

CAFCE ACCREDITATION STANDARDS AND RATIONALE

The work of the Accreditation Council is important in that it establishes criteria which are accepted as standards for programs and their delivery, and in maintaining or adjusting those criteria as the needs and demographics of society, employers and students evolve. This document covers the minimum requirements and institutions have the right to increase these minimum requirements.

Co-operative Education Program is a program that formally integrates a student's academic studies with work experience in co-operative employer relationship organizations. The usual plan is for the student to alternate periods of study with periods of work experience in appropriate fields of business, industry, government, social services and the professions.

Programs with more than one work experience period integrated into the overall academic program provide students with the opportunity for career exploration, development and exposure to more than a single type of work environment in their discipline.

Programs with one work experience period are co-operative education Internship programs. Internship programs provide an in-depth exposure to one employer organization, which provides the student the opportunity for development commensurate with the length of the overall program.

In all cases quality co-operative education programming requires:

- a commitment from the institution;
- a commitment to quality program delivery;
- a commitment to evaluation and monitoring, and
- a commitment to structural features, which facilitate the co-operative education learning process.

These criteria should be considered as a whole, and as mutually reinforcing, in the design and operation of co-operative education programs. The application of these criteria to particular institutions will vary with respect to size, scope of co-operative education programs and institutional structures. Institutional commitment and support is critical to the success of cooperative education. Nonetheless these criteria are all fundamental to the vision of a co-operative education program.

CAFCE's definition of co-operative education, as laid out in their bylaws, includes the following criteria:

1. Each work situation is developed and/or approved by the co-operative educational institution as a suitable learning situation;

1.1 Rationale: The institution in partnership with employers are in the best position to evaluate a work opportunity as appropriate to the student's program and career interests.

2. The co-operative student is engaged in productive, authentic and full-time¹ work rather than merely observing;

2.1. Rationale: *The nature of the engagement between the student and the learning context is important. While observation and modelling are certainly ways in which students learn², when this can be supplemented with active engagement in real work with peers and supervisors, learning is enhanced. Increasing levels of engagement in a community of practice³, the ability to engage in and reflect upon concrete experiences⁴ and the opportunity to work with real-life problems⁵ all optimize the learning potential of the experience.*

3. The co-operative student receives remuneration for the work performed⁶;

3.1 Rationale: *Having employers pay the students directly for work done increases the level of engagement and commitment for both the student and employer.*

3.2 Rationale: *The founding principles of co-operative education include students financing their studies through relevant paid work experiences. This was intended to address the issues of access to education as well as reducing students overall debt load.⁷*

4. The co-operative student's progress on the job is monitored by the co-operative educational institution;

4.1 Rationale: *The institution formally recognizes the work experience as an integral part of the student's academic program. The institution and the employer are seen as co-educators and therefore both have a vested interest in ensuring that the work site offers an appropriate environment for the student's learning goals to be achieved. This is best determined through an on-site visit. Other options of communication include telephone, fax, email, video-conferencing, or if possible when distance is a deterrent, have a post secondary institution in the area involved with cooperative education work site visits complete this on your behalf.*

4.2 Rationale: *The monitoring also provides opportunity for ongoing communication between the institution, the employers and the students.*

¹ Full-time work terms: The expected number of weeks per work term is 15 and the expected number of hours per week is 35. The minimum number of weeks per work term is 12 and the minimum number of hours is 35.

² Bandura, 1977; Hung, 1999

³ Lave and Wenger, 1991

⁴ Kolb, 1984

⁵ Schon, 1983; Dewey, 1938

⁶ CAFCE requires a paid salary for the minimum number of work terms required by the accreditation criteria (30% of time spent in studies)

⁷ "The Making of History: Ninety Years of Northeastern Co-op" by John-Pierre Smollins

5. The co-operative student's performance on the job is supervised and evaluated by the student's co-operative employer;

5.1 Rationale: Co-operative education programs partner with employers to provide learning opportunities outside the classroom; employers are viewed as co-educators. The co-operative education experience is an integral part of the student's academic program and, as such, the student should be receiving ongoing guidance and feedback at the workplace and a final evaluation on their performance that will be taken into consideration for the work term grade.

6. The total co-operative work experience is at least thirty percent of the time spent in academic study.⁸

6.1 Rationale: Many professional associations have certain experiential requirements, usually stated in years of work experience following graduation as a prerequisite to being granted professional designation. For example, in most university models, 30% would represent about a 1 year of work experience. Some professional associations do recognize and give credit for co-operative education experience.

