Cooperative Education Program (Co-op) is a structured method program that offers students the opportunity to alternate periods of academic study with periods of work closely related to their major field of study. The combination of academic study and work produces an overall learning experience that gives greater meaning to students’ studies and more direction to career development.

This program is non-compulsory; however, the University urges students to gain work experiences either through internships or cooperative education assignments prior to graduation. The program is centralized and operates out of the Office of Career Services (OCS).

**Types of Co-op**

There are two types of co-op assignments, alternating and parallel. Alternating co-op assignment is the most common. This allows the student to travel to another city, state or country and work full-time as a cooperative education student, enrolling only in the cooperative education course. Parallel co-op assignment allows the student go to school and work at the same time.

**Program Requirements**

Any undergraduate and graduate students formally enrolled in a degree-granting program at North Carolina A&T State University (N.C. A&T) can participate. Participants must establish and maintain at least a 2.5 overall grade point average. Freshmen must complete their first academic year prior to their first work assignment. Transfer students must complete one semester.

Students must be registered with the OCS.

**How long is a co-op assignment?**

Typically, a co-op assignment lasts a full fall or spring semester (12-16 weeks). Usually an employer will require at least 2-3 sessions, which can include one summer session.
Benefits from participating in co-op.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personally</th>
<th>Academically</th>
<th>Professionally</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Boost your maturity and self-confidence</td>
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<td>• Improve your human relations skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prepare for life after graduation</td>
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<td>• Integrate your core values with work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Enjoy a greater clarity about career decisions.</td>
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<td>• Integrate classroom theory with real-life experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Understand the relevance of your course work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase your motivation to learn</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use resources that are not available on campus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Explore a potential career field</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop career-related skills and abilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Observe professional people and behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Build a network of professional contacts, and develop potential mentoring relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Gain a competitive edge for employment.</td>
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The following charts illustrate some common school-work sessions:

**Two Co-op Assignments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Co-op</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Academics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Co-op</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Optional</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Three Co-op Assignments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<td>Co-op</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Co-op</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Academics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other scenarios are possible. Discuss specifics with your advisor and co-op coordinator.

**Finding and applying for a co-op position.**

Registration with the Office of Career Services (OCS) is required. To register with OCS, you must update your profile section and upload a resume. It is strongly encouraged to attend an orientation session either in our office or online, have a resume critique and approved by an OCS counselor, and complete InterviewStream (virtual mock interview).

Preparation is a key component in receiving a co-op assignment. Take advantage of the many services and resources OCS provides towards your professional development (i.e., resume development, varies workshops, and mock interviews).
Once registered with the Office of Career Services, several options are available to start the process of searching for a co-op.

1. Search and sign up online for *On-campus Interviews* using AggieLink.
2. Search and apply for positions listed in AggieLink by clicking on “*Jobs and Internships*”.
3. Search and apply for positions listed in the online *Summer Internship and Co-op Positions* on-line.
4. Receive emails first from OCS of available positions in your area of discipline.
5. Approved resumes are referred to employers looking to fill a co-op position.

The Cooperative Education Program is designed to help students find the best opportunities. However, it is up to the student to ensure success by utilizing a variety of career resources offered through the Office of Career Services (i.e., preparing a resume, attending workshops, participating in mock interviews and researching job opportunities). There are no guarantees that students will secure a co-op assignment. Some of the barriers to obtaining a co-op position include inflexibility regarding the geographic location in which students are willing to work, the term in which to begin working and having a GPA that is lower than what employers typically desire.

**Accepted a co-op position, what’s next?**

After accepting a co-op assignment, go to the Office of Career Services in Suite 101 Murphy Hall to schedule an appointment with the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning. Students should bring a copy of their offer letter to this meeting. During this meeting students will receive confirmation of approval of employer and co-op assignment. Employment must be related to the student’s area of study in about 80% of assigned task.

