

CEWIL Canada

Co-operative Education Accreditation Standards and Rationale

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The work of the Accreditation Council is important in that it establishes criteria which are accepted as standards for co-operative education (co-op) 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; institutions have the right to set levels that are higher than these minimum requirements.

Co-operative education formally integrates a student's academic studies with work experience. The traditional model has the student alternate periods of academic study with periods of work experience in appropriate fields of business, industry, government, and not-for-profit.

Both work and academic terms are full-time and follow a formalized sequence:

- For alternating co-op programs three to four years in length, the total amount of co-op work experience is normally at least 30% of the time spent in academic study;
- For programs of two years or less, the total amount is normally at least 25% of the time spent in academic study;
- A work term is defined as a minimum of 12 weeks and/or 420 hours full-time paid experience.

There are two approved program models:

1. Alternating

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

2. Internship

Programs with one work experience period where students receive an in-depth exposure to one employer organization, which provides students 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 to:

- structure educational features that mediate the co-operative education learning process,
- deliver quality programming, and
- assess, evaluate and monitor the employment experience.

These criteria are all fundamental to the vision of a co-operative education program and should be considered as a whole, and as mutually reinforcing, in the design and operation of co-operative education programs. Institutional commitment and support is critical to the success of co-operative education.

RATIONALE

1. The Accreditation Council is charged with evaluating and accrediting Canadian post-secondary co-op programs using these guiding principles. The guiding principles are enshrined in CEWIL Canada's by-laws; therefore, the Accreditation Council must petition the CEWIL Canada Board to propose, to the CEWIL Canada membership-at-large, any amendments deemed necessary. CEWIL Canada's definition of co-operative education, as laid out in their bylaws, includes the following guiding principles:
2. **Each work term is developed in partnership with the employer and approved by the co-operative education program as a suitable learning environment** (Billett, 2009; Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010; Fleming & Ferkins, 2005; Holly, 2014);

Rationale:

- 2.1 Co-operative education is sponsored and supported by the institution. Administrative structures and services 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.
- 2.2 Linkages between work and academic, or career objectives, are key to co-operative education. It is a complementary model of education designed to enhance students' academic learning. In the more technical or applied disciplines these connections may be more obvious (e.g., engineering, accounting) and the students' academic work more often directly reflected in their work place learning (e.g., software design, tax analysis). In less applied disciplines, such as the Arts and Humanities, co-op work may be less obviously linked to the students' specific majors or courses (e.g., English Literature) and more linked to the students' career objectives (e.g., an English major interested in publishing, teaching or research). Regardless of how obvious the connections may initially appear, the intent is that they are explicit and relevant to the learner.
- 2.3 A competitive employment process normally ensures that students are employed in a fair and equitable manner. It also prepares students for the job-seeking process they will face upon graduation and helps to encourage a supportive learning environment.
- 2.4 In some situations, students take a major role in 'self-developing' their own jobs or entrepreneurial work 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 work place where they can fulfil their learning objectives.
- 2.5 The institution recognizes the work experience as an integral part of the student's academic program as noted on the transcript; therefore, it should assess the work opportunity (whether developed by the institution or the student) as suitable.
- 2.6 The co-operative education educators, in partnership with employers, are in the best position to evaluate a work opportunity as appropriate to the student's program and career interests.

- 3. The student is engaged in productive work (Fink, 2003; McRae, 2015) for which the student receives remuneration (Beggs, Ross & Goodwin, 2008; Cho, 2006; Beard 1998; Waryzak; 1995);**

Rationale:

- 3.1 The nature of the engagement between students and the learning context is important. While observation and modelling are certainly ways in which students learn, learning is enhanced when it is supplemented with active engagement in real work with peers and supervisors.
- 3.2 Paying students for work done increases the level of engagement and commitment for both students and employers.
- 3.3 The founding principles of co-operative education include students financing their studies through relevant paid work experiences. This was intended to address the issue of access to education as well as reducing students' overall debt load.

- 4. The co-op curriculum supports student learning goals, personal evaluation and reflection (Andersen & Krathwohl, 2001; Kennedy, Billett, Gherardi, & Grealish, 2015; Schneider & Stier, 2006; Schön, 1983; Smigiel, Macleod, & Stephenson, 2015);**

Rationale:

- 4.1 Preparing students for the work place 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.
- 4.2 The practice of identifying learning objectives has been shown to support learning outcomes.
- 4.3 Students can utilize their employment opportunities to expand their learning beyond the day-to-day confines of the job.
- 4.4 The learning potential of the experience is optimized by engaging in, and reflecting upon, concrete experience and the opportunity to work with real-life problems. Discussing the evaluations with students can serve as important reflective opportunities.
- 4.5 Reflections also provide an opportunity to provide positive reinforcement of high levels of performance.
- 4.6 Assessments and reflections provide students with valuable evidence for their 'employment portfolio'; a valuable asset for future career development and job searches.

