

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
STUDENT EDUCATIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM
GUIDELINES FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

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STUDENT EDUCATIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM GUIDELINES FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

I. INTRODUCTION

These guidelines summarize the requirements for recruitment, selection, development and placement of SCEP and STEP students. Managers and supervisors should consult with the office responsible for the SCEP and STEP within their particular Region (either the Division of Human Resources or the Division of Diversity and Civil Rights) for additional information. The regulations for the Student Educational Employment Programs and the Service's Student Educational Employment Program policy provide additional guidance and information (see *EXHIBIT A and B* respectively).

A. Overview of the Student Educational Employment Program

The Student Educational Employment Program (SEEP) is comprised of two components: the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) and the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP). The SEEP program benefits both the Service and students. The Service can discover first-hand the abilities of a potential employee and students gain exposure to public service while enhancing their educational goals.

The Student Temporary Employment Program provides flexible temporary employment that enables students to earn a salary while continuing their studies. STEP students are appointed to positions not-to-exceed 1 year and such appointments may be extended in 1-year increments. The nature of the duties may be un-related to the student's academic and career goals and students are not eligible for non-competitive conversion to the competitive service. However, STEP students may later convert to the SCEP if they are working in a position related to their academic and career goals. STEP work experience may be creditable toward SCEP work experience requirements. The Service may recruit STEP students in professional, administrative, technical, clerical, and trades/labor positions.

The Student Career Experience Program facilitates the recruitment of high quality employees into Federal service; supports equal employment opportunity objectives; provides exposure to public service; and promotes education. The SCEP provides periods of study-related, paid employment for students pursuing high school, vocational or technical certificates, associate, baccalaureate, graduate, or professional degrees in accredited educational institutions. Managers and supervisors may use this program to bring undergraduate, as well as graduate or postgraduate level students into the workforce and at the same time have the opportunity to evaluate their performance in real work situations. The SCEP must provide experience directly related to the student's educational program and career goals.

This program allows students to be non-competitively converted from the excepted service into the competitive service, within certain time limitations, after satisfactory completion of educational and work requirements. The Service's expectation is that the office that initially hires the student be responsible for identifying the position to which the student is to be converted. The Service may recruit SCEP students in professional, administrative, technical, clerical, and trades/labor positions. The Service's primary focus for this program is on mission-related positions (e.g., General Biology, Fish and Wildlife Administration, Fish Biology, Refuge Management and Wildlife Biology).

B. Program Objectives

For the Service:

STEP and SCEP

- Provide an effective recruiting source for meeting long-term staffing goals.
- Support equal employment opportunity and affirmative employment efforts; selections are made in compliance with EEO principles.

SCEP

- Permit placement into career jobs based on proven performance.
- Bring new educational methods and concepts into the workforce.
- Support and enhances partnerships between the Service and Institutions of Higher Education.

For the Students:

STEP and SCEP

- Assist in meeting financial obligations by earning while learning.
- Provide work experience and the opportunity to shape careers.
- Provide opportunities to work with the latest technologies and on current issues.
- Provide the opportunity to apply classroom theory to “real world” work experience

For Educational Institutions:

SCEP

- Provide well-rounded education and curricula enrichment.
- Increase student enrollment and encourage retention.
- Expand teaching resources and faculty knowledge of workforce needs.
- Assist in placement service activities.

C. Responsibilities

Regional Directors and Assistant Directors:

- Plan, coordinate, implement and monitor the Student Educational Employment Program activities.
- Noncompetitively convert all SCEP students who successfully complete the program to career or career-conditional within the competitive service.
- Designate the Regional Programmatic Coordinator of the SCEP and STEP Programs.

Assistant Regional Director – Budget and Administration and the Regional and Washington Office Division of Human Resources and Diversity and Civil Rights Branch:

- Provide Regional/Washington Office program policy guidance and direction.
- Designate the Service-wide and the Washington Office Regional Programmatic Coordinators of the SCEP and STEP Programs.
- Coordinate the SEEP with supervisors, managers and/or Regional/Programmatic SCEP and STEP.
- Coordinate the recruitment, selection, placement and conversion of students.
- Establish SCEP working agreements with colleges/universities as necessary.
- Serve as a contact for supervisors, students and their respective schools.
- Report on program accomplishments.
- Develop literature, handouts and marketing materials, which are provided to students, schools and supervisors.

