

University: North Carolina State University

Program: Cooperative Education Program

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Description of Program:

The NC State Cooperative Education Program (Co-op) is an optional program designed to enhance traditional academic study by providing qualified undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity to integrate academic study with curriculum specific work experience. From its beginnings almost twenty years ago in the College of Engineering, the program has grown to become a centralized service for the entire university. The present program serves to provide students from each of the ten colleges at NC State University, "real world" learning opportunities. In addition to enhancing the student's classroom learning experience, students who complete the program enter the job market with at least one year's work experience in their chosen profession.

During the 2000-2001 academic year, 865 students self-selected to participate in the Co-op program. Admission requirements for undergraduate students include completion of their first year of study at NC State (one semester for transfer students), matriculation into a major, an accumulated grade point average of 2.25 or higher, and attendance at a Cooperative Education orientation session. Graduate students must have the approval of their academic adviser, possess an accumulated grade point average of 3.00 or higher, and attend a Cooperative Education orientation session.

While students have two Co-op work formats from which to choose, alternating or parallel, the Co-op program emphasizes the alternating format. This format has the student alternating between semesters of full time Co-op employment and semesters of full time classroom course enrollment. It is felt that the interspersing of classroom experience with work yields more favorable developmental increments for knowledge synthesis. Over 95% of Co-op participants utilize the alternating format. The parallel plan provides for concurrent part-time Co-op employment work along with part-time classroom course enrollment. It is used primarily in those instances where an alternating plan is not practical.

The NC State Cooperative Education Program was among the first cooperative education programs in the country to be accredited by the Accreditation Council for Cooperative Education (ACCE). Following an extensive program review by the ACCE, the program at NC State received accreditation for the longest period allowed, six years. Recent analyses of NC State undergraduate retention and graduation rates have documented the following impact of Co-op participation. Co-op participants' university persistence rates were on average 99% at the 3-year mark. This compared with rates of 75% for non-participants. Similarly, Co-op participants were shown to have higher graduation percentages at the 6-year and 7-year marks than non-participants. Data from NC State alumni surveys have shown that Co-op graduates were significantly more likely than non-Co-op graduates to have gained their first permanent job within six months of graduation. Likewise, Co-op graduates were more likely to be employed in position directly related to their major and to be employed in a position where the minimum educational requirement was a bachelor's degree.

The Co-op program receives 20% of its budget from university funding sources. The remaining 80% is generated by Co-op registration fee receipts.