The Employer’s Guide to Cooperative Education at the University of New Mexico

UNM Cooperative Education
Career Services
The University of New Mexico
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## Career Services/Cooperative Education Mission

As integral to the mission of the University of New Mexico, Career Services is a bridge between the world of work and the academic environment. We provide excellent customer service, superior opportunities for students, in choosing and securing appropriate, rewarding and satisfying careers, and quality services to employers.

Just as conceptual learning is the goal of classroom and laboratory instruction, the goal of Cooperative Education is the personal and professional development of the student in the workplace is. Our specific objective is to develop and maintain placements that add significantly to the value of a student’s academic experience. This requires close collaboration with organizations that hire UNM Co-op students. Through the guidance and expertise of supervisors and mentors, Co-op students graduate from the University as full-fledged professional partners with their colleagues in business, industry, and government.
**Introduction**

Cooperative Education is a program of paid, study-related employment, either part-time or full-time, throughout the semester in which the student is enrolled in the appropriate co-op course. Although UNM does not grant numerical credit for the work phase, the co-op assignment is recorded on the student’s transcript as credit (CR) for the completed co-op semester. Students can gain numerical credit under a separate co-op evaluation course.

Many co-ops span several semesters, and today employers use co-op as a training program, or a pipeline, for hiring their co-op students as regular employees after graduation. Through co-op, they can teach and evaluate students in professional and technical capacities with the option of hiring or not hiring those students upon graduation. From any group of co-op students, they can then extend offers to specific candidates upon graduation.

With its emphasis on first-hand training and supervision by experienced professionals, today’s co-ops are most analogous to the ancient practice of apprenticing students to master craftsmen.

**What is Cooperative Education**

At the University of New Mexico, cooperative education is defined as any practical learning experience that meets the following requirements:

- Co-ops must be paid.

- Cooperative education work periods are considered a formal part of a student’s curriculum. A co-op is work that is learning based and is geared specifically toward a student’s career and academic goals. It must complement and expand academic knowledge.

- An on-site professional must supervise, teach, and evaluate the co-op student’s performance and progress.

- Students must be registered with UNM Cooperative Education and must register for a co-op work phase course in order to have their work experiences recognized by the University as valid cooperative education placements. The Co-op assignment is recorded on a student’s transcript.

- A student can earn numerical credit for their work-phase assignment under a separate co-op course in which the student works with a faculty member to analyze the co-op experience.

- A learning agreement defines and documents a co-op work assignment. It must be filled out and signed by the student, the employer, and the co-op office. The learning agreement specifies roles, responsibilities and learning objectives agreed upon by employer, student, and the
Cooperative Education Office. If a student stays with an employer over several semesters, successive learning agreements must demonstrate a progressive continuum of learning from one co-op work-phase to the next. A new Learning Agreement must be completed each semester, as it establishes the position as a co-op job.

- At the end of each semester work phase, performance evaluations must be completed by the Co-op student and supervisor and returned to the co-op office.

- At the University of New Mexico, the cooperative education work phase does not earn numerical credit hours. A student registered in the co-op work phase course earns “0” hours but is considered a full-time student by UNM for purposes of loan deferment and maintaining student privileges at the University. On satisfactory completion of the co-op assignment, the student is awarded credit pending satisfactory completion of the co-op assignment. Several colleges allow students to sign up under a separate course to earn academic credit for co-op experience. Working with a faculty member, Co-op students can take advantage of this opportunity to earn credit hours by developing the theoretical aspects of their practical learning experiences.

### Types of Co-ops

- An **Alternating** or **full time** co-op designates a placement in which a student works full time for one school term and does not register for any other UNM classes during the work phase. (This also includes placements that last through one semester and its contiguous summer term). Alternating co-ops are typically 40-hour work weeks. The student must return to school full time the semester following the co-op.

- A **Parallel** or **part-time** co-op is one in which the student participates while taking regular credit-bearing classes at the University. Parallel co-ops vary from 15-30 hours per week. Students may continue with the same or different employers from one semester to the next, as long as they demonstrate a continuous learning growth curve, as reflected in the Learning Agreement.

- A **Summer** co-op occurs between the end of the Spring semester and the beginning of the following Fall semester at UNM. It must be full-time (minimum 8 hours per day) and at least 9 weeks long. Some co-ops last for the period of one regular academic semester and its following or preceding summer term. UNM counts this as two work phase co-ops and requires the student to submit separate Learning Objectives Agreements for each term.
Keys To A Successful Co-op Program

Because most companies pay competitive salaries to their Cooperative Education students, market standard compensation is viewed as a “given” by co-op students who are considering post-graduation employment with their co-op employer. Salary and other benefits do matter greatly. But research shows there are additional factors that play a significant role in retaining co-op students after graduation.

