Cooperative (Co-op) Education Program Guide for Supervisors and Mentors

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INTRODUCTION

The information contained in this handbook is intended to provide information regarding the Cooperative (Co-op) Education Program at the Goddard Space Flight Center. Referring to it will assist you in your role as a Co-op Supervisor. Some of it may be useful to your secretary or administrative assistant as well. If you have any questions, please contact the Student Programs Coordinator in the Office of Human Capital Management, Code 112 (x6-9951).

Cooperative Education Defined

Cooperative Education began in 1906 at the University of Cincinnati solely for engineering majors. Today it is available to students at colleges and universities worldwide.

The program is called "Co-op" because it involves a cooperative effort on the part of colleges, employers, and students to form an exceptional educational program. Working together, a synergistic learning process is created that integrates classroom studies with supervised work experiences. Students are employed for a semester at a time in positions related to their major field of study and career objective. The process typically alternates work and study. An example of a Co-op work tour is: a 6-month tour initially, and after that, the student may return for either 6 or 3-month tours. Scheduling will vary because of school requirements and geographical location. Therefore, a Co-op tour can differ from the one described above. It is strongly suggested that the Co-op works at least one semester and one summer tour together. Co-op is NOT strictly "summer work" nor is it a short "internship." The program is designed to provide the student with increasing responsibility commensurate with increased academic skills and experience gained from previous school and work terms.

The primary objective of the program is to provide the Center with a source of trained and highly motivated employees who are familiar with the Center's activities and are ready to assume their place in the work force immediately upon graduation and successful completion of the Co-op program. For this reason, the distribution of skill types within the program closely mirrors the Center's professional work force as a whole.

Benefits of Cooperative Education

To the Supervisor and the Center:
♦ Provides continuous source of new talent and original ideas.
♦ Provides cost-effective recruitment, training, and retention vehicle.
♦ Permits input into the educational process.
♦ Provides an opportunity to preview potential full-time employees in actual work situations.
♦ Aids in meeting diversity focused goals through identification, placement, and development of qualified minority candidates.
♦ Allows senior employees the chance to mentor and train employees.
♦ Provides a good "on-campus" image through Co-ops who become ambassadors for Goddard when they return to campus.

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To the Student:
- ♦ Provides practical experience in applying academic principles and theories.
- ♦ Helps in determining general and specific career opportunities and goals.
- ♦ Develops confidence, interpersonal skills, and professional work habits.
- ♦ Increases motivation and desire to learn.
- ♦ Allows exposure to state-of-the-art equipment and practices.
- ♦ Provides salary and tuition assistance eligibility.
- ♦ Provides all full-time Federal benefits.
- ♦ Possibility of full-time employment to be made upon successful completion of the program and graduation.
- ♦ Provides access to working professionals.

To the School:
- ♦ Offers feedback on current practices in the working community.
- ♦ Furnishes information on employment trends.
- ♦ Strengthens rapport with the community.

Expectations and Roles

When a Co-op student has been placed in your organization, it is you (the supervisor) who plays a central and crucial role in the success of the Co-op Program. The two most important ingredients for a successful experience are the establishment of a mentoring relationship and the quality of the work assignments. Here are some ideas to help foster effective development of a Co-op:

- ♦ Whenever possible, meet the student on the first day that they report to work or have someone designated to do so.
- ♦ Introduce the Co-op to fellow workers.
- ♦ Plan well-defined work assignments before the student's arrival.
- ♦ Assign projects of increasing responsibility and challenge.
- ♦ Vary the assigned tasks to expand learning opportunities.
- ♦ Set time schedules for follow-up and task completion.
- ♦ Provide an alternate resource person for the student to consult in case you are not available and brief this person on his or her role as an alternate source of guidance.
- ♦ Encourage the student to ask questions and develop an on-going communication system.
- ♦ Expect the Co-op to be a productive and contributing member of the group.
- ♦ Discuss career and academic goals.
- ♦ Discuss opportunities in the next tour(s) (consider experience in other sections or branches, if appropriate).
- ♦ Encourage participation in Center/Directorate/Division/Branch activities.
- ♦ Assist the student in adapting to the work-world environment by explaining routines, organizational structure, responsibilities, and expectations.
- ♦ Provide printed information or websites about your area whenever possible (e.g., acronyms, organizational chart, information resources, timekeeping, and security procedures).
- ♦ Familiarize the student with the telephone system and other electronic resources.
- ♦ Provide feedback to student through performance plans and appraisals.

PROCESSES

The majority of the questions supervisors raise regarding the Cooperative Education Program involve the processes necessary to obtain a Co-op student. Other typical questions are about the forms necessary when a Co-op goes on leave without pay, returns to duty, or converts to a full-time position. While efforts are made to keep each process as simple as possible, these processes are not always typical of those performed for full-time employees and are, therefore, done infrequently by you or your administrative assistant. For this reason, each procedure is outlined.

