

COOPERATIVE (Co-op) EDUCATIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM AT THE JOHN C. STENNIS SPACE CENTER

There are two Governmentwide student educational employment programs, Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). The main difference between the two programs is SCEP may lead to permanent NASA employment whereas STEP is solely a temporary employment program.

A. SCEP

Cooperative education prepares students for their careers by providing them with work experiences in areas related to their field of study. Your experience supplements classroom instruction and clarifies preconceptions about college degrees and career choices. While the majority of our positions are for undergraduates majoring in engineering, SSC does hire a limited number of business, computer science, and physical/natural science students. SSC will offer graduate co-op positions only to students majoring in the physical/natural sciences.

Benefits to the student include the following:

- Enhanced academic knowledge
- Paid work experience
- Application of classroom theory in a practical work environment
- Opportunity for full-time employment
- Contribute to the U.S. space program

Benefits to Stennis Space Center:

- Opportunity to develop and train future employees

Requirements

- Attends an accredited college or university on at least a part-time basis.
- Enrolled in a college or university's Cooperative Education Program; student must have at least 2 years of academic studies remaining before graduation.
- Recommended for assignment by school's co-op office.
- Completion of one full year of academic study is required.
- 2.5 or better grade point average on a 4.0 scale; maintain a 2.5 average to remain in the program.
- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Level of Education equivalent to Sophomore standing.
- The last work period must be within 18 months of graduation.

Type of Appointment

Co-op students are given appointments in the Excepted service. These appointments allow for noncompetitive conversion to full-time employment, within 120 days after graduation.

Qualifications for Initial Appointment

Scientific & Engineering and Professional Administrative Student Trainee Positions

Grade	Level of Education
GS-4	College Sophomore
GS-5	College Junior
GS-6	College Senior
GS-7	Masters Program or College Graduate
GS-9	Doctorate Program or Completion of 1 Year of Masters Level Study
GS-11	Doctorate Program (Research) or Completion of 1 year of Doctorate Level Study

Screening Period

The first work period is a screening period during which students' strengths and weaknesses are observed and assessed. Students will be assigned mentors who will advise them on appropriate work habits and work with them to improve the areas where they are less proficient. Marginal performance will be a basis for termination during any work period, however, every reasonable effort will be made to assist students overcome obstacles preventing successful performance.

Promotion Requirements

Student Trainees will be eligible for promotion upon reaching each Level of Education.

Within-Grade Increases

Within-grade increases are incremental (step) increases within the same pay grade and are based primarily on satisfactory performance while in a pay status. Co-op grade levels always begin with the first step of the respective grade and there is a minimum waiting period of 52 weeks between steps. An accumulation of 52 calendar weeks (including up to 80 hours of leave without pay) fulfills the time requirement for a within-grade (step) increase.

Reassignments

Generally, a single assignment to one organization has been found to be more beneficial and practical than several assignments between primary organizations. Movement within the organization is highly desirable. Reassignments to other organizations will be considered if (1) the student changes to another academic major, (2) performance and work progress indicate that a student is not making satisfactory adjustment to the present assignment but has demonstrated potential deserving of other consideration, or (3) the student has achieved advanced academic specialization within his own major field of study that is not related to the work being done in his present position. In all instances where reassignment is considered, both the gaining and losing organizations must agree with the proposed move.

Academic Schedule Conflicts

Academic scheduling problems in the junior and senior years sometime make it necessary for co-ops to spend two successive periods at school. Resolution of scheduling conflicts will require coordination between the school and SSC. In all cases, changes to student work rotation cycles must be communicated in writing to the SSC Co-op Coordinator.

Performance Evaluation and Performance Appraisal Plan

The first work period is a trial period. At the completion of this work period, a determination will be made whether a co-op should be retained in the program. Supervisors will discuss performance and Individual Development Plan (IDP) objectives with students at the beginning of each work period. At the end of each work period, performance progress and/or career development objectives will be reviewed for continued service and applicability. Both supervisor and co-op signatures are needed on the evaluation form. A copy of the performance evaluation form will be sent to the College Co-op Coordinator and the original will be retained in the co-op's personnel folder. An unsatisfactory performance report is reason for termination.

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

The IDP is a career developmental tool to help employees identify training and developmental needs in relation to their current and future responsibilities as well as to document activities they plan to accomplish during a designated time frame. IDP review is required at the beginning of each new work period. Updates are done as needed.

Employee Benefits and Services

Insurance Programs

There are a number of health and life insurance programs available to Government employees. Co-ops may participate in these programs if they choose.

Health Insurance

Federal Employees Health Benefits Program offers a wide range of insurance plans from which to choose. Co-ops may elect any plan under this program for which they are eligible within 31 days from appointment. The co-op and the Government, as employer, share the cost of health benefits. The co-op's share of the cost will be made through payroll deductions. Health insurance coverage will continue during nonpay status; however, co-ops must pay their share of the cost by making payments either while they are on leave without pay or when they return for another work tour. If co-ops elect not to enroll or cancel their health benefits, they may have to wait for an "open season" to enroll or reacquire health benefits. Co-ops wishing to cancel health insurance coverage while in a nonpay status should contact the SSC Co-op Coordinator and request a Standard Form 2809, then complete and return the form as soon as possible.

