entry-level engineers and gain more responsibility each work term.

How is my financial aid affected by Co-op?

Students are not eligible for IIT scholarships while participating in a co-op. Additionally, the income that students earn while working in a co-op must be reported on the FAFSA and may affect the student's financial aid package the following year. For more detailed information, please call the Office of Financial Aid at 312.567-7219.

Do I get credit for co-op?

You will receive administrative credit for co-op. This means that your co-op experience will appear on your transcripts. This is important because it verifies you experience to future employers and for state licensing requirements. Co-op experience can count toward the professional employment component in the state engineering licensing requirements. Your co-op work experience will not earn academic credit; although you may be able to use a co-op work experience as part of a research or independent study class. You would need to speak with your faculty advisor to investigate this option.

Do I pay tuition if I co-op?

You do not pay tuition for co-op. But there is a \$250 registration fee for each semester/quarter that you participate in the program.

How much money can I expect to make while I co-op?

While the major purpose of the co-op program is to gain direct experience in your field, you will be paid while you work. It is difficult to estimate how much you will make because each

industry has different salary ranges. If you have specific questions regarding salary, contact the CMC and we can share with you what current students are earning in your industries.

How long can I co-op?

The CMC requires a minimum of 3 full-time semesters of co-op for undergraduate students and two full-time semesters of co-op for graduate students to earn the co-op certificate. This certificate is presented to you at graduation with your diploma. It verifies that you completed the full co-op program at IIT. If you work as a part-time co-op the requirements are 6 part-time semesters for undergraduates and 4 part-time semesters for graduate students.

Am I required to stay with the same company throughout my co-op period?

Yes. It is preferred that you continue with the same company throughout your entire co-op period. The objective of the co-op program is to give you a progressive experience with an employer. This requires more than one semester with that employer. Co-op seeks to integrate your academic preparation with your work experience. To do this successfully means that you have a significant amount of time with that employer to achieve this goal.

There are times when a co-op placement may be changed. These mostly occur because of company downsizing due to poor economic conditions or if a co-op student significantly changes his or her majors. Any changes MUST be approved by the CMC.

Can I live in campus housing while I co-op?

Yes. As a co-op you retain your status as a full time student. You can continue to live in campus housing during your co-op. If you have specific questions about the housing, please contact the housing department.

What will happen to my medical benefits while I co-op?

Again as a co-op you retain your full time student status and keep all of the benefits of a full time student. You may be covered by your employers insurance while you are on the job. You can opt out of the university medical coverage for the semesters that your employer covers. But when you are not working, you must continue with the university coverage. If you have specific questions regarding medical coverage, contact health services.

Can I co-op in any city?

Yes. IIT has many co-op students working outside of the Chicago area.

Internship FAQs

What is the Internship Program and how does it work?

Internship Program is an academic program, which combines learning in the classroom with learning on the job. It provides the student with professional work experience that complements classroom studies. An internship lasts for one semester with one employer.

Who can participate in internship?

Students must be in good academic standing (2.5+ for Undergraduate Students or 3.0+ for Graduate Students), and remain in good academic standing throughout the duration of their internship. They must have completed at least 18 hours for graduate students OR 24 hours for undergraduate students by the time they want to start work, and must have an active NACELink account with the CMC.

Do I get credit for internship?

Internships do not carry any academic or administrative credits. Thus, you must maintain your full-time student status by taking a full-load of classes in addition to your internship during Fall and Spring Semesters. During summer, you do not need to take classes in addition to your internship.

Do I pay tuition if I do an internship?

You do not pay tuition for internship, but there is a \$150 registration fee for each semester/quarter that you participate in the program.

How much money can I expect to make while I am an intern?

While the major purpose of the internship program is to gain direct experience in your field, you will be paid while you work. It is difficult to estimate how much you will earn because each industry has different salary ranges. If you have specific questions regarding salary, contact the CMC and we can share with you what current students are earning in your industry.

How long can I intern?

An internship will last for one semester. If you would like to do multiple semesters of internship the semesters must be with different employers. If you want to continue with the same employer after a semester ends, you may be able to re-register or convert your internship into a co-op. To find out if you can continue your internship or convert to co-op, contact your CMC Advisor.

Can I live in campus housing while I'm an intern?

Yes, as an intern you are required to maintain your full-time student status by taking a full-load of classes in addition to your internship except during summer. Since you will be a full-time student, you can live in campus housing if you like. If you have specific questions about housing, please contact the housing department.

What will happen to my medical benefits while I'm an intern?

Again, as an intern you must retain your full time student status. Thus, you will keep all of the benefits of a full time student. If you have specific questions regarding medical coverage, contact health services.

Co-op and Internship Forms

All forms can be found on the CMC website under the online process.