How to Hire a Co-op

Requesting a
Co-op Student

The first step in hiring a Co-op student is to contact your Directorate office to let them know of your desire. Each Directorate has a Workforce Plan which can help in determining if additional personnel can be hired.

Most students support Programmatic Programs and Projects and should charge to the timecard number of the project they are supporting. The Center budgets for and pays for about 30 Student Program FTE's out of Institutional Mission Support, Center G&A. Each Directorate that budgets these 30 FTEs should know who they are and their approved budget levels. These FTE's encompass all student programs (Co-op, Stay-in-School, COE, etc.). After receiving Directorate approval to hire a Co-op, a package may be submitted to the Student Programs Coordinator with the following information:

♦ The section/branch where a Co-op placement is requested.
♦ The supervisor's name.
♦ The major requested (e.g., computer science).
♦ Any additional information useful in the screening of candidates (e.g., skills or competencies, preferred graduation date, etc.).

When requesting a Co-op, you should have the FTE to hire the student as a full-time employee upon graduation and successful completion of the Co-op Program. Most students graduate 2 years after beginning the program. A preferred graduation date may also be stated in your request. Co-ops are typically hired in January, May, and September. Keep in mind that upon completion of their undergraduate degree, students have the option to convert to the Graduate Co-op Program, thus delaying their conversion to full-time employment.

Recruiting	Once you have received the authority to hire a Co-op, they can be recruited in a number of ways: ♦ The Student Programs Coordinator receives resumes directly from interested students throughout the year. ♦ Co-op resumes are collected at on-campus recruitment trips. ♦ The Student Programs Coordinator works with Co-op Offices at over 35 colleges and universities. These schools solicit applications from qualified students and forwards them to the Student Programs Coordinator. ♦ Supervisors use their collaborative contacts at schools and universities to identify Co-op eligibles. (The supervisor needs to confirm that the student meets the Co-op eligibility requirements.) ♦ Supervisors identify eligible Co-ops through GSFC Summer Intern Programs. (The supervisor needs to confirm that the student meets the Co-op eligibility requirements.) Once the resumes are collected and screened for qualified applicants by the Student Programs Coordinator, they are scanned and inputted into the on-line OHCM Recruiting Tracking Application. Hiring managers may access this system to peruse qualified Co-op applicants by degree, school, graduation date, etc. Please contact the Student Programs Coordinator for a username and password to this system.
Qualification Requirements	♦ Completed at least 30 semester hours (undergraduate). ♦ Student enrolled at an accredited university. ♦ Enrolled in the school's cooperative education program. ♦ US Citizenship. ♦ Good scholastic standing (overall GPA 2.9 or above).
Finding the Match	Once you have received a resume that meets your requirements, contact the student directly for a phone interview or an on-site interview, if the student is local. Contact should be made quickly since most students apply to many Co-op employers. Once you have decided to hire the student, you should initiate a hiring process immediately (see Bringing Co-ops On Board on the next page).

Bringing Co-ops On Board

Hiring Process

To initiate the appointment of a student to the Co-op Program, simply initiate a FPPS (Federal Personnel/Payroll System—a web-enabled way to initiate Requests for Personnel Actions) action, complete a TDP (Testing Designated Position Review) and a NASA Form 1722 (Position Designation Record) and route it through your division, to the Directorate office, and then to the Student Programs Coordinator in Code 112. A copy of the student's resume (and transcript if available) should accompany the package. It is not usually necessary to attach a Position Description (PD) as the Student Programs Office typically has one on file for most undergraduate Co-op positions.

Once the approved Co-op package reaches Code 112, the student will be contacted to validate program qualifications. When this information is verified, an offer will be made. The student will respond verbally or in writing, and you will be promptly notified of the student's acceptance and Entrance On Duty date or their declination.

Position Description

The Student Programs Office will provide a Position Description for the student unless you are otherwise notified. Typically, undergraduate PD's are already on file. Those positions for the Graduate Co-op Program may need to be written by the supervisor with assistance from the servicing Human Capital Expert.

Organizational/ Mail Code

For personnel management purposes, Co-ops are officially assigned to the hiring office.