Acceptance of a co-op position, verbally and/or written, is considered final. *(If an emergency arises, contact the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning immediately.)*

**Enrollment into Co-op Class**

Instructions will be given on which co-op class to enroll in. This class will allow students to stay active and in good standing with the university, and receive a co-op notation on their official transcript. The university will charge a fee of $300. Payment is due by the first day of class of each semester to the Treasurer’s Office. The co-op course is for zero credit, which students will receive a pass or fail notation.
Receiving Academic Credit for Co-op Assignment
Academic credit is awarded by the department chairperson in respective schools/colleges. Before leaving on an assignment, discuss plans with your advisor/chairperson about your participation in a co-op and how it relates to your discipline. If the department decides to award academic credit, complete the Academic Credit form and get appropriate signatures. Once you return to the University, you will enroll into the a class to receive credit.

How will work performance be evaluated?
The site supervisor will use the Employer Evaluation form to evaluate various aspects the student’s performance. The site supervisor should discuss the performance rating and give a copy of the completed evaluation form to the student with signatures. It is the student’s responsibility to return all evaluation forms to the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning.

Documents and Forms
Provide the following documents below at the appropriate time to the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning to receive a passing grade for the co-op course and academic credit (if awarded by department). These documents will be forwarded with a formal recommendation letter to your department chairperson and a grade will be given.

- **Prospective Co-op Form** *(Fill out and turn in at the initial meeting with the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning.)*
- **Academic Credit Form** *(If applicable, turn in before leaving for co-op assignment.)*
- **Position Description and Offer/Acceptance Letter** *(Turn in before leaving for co-op assignment.)*
- **Agreement Form** *(Turn in before leaving for co-op assignment.)*
- **Policy Form** *(Turn in one week after reporting to co-op assignment.)*
- **Report to Work Form** *(Turn in two weeks after reporting to co-op assignment.)*
- **Student Evaluation Form** *(Turn in a week before the semesters and/or co-op assignment end.)*
- **Employer Evaluation Form** *(Turn in a week before the semesters and/or co-op assignment end.)*
- **Report** - at least 500 (five hundred) words typed *(If applicable, turn in a week before the semester and/or co-op assignment end.)*
- **The report should cover some of the following:**
  - Type of work/projects performed
  - Equipment/tools/materials used in completing work/projects
  - Relatedness to course(s) in current curriculum
  - Level of success in project(s)
  - What was learned
  - How results will be used at company/agency
  - Level of interaction with co-workers
  - Level of responsibility
How much will I be paid by the employer?
Compensation is set by the employer and depends on the industry, the level of the position, student experience and/or degree(s) and the local economy. The primary goal as a co-op student should be to obtain the best work and educational experience possible. At this point in a student’s career, salary should not be a major factor in deciding which co-op offer to accept.

Vacation while on co-op
Students are expected to work from the beginning to the end of the co-op assignment.

Taking time off while on co-op
Employers expect co-ops to be responsible with regular and punctual attendance. As an employee, the student must arrange for personal and college-related commitments to take place outside of regular working hours. If time off from work is needed for special circumstances, the student must contact the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning before requesting permission from the employer.

Taking courses while on co-op
We do not encourage co-op students to take classes while on assignment. However, students may enroll in classes that take place outside of their regular working hours.

Living arrangements while on co-op
If a student lives on-campus and accepts a position outside the Triad area, the housing deposit may transfer to another semester. Notify the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning. Before arriving at co-op site, plan for housing and transportation needs. Sometimes students are responsible for finding their own housing and transportation near their co-op assignment. However, some employers may provide housing and relocation assistance. Talk with the Human Resources Representative to get specific logistical information.

Identification/Work eligibility
Each time a student begins a new job in the United States, he/she will be asked to verify both work eligibility and identity by completing an I-9 form provided by the employer. All students, including international students, must have a Social Security number. All international students or non-immigrant visas must obtain (or verify) co-op authorization at the International Student and Scholars Office (ISSO), before the first day of co-op employment. Working without permission is a very serious violation of visa status.

Social Security requirement
All students, including international students, must have a Social Security number from the U.S. Social Security Administration before working on co-op. If the student doesn’t have a Social Security number, go to the ISSO for information about applying for one. Application should be made no later than one semester prior to co-op assignment.

Income tax
Federal law requires you to complete a W-4 form with your employer before beginning work. This form ensures that the appropriate federal and state taxes will be deducted from your wages. If the
employer does not deduct these taxes, the student will still be responsible for paying them. International students are also required to pay federal and state taxes.

