

Cooperative Education Handbook

The step-by-step guide for students

What is cooperative education? Cooperative Education (or co-op) is paid work experience in your field of study. Students participating in co-op must work in a position related to the declared major or minor. The co-op positions are approved by a Faculty Coordinator in each academic department.

Co-op paperwork must be completed, signed, and returned to Career Services **before** the co-op deadline, which is 4 weeks before the last day of class – or earlier for some majors, so be sure to check with Career Services. So you're ready to get some hands-on experience in your career field while earning academic credit and getting paid? Follow these steps to complete your co-op!

1. **Are you eligible?** In order to co-op, you must have a declared major, at least a 2.20 GPA, and at least 30 credit hours. Students seeking Associate Degrees need to have completed at least 15 credits.
2. **Find a job in your major or minor.** If you are already working in your field of study, you may be able to turn your current job into a co-op. If this is the case, skip to #4. If you will be searching for a job in your field, move to #3. Co-op students must receive compensation for their work.
3. **Get help with your job search.** To find a co-op job, start with the following:
 - a. Create (or update) your résumé. There are samples available from Career Services to help you get started. Once you are ready, bring your résumé to Career Services to have someone proofread it and provide feedback. Walk-in hours are available each week – check for times at careerservices.nku.edu or call 859-572-5680.
 - b. Utilize HireNKU, Career Services online database, to find positions, employer information, etc. Visit our website for details and other tools to help you with your job search.
 - c. Talk with family, friends, and even your current employer, to discuss your co-op goals. You may be able to move into a position related to your major without leaving your current company.
4. **Talk with your employer about turning it into a co-op**, once you have accepted a job in your field of study. Talk to your academic advisor about how much credit should be earned based on the table below, which indicates the maximum number of credits possible based on the number of work hours. Co-op credit, for most majors, is the course CEP 300, which is upper-level, elective credit. The grading is pass/fail and **students pay tuition for this credit, similar to any other course credit**. Students who work full time and are registered for 6 credits of co-op are considered full time students.

| ACADEMIC CREDIT HOURS | HOURS WORKED PER WEEK | HOURS WORKED PER SEMESTER |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 8 | 120 |
| 2 | 15 | 225 |
| 3 | 20 | 300 |
| 6 | 37.5 or more | 560 or more |

5. **Complete the Student Agreement / Job Approval Form** (on paper or electronically). This form is your request to register for academic credit and a contract allowing all relevant parties to make this job into a co-op. This must be signed by you, your employer, and your Faculty Coordinator. Submit this form to Career Services to get enrolled for academic credit. By signing this form, you request to be enrolled for co-op credit and agree to fulfill all related NKU obligations including tuition payment.
6. **Submit your job description** electronically or on paper – this should be provided by your employer.

7. **Complete the Learning Objectives Form** (on paper or electronically). Describe the 3 educational (and major-related) goals for your co-op as an academic experience, as well as a work experience. You, the student, should write the learning objectives, though you should discuss them with your employer and Faculty Coordinator. This form must be signed by you, your employer, and your Faculty Coordinator. See attached “Setting Learning Objectives” guide for assistance. Submit this form to Career Services to get enrolled for academic credit.
8. **Make it a co-op! Enroll for CEP 300/600.** Return your Student Agreement/Job Approval Form, Learning Objectives Form, and job description to Career Services (UC 225) before the co-op deadline – four weeks before the last day of class – or earlier for some majors. The Career Services staff will enroll you for CEP 300/600 (according to your request on the Student Agreement/Job Approval Form) or give you other instructions. Once enrolled, you will receive a confirmation email including the Co-op Syllabus, which contains all course requirements and deadlines, though both are subject to change by your individual Faculty Coordinator.
9. **Check myNKU to ensure you are in the correct section of CEP 300/600.** Check with your Faculty Coordinator about whether you will be using Blackboard.
10. **Continue to communicate with your Faculty Coordinator throughout the semester.** This person is your professor for the course so communication is essential. If there are any additional assignments, be sure to work on them as needed and submit them on time. The Faculty Coordinator may visit your co-op on-site to meet with you and/or your employer; make sure to communicate this with your employer.
11. **Keep a journal of activities you’re doing at work.** Each time you work, write a few sentences describing the projects you’re doing, successes and failures, and opportunities when you’ve applied your classroom knowledge to your work. Ask your Faculty Coordinator about how often this journal should be submitted. Some faculty coordinators collect the journal once per month; others, once per semester.
12. **Write a final paper to reflect on your co-op experience.** There is an outline (attached and also in the syllabus) for you to follow. The paper should cite entries from your journal and is typically due the last day of classes, or as determined by your Faculty Coordinator. Ask your Faculty Coordinator about his/her preferences – online or paper submission, deadline, length, etc.
13. **Complete the Student Evaluation** (available on the Career Services website) and return it to your Faculty Coordinator.
14. **Ask your employer to complete the Co-op Performance Appraisal** (available on the Career Services website) and return it to your Faculty Coordinator.