Appointment Grade

Grade*	Level of Education	# of Credit Hours Completed
GS-4	Sophomore	30
GS-5	Junior	60
GS-6	Senior	90
GS-7	Master Program or College Graduate	120
GS-9	• Doctorate Program or • Completion of 1 Year of Masters Level Study (at least 18 credits) **and** 1 year (2,087 hours) work experience at the GS-7 level	
GS-11	• Doctorate Program (Research) or • Completion of 1 year Doctorate Level Study or • Completion of 1 Year of Masters Level Study (at least 18 credits) **and** 1 year (2,087 hours) work experience at the GS-9 level	
GS-12	• Doctorate Program (Research) or • Completion of 1 year Doctorate Level Study **and** 1 year (2,087 hours) work experience at the GS-11 level	

*Specific salary amounts can be found by accessing the OPM's Salary Table website at www.opm.gov
**Only applicable when target position is a research position

Ceiling Points (FTE)	A Co-op assigned to your organization does not count toward your organization's allotted Full-Time Equivalent (FTE), however, they do count against your organization's Other Than Full-Time Permanent (OTFTP) count. After graduation and upon conversion to full-time employees, they are counted toward your organization's FTE ceiling like any other employee in your organization. If the Co-op is converted to a term position, they are still counted toward the OTFTP number. Note: Keep in mind that upon completion of their undergraduate degree, students have the option to convert to the Graduate Co-op Program. If they choose this route, they stay in the OTFTP count.
Benefits	Co-ops, as paid Federal employees, are entitled to all the benefits of Federal employment (e.g., annual, holiday, and sick leave, health and life insurance, retirement, and TSP).
Worksite	Before your Co-op reports for duty, the following preparations should be made: ♦ A desk, computer, e-mail account, and telephone should be ready for the Co-op's use the first day on duty. ♦ Once the Co-op reports to you after employee orientation, someone should introduce the Co-op to his/her fellow employees and inform the Co-op where the Credit Union and cafeteria are. ♦ A mentor should be assigned to the Co-op and meet with the Co-op within the first week of the Co-op's duty.
Travel	All monies for Co-op travel are furnished by your organization. Follow travel procedures as you normally would for any employee. Students are not eligible to receive travel money for their first trip to Goddard or their last trip back to school before graduation. (Travel and relocation expenses are paid for those students who convert to full-time positions.) Students are eligible for all intervening travel to Goddard and return travel to school, if they are not local. Co-op students who fly back to school should be provided an airline ticket and should be reimbursed for transportation to and from the airport and for any excess baggage. Co-op students traveling by personal automobile may be reimbursed transportation (mileage and tolls) and per diem on lodging cost plus meals not to exceed the total stated limits on their travel orders if those orders reflect that it is advantageous to the government for the CO-OP to drive his-her automobile. Students must travel at least 300 miles a day to be eligible for per diem. Receipts are required for tolls, lodging and meals. Gasoline is reimbursed as part of the mileage rate.
First Day at Work	The morning of the Co-op's first day is spent in an orientation process conducted by the Office of Human Capital Management. The Co-op should be expected to

arrive at your office by noon. If you are not available at this time, please designate someone to meet the student or inform the Student Programs Coordinator in advance where to send the student following orientation.

Note: If the supervisor determines that the Co-op student is NOT a proper match AFTER they have hired the student, please contact the Student Programs Coordinator immediately to arrange for a possible reassignment or termination from the program.

Working

Job Order
Number

For payroll tracking purposes, those Co-ops in Directorates that provide Institution Mission Support will charge their time to a special Student Programs charge number. Those Co-ops working on specific projects will use the same number used by the rest of the people working in your organization or on a project.

Performance
Plan and
Appraisal

In accordance with NASA's Employee Performance System, Center managers must provide a performance plan and appraisal for every Co-op, following Goddard's process to prepare at the beginning of the tour, review at the mid-term, and finalize at the end of the tour. Any questions regarding the performance appraisal process for Co-ops should be directed to the Student Programs Coordinator.

Overtime Hours

Co-ops are eligible to work overtime if requested to do so. Authorize payment or compensatory time as you would for any other employee. Pay and overtime guidelines should be discussed with your Co-op prior to overtime work being done.

Promotions

A Co-op's increase in GS grade is based upon satisfactory performance and the student's class standing at their school, sophomore, junior, senior, etc. Time-in-grade does not apply for these positions. The qualifications for promotions for scientific, engineering and professional administrative student trainee positions are the same as the appointment grade qualifications on page 7 of this document.

Student Trainees will be eligible for promotion upon reaching each level of education. Applying this standard should enable NASA to offer more competitive wages for students during their work periods.

An e-mail from the Student Programs Coordinator will be sent to supervisors to inform them of promotion eligibility. The decision to promote is yours and should be based upon the student's performance during the work tour combined with academic progression. The promotion FPPS action must be initiated by your office.

Back to School

Leave Without Pay (LWOP)

When Co-ops return to school at the completion of each work tour, they are placed in a Leave Without Pay (LWOP) status. Co-op students will receive an official LWOP package prior to leaving. You must notify the Co-op student's timekeeper of their departure date.