- Companies with high retention rates provide work that significantly challenges, and continues to challenge, the co-op employee.*

- A major factor in a student’s decision to stay with a business after graduation is the belief that the company will provide types and quality of work that the student wants to pursue.*

- Location of the company and the relative importance of the work can influence a co-op student’s decision to stay with the organization after graduation.*

- The most successful co-op programs are those in which co-op supervisors have high levels of motivation to train, challenge, and reward their student employees. These supervisors develop and oversee assignments that are as fulfilling to the co-op employee as the most challenging college project.

- The Cooperative Education Learning Agreement is the heart of the co-op experience. It is a compact that defines the roles and expectations of everyone involved in the student’s co-op experience. Learning Agreements that specify precise job duties, supervisory responsibilities, and expected outcomes give assurance of a successful co-op program.

- Upper management publicly acknowledges both co-op students and their supervising mentors for their collaborative achievements.

- Management recognizes co-ops as important to the overall productivity the organization.
**How to Establish a UNM Co-op Partnership**

To post a co-op position or to set up an on-campus co-op interview schedule, call 277-2531 and ask to be transferred to the Manager of Placement and Cooperative Education.

Each organization will be assigned a coordinator who will work with you to access our database which allows you to post the position so that students may apply online. As students apply to your posting, you are able to view resumes from the database, then contact the students directly to complete the interviewing and hiring process. Coordinators can also query our student database for qualified students, and send resumes to the potential co-op employer. The co-op coordinator is here to help you find those students who are most qualified and interested in the position.

An employer who wishes to advertise for a Cooperative Education position will work with one of three co-op program coordinators to advertise, post, and fill the position. Each coordinator is responsible for individual colleges/schools on campus.

**Contact**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joe Francomano</th>
<th>Arts and Sciences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary Montaño (Mgr)</td>
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<td>School of Law</td>
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<td>Lori Gallegos</td>
<td>School of Engineering</td>
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Minimally job descriptions should contain the following information:

- A clear description of the job responsibilities, supervision, learning objectives.
- The deadline for applying for the co-op position.
- Conditions of work, i.e. hours per week, location, duration of the co-op, desired majors, desired level of education, minimum GPA (if relevant), desirable skills, previous experience, special qualifications, supervision provided.
- A brief profile of your organization, including types of service or products.

The coordinator will announce the position to students and faculty through an e-mail distribution list. Any interested UNM student who is registered with UNM Co-op and who meets the stated requirements may apply for the position. The employer will then contact students whom they wish to interview.

**On-Campus Interviews** - Employers who wish to use Career Services facilities to interview students on campus can set up interview dates and sign-up schedules through their Co-op program coordinator.

**Advertising Your Co-op Positions** - It is strongly recommended that organizations posting positions through the Co-op Office place a display or classified
ad in the Daily Lobo, the UNM student newspaper. This will give broad exposure to the student body. Advertisements should specify: “For more information, please stop by the UNM Cooperative Education Office, Student Services 220; or call 277-2531.”

### Mutual Responsibilities, Mutual Benefits

UNM Cooperative Education subscribes to the standards of employer involvement enunciated by the Cooperative Education Network in its February 1996 version of **Attributes of Cooperative Education Programs:**

“A fundamental purpose of cooperative education is for students to have an opportunity to learn under real-work conditions. While on cooperative work experience periods, students are considered as actual employees of the hiring organization. These “conditions” of actual employment include:

- **The student will be considered to be an employee of the hiring organization and subject to the policies and laws that relate to other employees of the organization.**
- The student will receive compensation in the form of wages for work performed.
- The student will be under the supervision of the employer and perform work assigned by the employer.”

**Learning Agreement** - The essence of a cooperative education relationship is the agreement between The University, the student, the employer, and the Co-op Office about their mutual roles, responsibilities, and expectations for the period of employment. **Above all, a co-op agreement should stress learning outcomes that build on the student’s academic base of knowledge.** This should include a detailed statement of the supervisor’s contribution to the student’s professional growth and learning during the period of employment.

In writing up the Learning Agreement, efforts should be made to ensure that specific learning objectives are related to a student’s academic and career goals. Ideally, the student’s scope of work and responsibility should move toward increased responsibilities congruent with progressive experience and education.

**Supervision** – The designated work phase supervisor directs and evaluates the activities of the co-op student as specified in the Learning Agreement. The supervisor is responsible for providing the equipment, training, and personnel necessary for the co-op student to complete his or her semester learning experience. In addition to the student’s learning objectives, roles, and responsibilities, these material and educational conditions for a successful co-op should be identified in the Learning Agreement. If a problem or misunderstanding between the supervisor and student arise during the course of the work phase semester, the supervisor and student should ask the UNM Co-op Office to assist in resolving the problem.
**End-of-Semester Learning Evaluations** – At the end of each semester, the UNM Co-op office mails confidential work-phase evaluations to co-op students and their supervisors. These should be completed at the end of each work phase and returned as soon as possible to the co-op office. These are performance appraisals intended to determine the degree to which the co-op student has achieved the goals set out initially in the Learning Agreement. They are used also to establish a learning baseline for future co-op placements with the employer.