Divisions of Human Resources:

- Process all personnel actions relevant to students.
- Advise supervisors and students on personnel-related matters.
- Provide advice and counsel to supervisors, managers, students and educational institutions on performance or conduct related issues or other personnel-related concerns as necessary.
- Perform qualification determinations on students for the purposes of appointment, promotion and non-competitive conversion.

Divisions of Human Resources and Chiefs Divisions of Civil Rights:

- Carry out the policies and procedures of the program in accordance with agency directives and regulatory guidance.

SEEP Programmatic Coordinators are optional. Regions or Washington Office can elect to designate one or more Programmatic Coordinators (Refuges, Fisheries, Ecological Services, etc.) to be responsible for the duties listed below. (If this option is not utilized, the duties described fall to the SCEP and STEP Coordinators housed in either the Division of Diversity and Civil Rights or the Division of Human Resources):

- Serve as the SEEP contact for supervisors, students and their respective schools in their respective program areas.
- Coordinate the placement of students for work experiences and if the Region elects, conversion to a career or career-conditional appointment.
- Maintain contact with supervisors to monitor student progress to ensure students are meeting all the requirements of the program and to ensure that paperwork is completed in a timely manner (i.e., various progress reports and performance evaluations for both the Service and the educational institution, personnel actions such as promotions, within-grade increases, actions placing students in leave without pay status, or actions returning students to duty status).
- Serve as counselor for students and coordinates annual training for mentors.
- Along with other designated individuals or entities, serve as student recruiters for their program areas and for the Region. As necessary, coordinate recruitment activities with other SEEP Programmatic Coordinators and the Division of Human Resources to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Review students' grades and course work for adequacy prior to each period of study and ensure grades are submitted to appropriate parties after each period of study.
- Report to appropriate entities on a monthly basis regarding SEEP recruitment activities as well as students progress.

Supervisors of SEEP Students:

SCEP and STEP

- Provide orientation for new students.
- Provide training and development during work periods for all students.
- Assign mentors and develop Individual Development Plans for the SCEP students.
- Monitor students' performance and conduct and assess the students' suitability for continuation in the program and for conversion from STEP to SCEP or from SCEP to

Federal employment.

- Identify target positions for students' conversion.
- Notify the servicing human resources office of changes in the students' employment status.
- Obtaining copies of student transcripts to verify that the students continue to meet the eligibility criteria at the end of each quarter/semester and ensure the SCEPs meet educational goals and that work experiences are related to the students' major field of study.

SCEP

- Complete all appropriate documents such as job descriptions, individual development plans and performance evaluations in a timely manner and provide copies to the appropriate Assistant Regional Director, the Regional Director, the SCEP/STEP Coordinator and/or SEEP Programmatic Coordinator (if applicable) and to the Division of Human Resources.
- Keep the Division of Human Resources and the SCEP/STEP Managers or SEEP Programmatic Coordinator informed of changes such as return to duty dates, return to school dates, and anticipated and actual graduation dates, etc.

Students:

STEP Students

- Maintain student status at an accredited educational institution.
- Keep supervisor, STEP Coordinator and/or SEEP Programmatic Coordinator, informed of student standing.
- Demonstrate exemplary conduct and satisfactory work performance during their related experience.

SCEP Students

- Maintain good academic standing at an accredited educational institution and maintain the GPA requirements of the school.
- Keep supervisor, SCEP Managers and/or SEEP Programmatic Coordinator and college/university Cooperative Education or Internship Coordinator informed of progress in school including anticipated graduation date.
- Provide grade reports to SCEP Managers or SEEP Programmatic Coordinator.
- Demonstrate exemplary conduct and satisfactory work performance during their

required 640 hours of work-related experience.

II. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS

A. Developing a Recruitment Strategy

An effective recruitment process requires diligent coordination from start to finish. Recruitment should be a coordinated and shared effort among Diversity and Civil Rights (DCR) and Human Resources (HR) Offices, managers and supervisors, project leaders and SEEP coordinators. The Regional DCR and HR offices have established strong partnerships with a significant number of colleges and universities, career counselors, academia, military transition centers, professional minority organizations, and other institutions serving persons with disabilities and women. Managers and supervisors are encouraged to contact SEEP coordinators early in the recruitment process to obtain information on recruitment resources and identifying applicants for Student Career Experience Program or Student Temporary Employment Program opportunities.

There are some important aspects of recruitment to keep in mind when conducting targeted recruitment for some occupations. Such considerations range from establishing contacts with sources that can assist managers and supervisors to identify targeted minorities, women and persons with disabilities, to modifying some of the recruitment techniques to achieve better results in reaching a diverse pool of applicants. It is highly recommended that managers and supervisors consult with their Office of Diversity and Civil Rights regarding targeted recruitment implementation plans. *EXHIBIT C* provides a list of schools with Fish and Wildlife Programs and *EXHIBIT D* a list of Cooperative Research Units.

B. Application Process

The first step for managers and supervisors when they have a vacancy or anticipate having one is to ensure they have an accurate and current position description. For the SCEP, managers should use position descriptions specifically geared to trainee positions. For the STEP, the manager may use the position description of the appropriate target position. Sample position descriptions are included in *EXHIBIT E*.

The second step is to prepare a job announcement. There is no Federal requirement for public notice for SEEP positions. However, Regions have the option of posting vacancies on the Office of Personnel Management's websites at www.usajobs.opm.gov, www.studentjobs.gov, or the Service's website. It is important to take into consideration how far we want to reach job seekers when deciding how to announce a position. The vacancy announcement should provide a realistic view of the job and an accurate representation of duties and qualifications to provide the applicant with a clear picture of the position. Vacancy announcements used in campus recruiting should describe the duties of the position in terms that are familiar to college students.

The SEEP coordinators are the primary point of contact for student applicants. Students can contact SEEP coordinators directly for information on student employment opportunities and application processing. Inquiries by telephone, mail, or electronic mail are acceptable ways for students or

schools to obtain information on student employment opportunities. A recommended approach is to share announcements using the Service's website and clearly describe the prescribed method for applying. Applicants must submit a resume or Optional Application for Federal Employment (OF-612) and attach any required documents (e.g., college transcripts, writing samples, etc.). **EXHIBIT F** provides a list of the information that must be included in the application or resume. **EXHIBIT G** provides a career interest worksheet for the students to complete. Vacancy announcements using the Conservation Applicant Referral and Evaluation System must describe how to submit any required documentation.

C. Selection Process

Like for any other job, students must meet qualification requirements of the position. The servicing Human Resources Office will screen applicants for eligibility and minimum qualification standards. The manager or supervisor may choose to interview applicants or may make a selection. An interview checklist may be used when conducting interviews. Refer to **EXHIBIT H** for useful tips and information on interviewing techniques and questions.

Once the managers and supervisors have selected the candidate they wish to hire, they must contact their servicing Human Resources Office to make a formal offer of employment. It is always a good idea to provide appropriate time for the candidate to consider the job offer. Managers, supervisors, or SEEP Coordinators will then initiate necessary personnel documents to effect the appointment. Their servicing Human Resources Office will send a formal notification to the student to confirm the appointment. Before hiring a SCEP student, a working agreement with the student's school must be in place prior to bringing a SCEP student on-board.

The final step in the process is to follow-up with selected students. Greeting newly recruited employees when they report to work and seeing that they are properly introduced to their new environment is a crucial element of the recruitment process. Managers and supervisors must inform newly hired employees where and when to report to work. Managers and supervisors should also provide students with an overall orientation to the Service and ensure SCEP students sign the working agreement immediately. An employment checklist for supervisors of SCEP students is available in **EXHIBIT I**.

D. Student Eligibility Requirements

1. Be a U.S. citizen;
2. Enrolled or accepted for enrollment as a degree-seeking student (diploma, certificate, etc.);
3. Be at least 16 years old.
4. Taking at least a half-time academic, vocational, or technical course load in an accredited high school, technical or vocational, 2-year or 4-year college or university, graduate or professional school. The definition of half-time is the definition provided by the school in which the student is enrolled; and
5. In good standing with the academic institution and maintain the grade point average requirements of the school.

III EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

A. Appointments

After being selected for the SCEP, a student is appointed in the excepted service under Schedule B, Section 213.3202(b), into a position that is related to the student's field of study. This appointment may enable the student to qualify without further competition for a term, career-conditional, or career appointment if he/she satisfactorily completes the program. The student, for the duration of their SCEP experience, encumbers at least a portion of a permanent, full-time equivalent (FTE) position slot, depending upon the amount of time the student spends in duty status in a given year. The duration of a SCEP appointment is from the initial date of entrance on duty to a date not to exceed 120 days after completion of academic course requirements conferring a diploma, certificate, or degree.

The STEP student is also appointed under the Schedule B, but the position does not need to be related to the student's field of study. STEP students are not eligible for non-competitive conversion to a career or career conditional appointment. The student, shares a portion of a permanent, full-time equivalent (FTE) position slot with other STEPs. The duration of a STEP varies. STEP students are appointed to a position not to exceed 1 year. Appointments under this authority may be extended in 1-year increments as long as the individual meets the definition of a student.

B. Working Agreements

Before employing a SCEP student, a working agreement with the student's educational institution must be developed that depicts working schedules, program criteria and requirements for noncompetitive conversion to the competitive service. A sample working agreement is included in **EXHIBIT J**. SEEP Programmatic Coordinators (if any) should contact their Regional SCEP Coordinator (located either in the Division of Human Resources or in the Division of Diversity and Civil Rights) to ensure that there is a working agreement in place prior to bringing a SCEP student on board. If there is no working agreement with the student's school, the SCEP Coordinator is

responsible for ensuring a working agreement is established with the student's school. A representative from the Region, the educational institution and the student must sign the working agreement. Regions may sign a single agreement with an educational institution that covers all students attending that educational institution. SCEP Coordinators should ensure that all interested parties have available to them a list of schools for which their Region has a SCEP working agreement in place.

A working agreement with the school is not required to employ STEP students.

C. Financial Assistance

Students in the SCEP and STEP are paid a salary while they are in duty status. Other legal and authorized forms of tuition observing the prohibitions in 5 U.S.C. 4107, SCEP students may be offered tuition assistance to pay all or part of training expenses for courses in a field of study directly related to the student's official duties.

D. Travel and Lodging Expenses

SCEP students are provided transportation between school and work once appointed. In addition, lodging expenses should be paid for the SCEP participants, as a necessary training expense. See **EXHIBIT K** for information on payment of lodging expenses.

STEP students are not entitled to payment of lodging expenses nor for tuition assistance payments.

E. Job Titles and Grade Levels

SCEP students appointed to positions subject to the General Schedule are classified as Student Trainees (99 series) for the appropriate occupational group. For example, a future biologist would be a Student Trainee (Biology), GS-499-4. Refer to **Exhibit E** for a sample SCEP position description. SCEP students whose positions are covered by the Federal Wage System are classified as Student Trainees, to the -01 series of the appropriate occupational group. For example, a future Maintenance Mechanic would be a Student Trainee (Maintenance Mechanic), WG -4701-4.

STEP students are classified to the series appropriate to the occupational title of the position for which they are hired. Grade level is to be set according to the criteria in the GS or WG classification standard. For example, a General Biologist, GS-401-5, a Maintenance Worker would be WG-4701-4.

A SCEP student may be appointed to any position that provides an opportunity for the student's growth and development toward the target position. The SCEP's required education must lead to a bachelor's degree with specialization in, or directly related to, the field in which the student trainees will receive training on the job. Student trainees qualify for grade levels as described in Personnel Bulletin No. 02-05, see **Exhibit O**.

Students appointed in wage-graded positions are placed as WG-2 or WG-3's depending on their level of training.

F. Compensation and Benefits

STEPS and SCEPs

Pay - Students are paid at the current rate authorized by the Classification Act and will receive any authorized payment for overtime. The rate of pay is based on the grade level of the appointment. When not in pay status, students are placed on leave without pay. Students are eligible for within-grade increases as long as they achieve critical results level on their performance plans.