Life Insurance

Co-ops are automatically covered under the Federal Employee's Group Life Insurance Program (FEGLI) upon appointment and may elect optional additional coverage with 31 days from appointment. Co-ops who do not wish to participate may waive coverage at any time; however, payroll deductions will continue until Standard Form 2817 has been submitted waiving the

coverage. If co-ops waive the life insurance coverage, they will have to wait 1 year from the effective date of the waiver and undergo a physical exam (either at their own expense or through the SSC Clinic) before acquiring coverage. The co-op and the Government as employer share the cost of the basic insurance. The entire cost of the optional insurance must be paid by the co-op, since the Government does not contribute toward the cost of the optional insurance. The co-op's share of the cost will be made through payroll deductions. Co-ops remain covered under FEGLI without cost while in a nonpay status for up to 12 months; after 12 months, the insurance is canceled. If coverage is lost due to expiration of 12 months in a nonpay status, coverage will be restored upon a co-op's return to work.

Also, co-ops may elect to participate in the NASA Employees Benefit Association (NEBA) Group Life Insurance Plan. The amount of life insurance available is based on annual earnings. The cost of the premiums is based on age and amount of insurance. Premiums may be paid through payroll deductions while in a work status, but must be paid quarterly while on leave without pay. Payment notices are mailed to home addresses. Insurance coverage will continue while the co-op is in a nonpay status for up to 12 months, as long as the quarterly payments are made.

Leave Practices

Annual Leave

Co-ops earn annual leave while in a pay status according to their creditable service. Employees with less than 3 years of Federal service can earn up to 4 hours of annual leave each pay period. Employees with 3-15 years of Federal service can earn up to 6 hours of annual leave each pay period. Annual leave may be used for vacations and personal or emergency purposes. Co-ops must notify their supervisors and get approval before annual leave can be taken. If a co-op transfers to or from SSC and another NASA Center or Federal agency, all earned annual leave will be transferred. Co-ops separating from SSC are entitled to a lump-sum payment for any unused annual leave.

Sick Leave

Co-ops can earn up to 4 hours of sick leave each pay period that may be used to cover absences caused by sickness or by need for medical, optical, or dental appointments, for either the student or immediate family members, during duty hours. There is no maximum accrual of sick leave. If incapacitated for duty due to illness, co-ops are expected to call their supervisors in the morning, usually by 8:30 a.m., on the first day of the absence. Sick leave is charged in one-half hour increments. If a co-op transfers to another NASA Center or Federal agency, all earned sick leave will be transferred. Upon separation from SSC, co-ops are not entitled to any payment for unused sick leave.

Leave Without Pay (LWOP)

LWOP is a phase that describes the employment status of co-ops when they are in the academic phase of their program. Students are placed in a nonpay status the day after their last work day and are carried in this status until the day they return to duty for another work period or until the first day of duty following conversion to a full-time position, as appropriate. Benefits are continued during this phase as explained in previous sections. Normally, students will not be

carried in a LWOP status in excess of 12 months after their last work period. Students are given up to 6 months of LWOP each year before it changes their service computation date.

Military Leave

Co-op students, who are members of reserve components, are eligible to accrue up to 15 days military leave each fiscal year with pay. Co-ops must be in a pay status to be eligible for military leave.

Retirement Program

Co-ops are covered under both the Federal Employees' Retirement System and Social Security beginning at the time of appointment. Salary deductions are automatic. These funds are held in trust by the U.S. Treasury for paying annuity, refunds, and death benefits to persons entitled to them. Brochures describing the programs are provided at time of appointment.

What are my Responsibilities as a Co-op?

Work Performance

Co-op students are usually assigned to work with an individual and it is to this person that the co-op should look for normal day-to-day direction, supervision, and guidance. Co-ops are expected to demonstrate initiative in performing assigned duties. Duties may range from those requiring minimal skills/knowledge to those that may be exceptionally difficult and challenging, depending upon the organizational requirements and the individual's readiness to accept responsibility for the assignment. The employee's ability and readiness to accept constructive criticism is an important trait as it provides for additional learning possibilities. The co-op's appearance is an outward manifestation of their professionalism and particularly with those with whom they work, an essential consideration in gaining acceptability within the organization.

Work Reports

Co-ops are responsible for preparing a written report at the end of each work period. The report should include a concise, but comprehensive, description of work assignments, completed or in progress, during the period. Other comments relative to the appropriateness of work assignments should be included. If the cooperative institution has a prescribed format for a work report, a copy of that report is acceptable in meeting this requirement.