Glossary of terms:

Career Advisor – a Career Services staff person who can assist you with the co-op paperwork and finding a position.

Faculty Coordinator – a faculty member or advisor in your academic department who will approve (or deny) your co-op, collect your journal, grade your final paper, and assign you a final grade.

Internship – a curricular work experience for academic credit which may or may not be paid.

Co-op – a paid work experience related to a student’s area of study for academic credit.

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Setting Learning Objectives

In order to get the most out of your experiential education experience, you should consciously think about what you want to accomplish. One way to do this is by setting learning objectives, which is a required portion of the cooperative education paperwork.

Along with the Student Agreement/Job Approval Form, your Learning Objectives Form must be signed by you, your employer, and your faculty coordinator. This will help all parties assist you with your co-op goals.

Each semester you participate in the co-op program, you will need to complete a new Learning Objectives Form and write new, different learning objectives. Since you'll be taking another course, it's important to focus on the new accomplishments and lessons you'll learn to build on the previous semester's learning.

What is a learning objective?

A learning objective is a written statement describing measurable achievements to accomplish during your co-op experience. The learning objectives you develop should relate to your job assignment, represent the job functions and duties you will perform, assist in your professional growth and development, and relate to your course of study or major (or minor). They should be realistic enough for you to attain during the semester.

Categories for Objectives:

Routine Duties – improving your performance in day-to-day job functions and activities.

Problem Solving – solving specific problems in your job area with measurable results.

New Skills and Assignments – learning a new job skill, increasing your knowledge and usefulness, or starting a new assignment on the job.

Personal Improvement – developing interpersonal skills, improving communication skills, or developing other social skills that will permit you to function more effectively in the work environment.

Creative Opportunities – trying new approaches, showing initiative, or having new ideas relative to your work assignment.

Examples:

“I will improve my oral communication skills by preparing a formal briefing for my supervisor; he will meet with me to give me feedback about the briefing.”

“I will observe the interaction of the social service team and produce a 10-page report analyzing the role of each team member, which will be reviewed by the team for accuracy then added to the website.”

“I will develop an Access database, which will be used to collect market research data on the positive/negative impact of a new product. A report of this research will be generated at the end of the semester.”

“I will learn to operate digital editing equipment and rearrange, organize, and edit an hour of footage for a new local sports program.”

Final Paper Outline

At the end of the semester, you are required to submit a written report summarizing your experience as a co-op student. Talk with your Faculty Coordinator about his/her specific preferences for the paper – online or paper submission, deadline, length, etc. The final paper should be submitted directly to your Faculty Coordinator.

This report must be typed, double spaced and 5-6 pages in length plus a title page. Correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling are required and may be taken into consideration when determining the final grade. The report should be "open ended" to provide freedom of expression, but also related to the following topics:

- I. Summary statement of job duties and responsibilities.
 - A. Mental processes used on job.
 - B. Work output (results).
 - C. Interpersonal relationships.
 - D. Job satisfaction.

- II. Statement of present learning objectives.
 - A. How you have met objectives. Give examples of how accomplished (cite entries in log).
 - B. Why you did not meet a certain objective. This does not reflect negatively on experience; in fact, not meeting an objective can sometimes be a more valuable learning experience than meeting one.

- III. Relevancy of experience.
 - A. Personal maturity or growth.
 - B. Academic application.
 - C. Identification of special interests.
 - D. Improvement in technical areas.
 - E. Improvement of interpersonal skills (communication).
 - F. Significance of co-op assignment.

- IV. Formulation of “next level” learning objectives (objectives should be established whether or not you will co-op next semester).
 - A. Should be challenging but within practical performance limits.
 - B. Should be measurable as to achievement.
 - C. Can be technical, interpersonal, or both.

- V. Summary statement describing the impact of your job and co-op on your career plans.

- VI. Constructive and frank recommendations concerning current policies and operations of program.