6.2 Rationale: An obvious benefit for students selecting co-operative education programs is the opportunity for them to evaluate alternate career choices. An alternating structure provides the opportunity to view a variety of careers in all seasons of the year.

6.3 Rationale: Students in a co-operative education program should have the opportunity to experience progressive levels of responsibility and challenges. It is possible to achieve this in a multiple work term program and less so in programs with less time on the job.

6.4 Rationale: The level of academic attainment has a direct influence on the level of responsibility and challenge a student can expect on a work term. With a typical program structure involving multiple work terms and the requirement that programs begin and end with academic study terms, it is possible to achieve this progression in responsibility and challenge.

6.5 Rationale: Alternating work terms and academic study terms provide the opportunity for students to modify their academic program to fit with their career aspirations. Internship co-op also provides for similar academic adjustments somewhat later in the student's academic career.

⁸ Calculation: The thirty percent can be calculated using a month as the basic unit of measurement. For an academic program that has 32 months of academic study the minimum co-operative education work experience would be $32 \text{ months} \times 30\% = 9.6 \text{ months}$ rounded to 10, If you divide 10 by 4 you get 2.5 terms rounded to three terms. The minimum number of alternating co-operative education work terms is three. For those programs which operate on a different academic calendar i.e.; weeks, than an equivalent time is to be calculated.

Standards:

This section provides the standards for Accreditation Application and the lettering is aligned to the current Accreditation Application

B. Co-op in the Institutional⁹ Context

1.1 **Rationale:** *It provide the review team with an understanding of the overall Co-op programs within the institution including history, scope, structure, and information systems for co-operative education.*

1.1.1 **Indicator:** The inclusion of co-op information in such institutional processes as High School liaison, orientation programs, international student orientation, and new faculty orientation.

C. Institutional Commitment Criteria

2.1 **Rationale:** *Provides evidence that the co-operative education program is not merely a “politically expedient and attractive option” for the institution. When the institution puts resources into co-operative education and makes curriculum adjustments in content and delivery it demonstrates that co-operative education is considered of value in the academic community. The growth or shrinkage of a program should cause the institution to reflect on whether the co-op program’s success is being driven by internal factors (management, linkage to faculty) or external (labour market, competition).*

2.1.1 **Indicator:** Measurement of the satisfaction of students, employers, faculty and staff through surveys, as a regular component of the program enables responsiveness to internal and external changes and assists trend analysis over time.

2.1.2 **Indicator:** Budget: Fluctuations in budget support, beyond those experienced by all other programs in the institution, may signal a change in commitment by the institution. Budgets should acknowledge both the fixed and variable costs of operating a co-op program.

2.1.3 **Indicator:** Integration – active partnerships between the support unit and faculty: The degree to which faculty promote co-op or make changes in the sequencing/offering of courses in the curriculum to support co-op, or participate in site visits, or mark work term reports all token a healthy relationship between co-op staff and faculty, where co-op staff are not already faculty members.

⁹ Institutional in this document refers to post secondary institutions in which the co-operative education program resides.

2.1.4 Indicator: Awarding credits for co-op work terms or co-op training courses is one tangible way of demonstrating institutional commitment.

2.1.5 Indicator: Qualified staff specifically dedicated to co-op. When an institution has specifically dedicated co-op employees, there is no conflict of interest between other duties or a tendency for co-op work to be the last work done. Specifically trained professional co-op staff adds to an institution's credibility with internal and external stakeholders.

2.1.6 Indicator: The institution includes co-op in such long-term planning documents and processes as: Strategic Planning, Academic Planning, and Academic Visioning.

D. Quality Program Delivery Criteria

Demonstration of practice and commitment to quality program delivery is required. Quality in program delivery comprises standards for entry, progression, and completion of the program; fairness in the job competition process, quality of the work experience, preparation of students, and support for learning from the work term.

3. Pre-work term preparation

3.1 Rationale: *Preparing students for her workplace helps to set them up for success in making the transition from student to worker/learner as well as underscoring the importance of learning. Students also gain job seeking skills that will be valuable upon graduation.*

3.1.1 Indicator: The number of workshops provided by the institution and by faculty.

3.1.2 Indicator: The content of these workshops is specific and relevant in supporting students with the job search process and success in the workplace.

3.1.3 Indicator: The number and the percentage of students who obtain work placements who are seriously seeking a co-op work term.

3.1.4 Indicator: The number, and the percentage, of co-op students who successfully complete (pass) their co-op work term.

3.1.5 Indicator: The number of and the required percentage, of co-op modules delivered within an 'academic' course, or for which the students receive credit.