Promotions - Students are eligible for promotion to higher-graded positions upon meeting the appropriate qualification standards and continued satisfactory performance.

Within Grade Increases – Students in the SCEP are eligible for within grade increases. STEP student eligibility for within grade increases depends on the pay system of the occupation. Wage Grade STEPs are eligible for within grade increases but STEPs in the General Schedule are not.

Awards - Students are eligible for awards under the Service's award and recognition program policy. Refer to 224 FW3-6 for additional information.

Leave - Students are eligible for annual and sick leave.

Holidays - Students are paid for legal holidays that fall within the period of work, provided they meet the requirements under appropriate regulations for receiving such pay.

Work Schedules – Students may work full-time (40 hours per week) during the summer months. During the academic year, schedules may vary depending on the student's academic schedule. However, students' work schedules should not interfere with their academic schedule.

STEPS

Health Insurance - STEP students who have been continuously employed for a year without a break in service exceeding 5 days may enroll in the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program, but they are responsible for paying both the employee and the government's share of the premium.

SCEPs

Leave - During work periods, students are entitled to earn sick leave at the rate of four hours per pay period and annual leave at the rate commensurate with their total federal service, including military service. They are entitled to use earned leave on the same basis and subject to the same rules and regulations as other federal employees.

Leave Without Pay – The student is carried on the Service's rolls for the full period of the SCEP appointment. When not in working status, the student will be on leave-without-pay.

Retirement - With no prior service or with less than 5 years of prior civilian service, SCEP students are generally covered under the Federal Employees Retirement System.

Life Insurance - Students are eligible for life insurance coverage as long as they are expected to be in the program for at least one year and are expected to be in a pay status for at least one third of the

total period of time from the date of their initial appointment to the date of the completion of the program.

Health Insurance - Students are eligible for health insurance coverage as long as they are expected to be in the program for at least one year and are expected to be in a pay status for at least one third of the total period of time from the date of their initial appointment to the date of the completion of the program. Students are responsible for paying the employee's share for their continuing enrollment during both pay and non-pay status. Generally, coverage may continue for up to one year of continuous non-pay status.

During periods of non-pay status, the student has three options for paying their health benefit premiums: make payments as the premiums are due, pre-pay the premiums, or pay the premium once returned to duty status.

Work Schedules - Work may be scheduled on a full-time or part-time basis, or as a combination of both. SCEP part-time students must be taking at least half-time academic course load and must have satisfactorily completed a minimum of 640 work hours prior to degree conferment.

G. Terminations

Managers and supervisors must consult with their servicing Division of Human Resources any time they are concerned about a student's performance or conduct. Supervisors must also keep the HR office informed of any proposed actions they are taking to separate a student.

SCEP and STEP appointments may be terminated for any of the following reasons.

1. Resignation (student chooses to withdraw from the program).
2. Suspension, expulsion, or withdrawal from the educational institution.
3. Unsatisfactory work performance or conduct.
4. Failure to maintain academic standards of the school.
6. Inability of the program office to retain student due to administrative reasons (e.g., budget constrains, Reduction-In-Force).

For the SCEP, the work experience must be directly related to the student's academic and career goals. A SCEP appointment may be terminated if the student chooses to change to a curriculum which will no longer qualify him/her for the position.

IV. TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

A. Orientation, Training and the Individual Development Plan

Orienting new students is a critical aspect of the Student Educational Employment Program. Supervisors must provide interns with a comprehensive orientation to the Service, their office and work environment. Refer to *Exhibit L* for an orientation checklist. The SCEP/STEP Coordinator must contact the students to provide information about the services available in HR and DCR. The SCEP/STEP coordinator must also organize on-going career counseling and development activities for the students.

STEP students receive short training periods to help them develop key work habits, shape a public service concept and learn about the Service's mission. These training periods should also include education on the Service's career opportunities to help the student develop their career objectives.

SCEP students' supervisors must develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP) for the student within 30 days of the date the student enters the position. The supervisor and student should be involved in developing the IDP so that both understand and agree on the learning objectives and specific work activities that will be assigned. In preparing the IDP, the supervisor should consider the student's career interests and the position. Refer to *EXHIBIT M* for a sample Individual Development Plan.