**Contacting the UNM Co-op Office** – The UNM Cooperative Education Office is part of UNM Career Services. For information or assistance, please call 277-2531 and ask to be transferred to the Manager of the Co-op program.

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**Worker’s Compensation, Unemployment Insurance, Taxation. Health Insurance**

**Workers Compensation** - An employer is responsible for carrying Worker's Compensation Insurance. This applies to co-op students in the same way it does to any other employee working on-site at the employer's place of business.

**Unemployment Insurance** - UNM considers each cooperative education placement as a semester-long class. Co-op employment is limited and defined by the stated terms and duration of each semester’s Learning Agreement. It is a learning relationship and not a business or consulting contract. Therefore, the end of each semester’s co-op is not considered a lay-off or employment termination and cannot be the basis of an unemployment insurance claim.

**Student Health Insurance** – Under co-op, a student retains his or her status as a full-time UNM student, even if the student is not taking other for-credit academic classes during the co-op work-phase semester. This entitles the student to maintain student insurance, Lobo Card privileges, and student loan payment deferment. A student who is on a co-op placement is responsible for purchasing and maintaining his or her own health insurance.

**Tax Benefits** – There are no direct federal or New Mexico State tax benefits to an employer of cooperative education students. Salaries paid to co-op students are not considered fellowships or scholarships for tax purposes. A co-op position is recorded on the student’s transcript like any other academic course, and it is taken for Credit/No Credit.
International Students and Cooperative Education

Commencement of co-ops within the United States for international students is contingent on the approval of the UNM Office of International Programs and Studies. The following outlines the policies and procedures pertaining to cooperative education for international students.

F-1 Visa: International Students on an F-1 visa are eligible to participate in Cooperative Education provided they meet the criteria for Curricular Practical Training and have obtained approval from the UNM Office of International Programs & Studies (OIPS) at (505) 277-4032.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service defines Curricular Practical Training (CPT) as employment which is an integral or important part of the curriculum. Cooperative education meets the definition of CPT. To be eligible for CPT, the work must be related to a student’s degree program and the student must meet the following criteria:

1. Be in lawful F-1 status.
2. Have completed nine months of full-time study.
4. Obtain a letter from the Cooperative Education office detailing your work.
5. Obtain a letter from the student’s academic advisor indicating how the training relates to your academic program and is an integral part of your curriculum.

After obtaining the appropriate letters from the academic advisor and the Cooperative Education office, the student picks up the pink handout from the Office of International Programs and Studies, complete the form I-538, and makes an appointment with an International Student Advisor. The International Student Advisor will review the documents and make a recommendation for Curricular Practical Training.

J-1 Visa: International students on a J-1 Visa must speak to an advisor at OIPS about options to participate in Cooperative Education.
Using Co-op Students as Consultants or Independent Contractors

Above all, the cooperative education placement is an educational relationship between the supervisor-teacher and the co-op student. Co-op students are not available to be hired as at-will professional contractors or consultants. The UNM Cooperative Education office reserves the right to terminate a co-op when a co-op student is being used for any purpose that does not support the professional growth and learning of the student.

Employer Incentive Programs

Working To Learn – Funded by the New Mexico State Legislature and administered through the Commission on Higher Education and the New Mexico Small Business Development Center, Working to Learn provides small businesses with matching funds to employ cooperative education students who attend participating post-secondary institutions. Qualified businesses may be reimbursed for up to 50 percent of the co-op student’s wages. Preference is given to New Mexico businesses that employ fewer than 20 employees and are owned by minorities or women. However, placements will be considered in non-profit organizations and local governments.

If you are interested in qualifying as a Working to Learn partner, please contact Mary Montaño at 277-2531 or montano@unm.edu.

Non-Profit Co-ops – A UNM student who qualifies for federal work-study funds can apply for co-op positions with off-campus, non-profit organizations. This includes government agencies. To qualify, an organization must show proof of non-profit tax status and must provide a direct benefit to the community members it serves. Qualified non-profit organizations sign an employment contract with the University and set up a payroll account through UNM Student Employment. They can then establish criteria for the position (including hourly wage rate), advertise the position(s) through UNM Cooperative Education, screen for potential student work study employees referred by UNM Cooperative Education, and select student employees who meet the stated requirements. Once hired, a student’s work-study award pays for 70 percent of his or her salary, and the employer contributes 30 percent.

Also, since UNM serves as the employer of record for the federal work-study share of a student’s salary, the University of New Mexico assumes responsibility for any Workers Compensation Insurance covering that student employee. Any government, legal, or agency requirements for professional liability, e.g. supervision of interns in helping professions, would be the responsibility of the community agency that hires the UNM co-op student.

For more information on this program, contact Mary Montaño, Manager, at 277-7801 or montano@unm.edu.