Return to Duty

Co-ops are expected to provide to the SSC Coordinator, in writing and at least 1 month in advance, their expected return to duty (RTD) date. In the same communication, co-ops are expected to provide the total number of academic hours accumulated, and projected for completion by the end of the term, which are creditable towards the degree being pursued. The institutional co-op office should verify the number of hours. Promotions are based upon students reaching each Level of Education (i.e., sophomore, junior, senior). Therefore, it is essential that this information be both timely and correct. Students will be required to provide SSC with a transcript or grade report on the morning of the RTD date or have arrangements for such a document to be sent to SSC. A delay in the processing of any action can be expected if the information is not provided with sufficient lead-time.

Returning to School

Specific dates for returning to school can usually be projected. Where return-to-school dates are not established by the institution, students are expected to establish dates in conjunction with their supervisor. Co-ops will be asked to advise the SSC Coordinator of these dates. The Office of Human Resources uses this information to place students in a leave without pay status during the academic period. Co-ops will also be asked to indicate their estimated RTD dates and to specify whether they want to retain or be paid for any annual leave accrued. Arrangements for payment must be made before the last day of duty in the work period.

Responsiveness

Prompt responses are expected to requests for reports and information regarding dates for returning to duty and returning to school. Timely visits to and communication with the co-op office (at the school and the Center) regarding program status and anticipated changes are equally important.

Resignations and Separations

Co-ops may voluntarily withdraw/resign from the program at any time. Co-ops who decide to resign while at the worksite should notify their supervisor, their school coordinator, and SSC's Coordinator. The SSC Coordinator will give specific instructions on procedures to follow. If the decision to resign is made while at school, the student should contact the school's coordinator who should contact the SSC Coordinator.

Separation from the program is required under any one of the following circumstances.

- Failure of the student to maintain acceptable academic standing.
- Failure of the student to maintain at least part-time student status while in an academic period.
- Failure of the student to register for co-op credit with the Co-op Office at the school prior to returning for the next scheduled work phase.
- Failure of the student to return to duty from school (abandonment of position).
- Failure of the student to maintain a satisfactory level of work performance.
- Student's change to an academic field unrelated to SSC staffing needs.

It is usually to the co-op's advantage to resign rather than have the school or SSC initiate separation action.

On completion of the program, co-ops that remain with SSC and those who accept employment with other NASA Centers will be converted to full-time employment and transferred/reassigned, if appropriate. Co-ops not offered a conversion appointment should forward a letter of resignation to the SSC Coordinator.

Conversion to Career-Conditional Appointment

Student Trainees may be converted noncompetitively to the competitive service in accordance with the provisions of 5 CFR 213.3202(b). They must meet the requirements of the qualification standard to which converted. and receive a satisfactory performance appraisal and be recommended for conversion by their supervisor. Offers are contingent upon availability of staffing billets, dollars, and administrative conditions. Conversions must occur during the 120 days following graduation.

Aerospace Technology (AST) Position Titles

Upon graduation and subsequent full-time employment, position titles change from "student trainee" to a professional position title. Titles of engineering and science co-op graduates will change to Aerospace Technologist (AST). The term AST is unique to NASA engineers in that it represents positions that are interdisciplinary in nature and brings into play combinations and extensions of academic disciplines that require an understanding of problems peculiar to NASA's mission. Typical examples of AST titles are Data Systems, Flight Systems Test, Experimental Facilities Development, Measurement and Instrumentation Systems, and Propulsion Systems. Examples of administrative position titles are Contract Price Analyst, Contract Price Specialist, Public Affairs Specialist, Budget Analyst, or Systems Accountant.

Accelerated Training Program (ATP)

The ATP is an intensive 6-month training for science and engineering majors who convert to full-time employment. Through participation in this program, individuals who successfully complete the requirements are promoted to the next grade level (GS-7 to GS-9 or GS-9 to GS-11) in 6 months instead of 1 year as normally required by law.

B. STEP

A program designed to integrate the students' educational studies with a wide range of clerical, administrative, professional, and technical experiences that support the Agency. NASA offers bright and highly motivated students an opportunity to work in a research environment with the nations top scientists and engineers in some of the most advanced facilities in the world.

Advantages

There are many positive advantages to participate in NASA's STEP program. In addition to earning while learning, you will get:

- The chance to apply your talents and skills to on-the job challenges;
- Exposure to the unique work performed at NASA Centers;
- An opportunity to explore career options before choosing a career; and
- Work experience that enhances your degree after graduation.

Eligibility Requirements

You are eligible for STEP if you are:

- A U.S. citizen or permanent resident;
- Pursing Vocational/Technical certificate; or a college degree;
- Taking a halftime academic course load;

- Maintaining good academic standing in school; and
- Willing to work full-time or part-time schedule at anytime during the school year.

Qualifications for Initial Appointment

Clerical and Technician Student Trainee Positions

Grade	Level of Education
GS-1	High School Student
GS-2	High School Graduate/Equiv.
GS-3	Complete 1 year of study post High School
GS-4	Complete 2 years of study post High School

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