- 5. The student's performance in the work place is supervised and evaluated by the student's employer. (McRae, 2015; von Treuer, Sturre, Keele, & McLeod, 2011)**

Rationale:

- 5.1 Co-operative education educators partner with employers to provide learning opportunities outside the classroom; students become members of a community of practice and employers are viewed as co-educators. The co-operative education experience is an integral part of students' academic programs and, as such, students should receive on-going guidance and feedback in the work place and a final evaluation of their performance that will be taken into consideration for the work term grade.

- 5.2 In many theories of experiential learning, a mentor, expert or experienced colleague plays a key role in the model. 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 students' performances.
- 5.3 Work term assignments can provide opportunities for developing and refining skills in project management, conceptualization, research and communications.
- 5.4 The employer is the best judge of expected performance in their given context. 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. 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., work reports, self-assessments, site visit checks etc.); however, the employer's evaluation is critical for overall 'authentic assessment'.

6. The student's progress during their work term is monitored by the co-operative educational program (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Billett, 2009; Connaughton, Edgar, & Ferns, 2014; Cooper et al., 2010; Kolb & Kolb, 2005);

Rationale:

- 6.1 The institution formally recognizes the work experience as an integral part of the student's academic program; therefore, must ensure academic standards are met through on-going monitoring and assessment. The institution and the employer are seen as co-educators; 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.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 The monitoring also provides opportunity for on-going communication between the institution, the employers and the students.

7. Both work and academic terms are full-time and follow a formalized sequence. The total amount of co-op work experience is normally at least 30% of the time spent in academic study. For programs of two years or less, the total amount may be a minimum of 25%. A work term is defined as a minimum of 12 weeks and/or 420 hours full-time paid experience.

Rationale:

- 7.1 Co-operative education promotes continuous learning through the integration of classroom and applied work-based learning.
- 7.2 Alternating work and academic study terms allows students to undertake increasing challenges in their work terms commensurate with progress in their academic programs. It also provides multiple opportunities for students to apply theory and practice and modify their academic program to refine their career aspirations. Co-op internship also provides for similar academic adjustments somewhat later in students' academic and career adjustments.

- 7.3 Full-time study and work terms encourage maximum focus on the work place or on academic study.
- 7.4 Students completing the work terms transfer the learning from the classroom to the work place and from the work place to the classroom with greater confidence.

8. The co-op program begins and ends on an academic term.

- 8.1 The level of academic attainment has a direct influence on the level of responsibility and challenge students can expect on a work term. With a program structure involving multiple work terms, and the requirement that programs begin and end with academic study term, it is possible to achieve this progression in responsibility and challenge.
- 8.2 Students should have an initial grounding in their field of study and preparation they can apply to gaining and maintaining their first work term; returning 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 and end with a study term to ensure that the preparation for the work term and the synthesis of the work experience into the total program can be accomplished.

9. The student completing multiple work terms is normally exposed to the work environment during more than one season of the year. (Lasky & Cardillo, 2004).

Rationale:

- 9.1 Both the alternating and internship co-op models typically provide a year-round commitment by the institution and the employer. For employers, this means a continuous year-round work force; for institutions, this means better use of facilities, faculty and staff. **Note:** 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. Programs with 'summer only' work terms must show this is necessary due to the nature of the industry/business as reflected in the seasonality of the work or due to the institutional length of the program.
- 9.2 Students can be exposed to real differences in demand based on the nature of the work and priorities in different seasons of the year.

STANDARDS

This section provides the standards for the Accreditation Application; the lettering and numbering are aligned to the current Accreditation Application form.

C. Structural Criteria

1. Alternating work and study | Program Model(s): Alternating

Indicator(s):

- 1.1 Charts and/or other official program documentation showing an alternating structure that includes work terms in all season of the year

2. Start and end with an academic study term | Program Model(s): Alternating, Internships

Indicator(s):

- 2.1 Regulation(s) require that programs start and end with a study term.

3. Length of each work term is approximately equal to the length of each academic study term | Program Model(s): Alternating

Indicator(s):

- 3.1 A chart showing how students can 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)
- 3.2 The integrity of the academic curriculum is maintained and enhanced.
- 3.3 Employer and student participation is maintained and their needs are met (i.e., year round availability of students for employers, timely degree completion for students)

4. Both work and study terms are full-time | Program Model(s): Alternating, Internships

Indicator(s):

- 4.1 Documentation that shows the number and length of work terms and the requirement that employment be full-time, typically one employer.

5. 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 | Program Model(s): Alternating

Indicator(s):

- 5.1 Employers, through their participation, support the concept of year-round availability of co-op students.
- 5.2 The institution makes every effort to offer the curriculum every term to support the possibility of work terms in each term of the year by limiting the number of back-to-back prerequisites or by increasing the availability of academic courses in the summer.

D. Institutional Commitment Criteria

This section should provide the review team with an understanding of the overall co-op programs within the institution including their history and structure as well as the information systems used to manage them. This section should also provide 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 a valuable part of 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).