The LWOP form will indicate the student's last day on duty, provide a forwarding address, and may request that annual leave be taken following the student's last day. The student may use any or all of the annual leave that has been accrued during the tour. Any annual leave taken should be recorded on the Co-op's timecard as usual. The first day of LWOP will begin when annual leave is over. Most students do not elect to use their annual leave at this time since they do not lose it by going on LWOP. Your office is responsible for initiating an LWOP FPPS action upon notification from the Co-op of their intended departure date.

Co-ops going on LWOP may elect to keep their Health Benefits coverage during their LWOP status. The form to do so is in their LWOP package.

Only LWOP taken in excess of 30 consecutive days needs a FPPS action to accompany it. LWOP less than 30 consecutive days may be approved by the supervisor via the WebTads timecard system.

Supervisor's Evaluation

The NASA Employee Performance System form must be completed and should be discussed with the student on a regular basis. If the student is going on LWOP, the form should be discussed prior to the last day of the work tour, with a copy send to the Student Programs Office, Code 112. An unsatisfactory performance rating is a basis for termination.

You may also receive an additional Evaluation form from the Co-ops University. Please fill this out immediately and return it to the Co-op's school.

Tuition Assistance

The tuition assistance package will contain a GSFC 17-117 form "Request, Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training". A student must receive a "Meets or Exceeds" or better performance evaluation to be eligible for tuition assistance. Although this assistance is Center funded, the package should be routed from you through your division for appropriate signatures on the Training Request before reaching the Training Office. The maximum allowable amount of Tuition Assistance is $2,500/semester or $1,675/quarter not to exceed $10,000 while in the Co-op Program. (If a Co-op converts to a Graduate Co-op status, a new $10,000 cap is instilled.) Books and activity fees are not paid for under Tuition Assistance. The Co-op can obtain all of the required Tuition Assistance forms and detailed directions on completing the forms from the Student Programs Coordinator. Co-op students are aware of all of the tuition

assistance procedures via the Co-op Handbook and the Student Programs Coordinator.

Return to Duty	You will receive notification of your Co-op's Return to Duty (RTD) date approximately 1 month in advance from your Co-op student. Your office is responsible for initiating a RTD FPPS action. The student will first stop by the Student Programs Office prior to reporting directly to the work site. The student will briefly visit Security during the first day as part of the check-in process.
Terminations	A Co-op may also be terminated for any of the following reasons:

♦ Change in academic major, which will not qualify for the position.
♦ Expulsion or withdrawal from school.
♦ Failure to maintain academic standards (overall GPA 2.9 and above).
♦ Lack of available work, manpower, or budget reasons to retain the Co-op in the job
♦ Unacceptable performance or conduct
♦ Unsatisfactory work performance

Performance evaluations are critical, especially during a Co-op's first tour of duty. Supervisors need to identify any performance or conduct issues and try to resolve them early. Unsatisfactory work performance should be handled through the Student Programs Coordinator and the Human Capital Expert that supports your area to ensure that the appropriate Employee Relations steps are followed. The first steps will be to clearly document the problem and counsel the student. If the problems are not resolved and the student receives an unsatisfactory evaluation, the student may be terminated.

Graduation

Conversion to Full-Time Employment

Each year the Center makes every effort to offer full-time employment to all Co-ops who have graduated and meet the qualification requirements for non-competitive conversion into the permanent work force. The Student Programs Coordinator works closely with each student to ensure that all requirements are met by this time. The following are requirements for a Co-op to be converted:

♦ Completion of degree with an overall GPA of 2.9 or above.
♦ A minimum of 640 Co-op duty work hours.
♦ Acceptable work performance.

You must initiate a FPPS action to begin the conversion process. This should be done after the Co-op finishes the final tour of duty and returns to school to complete requirements for a degree. A PD and Sensitivity Level Designation (SLD-drug testing information for Security) form should accompany the FPPS action. When this reaches Code 113, a verbal and/or an offer letter for full-time employment will be sent to the student. You will be informed of an acceptance or declination as soon as the student responds. You will also be notified of the student's return date upon acceptance. Often, your own follow-up with the Co-op helps reassure them of your interest in their career at Goddard.

Conversion to Graduate Co-op Program

Once a student completes their undergraduate degree, they have the option to convert to the Graduate Co-op Program. They can receive 4 more semesters of tuition assistance once converted. If the student converts, you will not need an FTE for them until they complete their graduate program. You will need to initiate a FPPS action to convert a Co-op from an undergraduate Co-op status to a Graduate Co-op status.

GSFC's Graduate Co-op Program begins at the GS-7 level and can go as high as the GS-12 level.