**Agreeing to confidentiality**
In many technical and professional fields, students might work in research, health care, product development and improvement, or marketing activities that generate patentable or confidential information. To work in one of these settings, the student may be asked to sign an agreement that protects the employer from unauthorized disclosure of such information. The student is legally bound by terms of this agreement in all cases. Information gathered while on a co-op assignment cannot be used in any projects, term papers, or reports unless your employer signs a release. If there are any questions or concerns about signing an agreement, discuss them with the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning.

**Students with disabilities**
Employers are required to provide reasonable accommodation for the physical or mental limitations of a qualified individual with a disability. If a student needs reasonable accommodation to apply for a co-op position or perform essential job functions, the student should inform the staff at the Veteran and Disability Support Office and the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning for more information.

**Dealing with stressful and uncomfortable situations is part of the workplace learning experience.**
As with every other aspect of experiential learning, the University and the Office of Career Services are here to support and guide the student as necessary. The Office encourages the student to make an effort to resolve issues on his/her own with the immediate supervisor or another manager at the job site. Should the student feel uncomfortable discussing a problem with the supervisor, contact the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning for assistance or advice. It is important to address issues as they arise, rather than postpone such a discussion or ignore the problem.

**Absences and medical leaves**
Students should contact the employer immediately if they must be absent because of illness or emergency. If the absence is for a week or more, also call the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning. If the student must miss work because of a work-related injury or illness, he/she should inform the supervisor immediately. Also be sure to formally report the illness or injury to the employer according to the employer’s regulations.

**Discrimination**
North Carolina A&T State University does not condone any form of discrimination or harassment toward students, either on or off campus. Although the Office of Career Services makes reasonable efforts to ensure that co-op sites are free of discriminatory practices, it is possible that a co-op student may experience illegal or unethical behavior in the workplace. If a student experiences any kind of harassment or unfair treatment on the basis of race, color, religion, religious creed, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin, ancestry, genetics, disability, or veteran status during a job interview or while employed, contact the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning immediately. Students will not be penalized in any way for reporting such a situation.
Sexual harassment
Sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination and is a serious concern. There are two types of sexual harassment: quid pro quo and hostile environment. Quid pro quo normally occurs when someone with authority makes submission to sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature an explicit or implicit term or condition of evaluation, employment, advancement, training, compensation, or opportunity for professional development. Hostile environment involves verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work or academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. If a student feels he/she is a victim of sexual harassment while on a co-op assignment, contact the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning. After being notified of the experience, the Office of Career Services will work to resolve the problem.

Discharge from a co-op position
Employers may discharge a co-op student, just as they would any other employee. Reasons may include unsatisfactory performance, incompetence, inability to perform expected tasks, irregular attendance or tardiness, or unacceptable attitude or behavior. However, the Office of Career Services encourages employers to contact us before initiating any action. The Assistant Director for Experiential Learning will work with the student and employer to resolve the problem.

Deserting a co-op position
Students who leave a co-op position without notifying the Assistant Director for Experiential Learning will automatically be suspended from OCS and online access blocked. Additional disciplinary action may also occur.

Disciplinary action, co-op probation, and suspension
Unsatisfactory job performance is handled in various ways, depending on the nature of the problem. The Assistant Director for Experiential Learning will determine if the student’s violation of the rules or behavior that resulted in discharge from the job constitutes failure to complete the co-op term satisfactorily. Although first offenses usually result in an oral or written warning, serious or repeated offenses may be referred to the college/school Dean/Chairperson. The student may be refused further co-op employment referrals. While on a co-op assignment, students must also follow the University’s Student Code of Conduct.

Twelve Steps to a Successful Co-op

1. Adopt the right attitude.
2. Adjust your expectations.
3. Master breaking-in skills.
4. Manage the impressions you make.
5. Build effective relationships.
6. Become a good follower.
7. Understand your organization’s culture.
8. Develop organizational savvy.
9. Understand your new-hire role.
10. Develop work savvy.
11. Master the tasks of your job.
12. Acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities you need.

Source: Job Choices
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