4. Co-operative education employment occurs through competition (postings and interviews), and self-developed opportunities (jobs and entrepreneurial work terms).

4.1 **Rationale:** *Competition normally ensures that students are placed in a fair and equitable manner, and prepares students for the job-seeking process they will face on graduation. It also helps in encouraging a supportive learning environment.*

4.1.1 **Indicator:** The number of jobs filled as a proportion of the number of jobs posted by term demonstrates how closely aligned is the job postings with the students' skill sets.

4.1.2 **Indicator:** The number of interviews obtained may be an indicator of the success of the workshops in resume and cover letter preparation.

4.1.3 **Indicator:** The number of students applying for multiple work opportunities demonstrates the success of such co-op content knowledge as 'transferable skills'.

4.2 **Rationale:** *In some situations students take a major role in 'self-developing' their own job, and their work terms are obtained outside the normal competitive process. Such activity fosters authentic learning as students are taking active responsibility for defining the kind of workplace where they can fulfil their learning objectives.*

4.2.1 **Indicator:** The proportion of work terms that are self-developed as opposed to posted and obtained through competition is dependent on each institution's strategies.

4.2.2 **Indicator:** Support structures in place to assist students with self-developed jobs.

5. Each co-operative education opportunity is approved by the institution as a suitable learning situation.

5.1 **Rationale:** *The institution recognizes the work experience as an integral part of the student's academic program as noted on the transcript and therefore, should assess the work opportunity (whether developed by the institution or the student) as suitable.*

5.1.1 **Indicator:** The inclusion of the co-op work term on the student's academic transcript.

5.1.2 Indicator: The inclusion of co-op on the university degree parchment.

5.1.3 Indicator: The maintenance of regular contact between the co-op coordinator and the workplace supervisors.

5.1.4 Indicator: The practice of on-site visits that establish the working conditions of the student(s) and fosters deeper communication between the institution and the workplace.

5.1.5 Indicator: The recognition of co-op work terms for academic credit by the institution.

6. Work terms involve paid, productive work related to the student's academic or career objectives

6.1 Rationale: *Having employers pay the students directly for work done increases the level of engagement and commitment for both the student and employer.*

6.1.1 Indicator: Track posted positions that pay market value salary.

6.2 Rationale: *The founding principles of co-operative education include students financing their studies through relevant paid work experiences. This was intended to address the issues of access to education as well as reducing students overall debt load.*

6.2.1 Indicator: There is a reduction in the overall debt of students in co-op versus non-co-op students.

6.2.2 Indicator: Students have the ability to contribute toward costs of subsequent academic terms.

6.3 Rationale: *Linkages between work and academic, or career, objectives are key to co-op as it is a complementary model of education designed to enhance student academic learning. In the more technical or applied disciplines these connections are more obvious (e.g. engineering, accounting) and the students' academic work is often directly reflected in their workplace learning (e.g. software design, tax analysis). In less applied disciplines such as in the Arts and Humanities, the co-op work may be less obviously linked to the student's specific major or courses (e.g. English literature) and more linked to the student's career objectives (e.g. an English major interested in publishing, teaching, or research). Regardless of how obvious these connections may initially appear, the intent is that they are explicit and relevant to the learner.*

6.3.1 Indicators: Students see how their learning objectives align with various co-op job opportunities (through one-on-one coaching, workshops, self-reflection exercises etc.)

6.3.2 Indicator: Students make linkages through work reports, presentations, journals, logs, etc. between their academic study and academic co-op learning.

6.3.3 Indicator: There are high levels of student satisfaction with respect to learning value of co-op as demonstrated through various feedback mechanisms such as surveys, focus groups, evaluation forms etc.

E. Monitoring and Evaluation Criteria

Monitoring and evaluation are a critical part of co-operative education objectives and in ensuring quality program deliver. Employers, as major partners in the educational process, are made aware of their educational role, including their part in the evaluation process.

7. Student's performance on the job is mentored, supervised, and evaluated by the employer.

7.1 Rationale: *In many theories of experiential learning, a mentor, expert or experienced colleague plays a key role in the model. Co-op research has also shown that students cite their supervisor as one of the most important influences on their learning¹⁰. Because of the importance of learning in the co-op work term, it is expected that the employer takes an active role in supervising, modelling, and assessing the co-op student's performance.*

7.1.1 Indicator: Supervisors are part of the hiring process.

7.1.2 Indicator: Supervisors meet co-ordinators at work site visit and provide detailed feedback on the students under their supervision.