1. Institutional Commitment

Indicator(s):

- 1.1 The inclusion of co-op information in such institutional processes as marketing and undergraduate recruitment, secondary school liaison, orientation programs, international student orientation, and new faculty orientation.
- 1.2 Internal mechanisms/review
- 1.3 The inclusion of co-op in strategic plans and other external academic accreditation processes.
- 1.4 Measurement of the satisfaction of students, employers, faculty and staff through regular program surveys enables responsiveness to internal and external changes and assists trend analysis over time.
- 1.5 Integration: active partnerships between the support unit and faculty: The degree to which faculty promote co-op or make changes in the sequencing and/or offering of courses in the curriculum to support co-op, or participate in site visits, or mark work term reports are all tokens of a healthy relationship between co-op staff and faculty (where co-op staff are not already faculty members).
- 1.6 Awarding academic credit or additive/not-for-credit grading for co-op work terms or co-op training courses is one tangible way of demonstrating institutional commitment.
- 1.7 The inclusion of the co-op work term on the students’ academic transcripts.
- 1.8 The inclusion of co-op on the institution’s parchment/graduation credential.
- 1.9 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 add to an institution’s credibility with internal and external stakeholders.
- 1.10 The institution includes co-op in such long-term planning documents and processes as: Strategic Planning, Academic Planning, and Academic Visioning.

E. 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.

1. Pre-work term preparation

Indicator(s):

- 1.1 The number and content of workshops provided by the institution are specific and relevant in supporting students with the job search process and strategies for success in the work place.
- 1.2 The number and the percentage of students actively seeking a co-op work term who obtain employment.
- 1.3 The number, and the required percentage, of co-op modules delivered within an academic course or for which the students receive credit.

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

Indicator(s):

- 2.1 Evidence of a fair and competitive employment process.
- 2.2 Evidence that students are eligible, and encouraged, to apply to multiple work opportunities and that they earn a variety of interviews.
- 2.3 Evidence of support to assist students to self-develop jobs and/or self-employment. Evidence showing the proportion of work terms that are self-developed as opposed to posted and obtained through competition.
- 2.4 The number, and the percentage, of co-op students who successfully complete (pass) their co-op work term.
- 2.5 Historical co-op employment rates.

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

Indicator(s):

- 3.1 The inclusion of the co-op work term on the students' academic transcripts.
- 3.2 The inclusion of co-op on the institution's parchment/graduation credential.
- 3.3 The maintenance of regular contact between the co-op coordinator and the work place supervisors.
- 3.4 The practice of on-site visits that establish the working conditions of the student(s) and foster deeper communication between the institution and the work place.

3.5 The recognition of co-op work terms for academic or additive/not for credit by the institution.

3.6 Job approval criteria.

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

Indicator(s):

4.1 Requirement that positions are paid is broadly advertised.

4.2 Evidence of material/mechanisms available to help students see how their learning objectives align with various co-op job opportunities (e.g., one-on-one coaching, workshops, self-reflection exercises, etc.).

4.3 Evidence that supports the opportunities that allow students to make linkages through work reports, presentations, journals, logs, etc. between their academic study and academic co-op learning.

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

F. 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.

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

Indicator(s):

- 1.1 Supervisor meets the coordinator during the work site visit and provides detailed feedback on the student(s) under their supervision.
- 1.2 Employer formally assigns a mentor to the co-op student(s).
- 1.3 Student notes ways in which supervisor and/or mentor is assisting with learning.
- 1.4 Supervisor supports the preparation of, and provides feedback on, the work term report/project/assignment.
- 1.5 Supervisor's evaluation of the student's work term performance is completed in full and shared with the student.
- 1.6 Institutional representative reviews performance evaluation(s) with the student(s) and/or the employer(s).
- 1.7 Supervisor's assessment of a student's work term performance carries significant 'weight' in overall grade assigned for the work term.

2. Students' learning is monitored and assessed by the institution.

Indicator(s):

- 2.1 Students set their learning objectives for the work term.
- 2.2 Work site visit, back to school debriefing, etc., have protocols that reflect a focus on learning (e.g., assessing learning objectives, reflection exercises, establishing work report/project/assignment based upon learning objectives, etc.)
- 2.3 Work term completion requirements include evidence of learning outcomes.
- 2.4 Students are encouraged to integrate their co-op experiences back into the classroom.
- 2.5 There is a high level of faculty involvement in above monitoring and assessment.
- 2.6 Students are awarded academic or non-academic credit for the completion of all requirements for the work term.
- 2.7 There are co-operative education policies and practices that focus on learning.

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

Indicator(s):

- 3.1 Reference to structured reflective processes in student handbooks and other informational material circulated to the students including work performance evaluation tool and learning goals tool.
 - 3.2 Opportunity for students to share experiences with staff, faculty and students in formal presentations, through informal group reflecting, one-on-one with coordinators, on line postings, web logs, evaluations (both positive and constructive), etc.
- 4. Students are expected to submit a work term report/project/assignment at the end of each co-op work term. It is up to the institution to determine the appropriate format of the assignment based upon the professional, personal and program goals.**

Indicator(s):

- 4.1 The evaluation of the work term report/project/assignment is part of students' official files/documentation.
- 4.2 The institution provides work report/project/assignment guidelines and evaluation criteria to students.
- 4.3 Students utilize their portfolios (including reports) for future work terms and for their future career development.

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