All employees, including SCEP students, must document all completed training including training received from the National Conservation Training Center and the Department of the Interior University.

B. Performance Appraisal and Progress Reports

STEPs

The performance appraisal system does not cover STEP's students but a Performance Report must be performed at the end of the students' period of employment see *EXHIBIT N*.

SCEPs

Performance Appraisal

Performance standards for SCEP students must be prepared in conjunction with the scheduling of work assignments. The minimum length of time a SCEP must serve in a position and under written performance standard in order to receive a rating is 90 days. The Service's annual appraisal period is October 1 through September 30. If a SCEP student has completed at least 90 days and is in a work phase on September 30, the same appraisal form (Form DI-2002) used for other employees must be used. If on September 30, a SCEP student has not served under an official performance plan at least 90 days, his/her appraisal period is extended until the 90-day requirement is met. A sample performance appraisal using the Form DI-2002 is in *EXHIBIT N*. If a student's work phase will not last for 90 days, then a progress report and not a performance appraisal is completed. *EXHIBIT N* has a sample progress report. Refer to 224 FW 1 for operational guidance.

Prior to the end of the work phase, the supervisor must review the student's performance and rate her/him against the established standards. Supervisors should not wait until completion of the work phase to advise the SEEP Programmatic Coordinator or the SCEP Coordinator regarding performance and conduct issues. The supervisor must prepare either a performance appraisal or a progress report that is appropriate to the level of each SCEP student. The level of work product required from an undergraduate SCEP student would be different from that of a graduate SCEP student. After the performance plan or progress report has been developed, the supervisor and the SCEP student should discuss, sign and date it. The supervisor should retain the original and give the SCEP student a copy. The supervisor should keep notes and a work folder for documenting the SCEP's student performance, training and other performance related items. Regular communication between the supervisor and the SCEP student is essential.

C. Probationary Period

SCEP experience is creditable toward completion of the one-year probationary period if the experience is in the Service and in the same line of work, and contains or is followed by no more than a single break in service that does not exceed 30 calendar days. Same line of work means that the two positions are so similar that they require the same qualifications, and would be in the same competitive level for reduction-in-force purposes. Leave without pay in excess of 22 working days is not creditable and extends the probationary period time by an equal amount.

D. Mentoring

To assist the STEP and SCEP student in making a smooth transition to the workplace, Supervisors must assign mentors to the students. The mentor can serve as a communication link for any concerns or problems the student may have; discuss career opportunities, career preparation and career paths; assist the student in building a professional network; and involve the student in other appropriate activities.

V. EMPLOYMENT AFTER GRADUATION (SCEP STUDENTS)

It is the Service's policy to non-competitively convert all SCEP students who successfully complete the program to a career, career-conditional, or term appointment within the competitive service. Term appointments have non-competitive conversion to a career or career conditional appointment prior to the end of the term appointment.

The duty station assigned to the student at the time of conversion is at the discretion of management and the location is based on the availability of positions. If for some highly unusual administrative reason a Region cannot convert the student to a position within its geographical jurisdiction, the Regional SCEP Coordinator will assist the student by ascertaining placement opportunities in other Regions or the Washington Office. The student will be made aware that their non-competitive eligibility for conversion is transferable to any other Federal agency, within the prescribed time limits (120 days); and will be given counseling on the requirements of employment under the competitive service process and their rights relative to competing through examination for other entry level positions for which they qualify.

All SCEP students must meet the following conditions prior to conversion:

1. Placement to the permanent position must occur no later than 120 days after the date that degree/diploma requirements are met.
2. To be converted to a permanent position, a SCEP student must have:
 - a. Worked a minimum of 640 hours (16 weeks) of career-related work prior to graduation;
 - b. Demonstrated successful job performance and has been recommended for conversion by the supervisor;
 - c. Maintained academic good standing and completed all course requirements for a degree related to the target position; and
 - d. Met the qualification standards for the position for which the student is being considered for appointment. The position must be in the field, or in a closely related field, for which the student was trained.
 - e. Been recommended by the office in which the career-related work was performed.

Graduating SCEPs may be converted to career or career-conditional appointments as described in Personnel Bulletin No. 02-05 (see ***EXHIBIT O***).