7.1.3 Indicator: Student notes ways in which supervisor is assisting with learning.

7.1.4 Indicator: Employer formally assigns a mentor to the co-op student.

7.2 Rationale: *The employer is the best judge of expected performance for their given context. While the institution may supplement the employer's evaluation with other forms of assessment in order to reach a final grade for the work term (e.g.*

¹⁰ Johnston et al, 2003

work reports, self-assessments, site visit checks etc.), the employer's evaluation is a critical centrepiece of overall "authentic assessment".¹¹

7.2.1 Indicator: Supervisors' evaluations are completed in full and shared with the student.

7.2.2 Indicator: Supervisors assist in work report evaluations.

7.2.3 Indicator: Supervisor's assessment carries significant "weight" in overall grade assigned.

7.3 Rationale: *As above, the supervisor's feedback plays an important role in the learning. Sharing feedback through the performance evaluation process provides a good way of ensuring it is formally delivered and received.*

7.3.1 Indicator: Performance evaluations are reviewed with students and/or institutional representative and/or employer.

8. Students' learning is monitored by the institution (mostly on-site visits). For internship, monitoring takes place in first 4 months and again later in the work term.

8.1 Rationale: *Assessment of co-op learning is ultimately the responsibility of the co-op institution. Performance evaluations, the responsibility of the employer, contribute to the overall assessment of co-op learning as do other "authentic assessment" tools including self-reviews/reports, reflective journals, work reports and projects, presentations, etc.*

8.1.1 Indicator: Students set their learning objectives prior to the work term.

8.1.2 Indicator: Work site visit, back to school debriefing, etc, have protocols that reflect a focus on learning: monitoring of learning objectives, reflection exercises, establishment of work project based upon learning objectives, etc.

8.1.3 Indicator: Work term completion requirements include evidence of learning outcomes.

¹¹ Authentic learning refers to learning that better reflects the real world experiences of students. It represents much of the workplace learning which emerges for co-operative education students in preparation for, and during, their work terms. Authentic learning, originates with the needs of the students and is guided by the student's goals, opportunities and situational context. Authentic learning activities ensure that students are actively involved in tasks that present opportunities to acquire and apply new information and skills that are best learned "in context".

8.1.4 Indicator: There is an integration of co-op experiences back into classroom.

8.1.5 Indicator: There is a high level of faculty involvement in above monitoring and assessment.

8.2 Rationale: *As co-op is an academic program, the institution must ensure academic standards are met through ongoing monitoring and assessment.*

8.2.1 Indicator: Students are awarded academic credit for the completion of all requirements for the work term.

8.2.2 Indicator: There are co-operative education policies and practices that focus on learning.

9. Based on the agreement of employer, student, and co-op staff, employer and student evaluations of the work experience are discussed with students after the completion of each work term (debriefing). Evaluations remain part of the student's co-operative education file.

9.1 Rationale: *Much of the learning potential from work term experiences is achieved from reflective processes. Discussing the evaluations with students can serve as important reflective opportunities.*

9.1.1 Indicator: Reference to structured debriefing processes in student handbooks and other informational material circulated to the students.

9.2 Rationale: *Where areas for improvement have been identified, debriefing provides an opportunity for the Co-operative Education staff to advise the student in improvement implementation.*

9.2.1 Indicator: Appropriate documentation is provided for debriefing activities.

9.3 Rationale: *Debriefings provide an opportunity to provide positive reinforcement of high levels of performance. If debriefings are conducted in groups, this reinforcement can help other students to aspire to higher levels of performance.*

9.3.1 Indicator: Opportunity for students to share experience with staff, faculty and students in formal presentations, through informal group debriefing, one-on-one with coordinators, on line postings, web logs, evaluations (both positive and constructive), etc.

10. Students are expected to submit a project/assignment at the end of each co-op work term that explains what they have done, what they have learned and how it links to their academic studies and career goals. It is up to the institution to determine the appropriate format of the assignment based upon the professional, personal and program goals.¹²

10.1 Rationale: *Work term assignments can provide opportunities for developing and refining skills in project management, conceptualisation, research and communications.*

10.1.1 Indicator: The evaluation of the assignment is part of the official student files documentation.

10.1.2 Indicator: In research, data collection and analysis the work term assignments are viewed positively by both students and the institution with respect to their value as a learning tool.

10.2 Rationale: *Students can utilise the opportunity to expand their learning beyond the day-to-day confines of the job.*

10.2.1 Indicator: Student's work report topic, while related to the job, may not necessarily be part of their assigned work.

10.3 Rationale: *Provides the student with a valuable addition to their "portfolio" which can be an asset in future career development and job search.*

10.3.1 Indicator: Students utilize their portfolios (including reports) for future work terms and for their future career development.

10.4 Rationale: *Can enhance integration with the academic program content if classroom faculty are involved in the report evaluation process.*

F. Structural Criteria

11. Alternating work and study

11.1 Rationale: *Co-operative education promotes continuous learning through the integration of classroom and applied work-based learning. For programs with*

¹² There is a minimum requirement of one formal written report.

more than one work term, alternating work and study allows the student to undertake increasing challenge in their work terms commensurate with progress in their academic program.

11.2 Rationale: *For programs with more than one work term, alternating work and study allows the student to evaluate alternate career choices within either the same or differing organisations.*

11.3 Rationale: *Students can be exposed to real differences in demand, nature of the work and priorities in different seasons of the year.*

11.1.1. Indicator: Charts and/or other official program documentation showing an alternating structure that includes work terms in all seasons of the year. Programs having multiple work terms can achieve this very effectively. Programs showing “summer only” work terms must show that this is necessary due to the nature of the industry or business.

12. Start and end with an academic study term

12.1 Rationale: *Students should have an initial grounding in their field of study and preparation they can apply to gaining and maintaining their first work term; return to campus following each work term allows for reflective learning process to take place and completion of the work term requirements. The program must begin with a study term and end with one, to ensure that the preparation for the work term and the synthesis of the work experience into the total program can be accomplished.*

12.1.1 Indicator: Regulations requiring that programs end with an study term.

12.2 Rationale: *Experience has shown that when students end their program with a work term there can be a temptation and a tendency to become detached from the program and the institution.*

12.2.1 Indicator: Program structural charts showing the alternating sequence of academic work terms and academic study semesters.

12.2.2 Indicator: Ending on an academic study term allows for timely completion of degree program.

13. Length of each work term is approximately equal to the length of each study term

13.1 **Rationale:** *Co-op is an academic program sponsored and supported by the institution. Teaching and research are the institution's primary activities. Administrative structures and services support these activities and are organized and offered under a yearly academic schedule (calendar). Most Canadian institutions offer their courses in two or three four-month terms over a twelve-month period. The Co-op program has to be an integral component of this academic and curricular schedule. Co-op has to fit into these structures in order to provide a coordinated approach to both co-op and regular academic programs.*

13.1.1 **Indicator:** Students can generally move between co-op work terms and study terms without the institution compromising access to student services or necessary academic courses (i.e., trimester system)

13.1.2 **Indicator:** The integrity of the academic curriculum is maintained and enhanced.

13.1.3 **Indicator:** Employer and student participation is maintained and their needs are being met (i.e. year round availability of students for employers, timely degree completion for students).

13.2 **Rationale:** *Institutions can provide employers with consistency throughout the year and facilitate planning, hiring and the dovetailing of work terms and study terms.*

13.2.1 **Indicator:** Employers incorporate the co-op program into the recruiting process.

13.2.2 **Indicator:** There is a consistently high placement rate.

13.2.3 **Indicator:** The institution can provide evidence that the length of each work term is equal to the length of each study term.

13.3 **Rationale:** *The shared framework between institutions provides students with the ability to transfer between institutions and provides predictability in their study terms and work terms.*

14. Both work and study terms are full time.

14.1 **Rationale:** *Full-time study and work terms encourage maximum focus on the work place or on academic study. The highest value from a co-op program accrues to each of the partners through full-time study and full-time work.*

14.1.1. **Indicator:** Employers continue to hire full-time co-op students and there is a consistently high placement rate.

14.1.2 Indicator: Students continue to prefer full-time co-op work terms.

15. For programs of two or more work terms, work experience is not limited to one season unless it can be demonstrated that work in a specific career is purely of a seasonal nature.

15.1 Rationale: *The alternating sequence of a co-op program provides for a year-round commitment by the institution and the employer. For employers it means a continuous year-round work force; for institutions it means full use of space, facilities and faculty/staff. There are programs which may be constrained by factors such as climate, location, nature of the business etc where a work term can only be offered on a seasonal basis.*

15.1.1 Indicator: Employers, through their participation, support the concept of year-round availability of co-op students.

15.1.2 Indicator: The institution makes every effort to offer the curriculum every term to support the possibility of all year round work terms by limiting the number of back-to-back prerequisites, or by increasing the availability of academic courses in the summer.

References:

1. "The Making of the History: Ninety Years of Northeastern Co-op" by John-Pierre Smollins. This was taken from the following website:

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