

## :: Cooperative Education Program ::

### Transition to the Workplace

Your Co-Op work assignment may be your first introduction to the professional work environment. We have provided information that may help you in making an effective transition from school to the workplace. In addition, we have provided tips to help you maximize your Co-Op experience, as well as CSU student service information.

#### RELOCATION

If you already have housing and transportation needs covered, much of the following will not be an issue. If you do not have housing, use this checklist to help organize your move.

**Housing** – Check with your employer to see if any kind of housing assistance or subsidy is provided. Some employers will provide hotel accommodations while you look (2-7 days). Most employers will provide little or no assistance. Ask if there are other Co-Op students at the company who may need roommates. The Human Resources representative or your supervisor should at least be able to identify neighborhoods where close, safe, reasonably priced housing may be found. Possible sources would also include relatives, friends, local university housing offices, or affiliations (church, sororities/fraternities or professional associations). It would be wise to start by securing temporary housing rather than committing to a lease situation. This would allow you additional time to review options and learn more about the area.

**Insurance** – Co-Op students frequently do not qualify for company health insurance benefits (check with the Human Resources representative). Notify your personal health and/or automobile insurance carrier(s) of your temporary change of address (make sure they know that based on your course registration, you are still a currently enrolled Cal Poly student during your Co-Op).

#### WORK INFORMATION

If your employer does not provide you with an informational packet before you report to work, call the Human Resource representative or your supervisor and get at least the following basic information:

- Company address
- Directions
- Where to park
- What time to report
- Who to report to at work.

What to wear? Remember the environment that we work in (Jobsite and Main Office). Check with the Human Resource Department/Coop Supervisor for the appropriate dress for your particular work environment.

## FIRST DAY ON THE JOB

The following is standard for almost any employment situation – knowing what to expect just makes it that much easier.

Standard payroll procedures require that you provide your employer with your valid California driver's license and original Social Security Card (or visa/work permit if you are a non-citizen). A U.S. Passport (current or expired) will satisfy the Driver's License and Social Security Card requirement. You will be required to complete a W-4 form (taxes), an I-9 form (proof of right to work in the U.S.), and a variety of other forms.

If you are not provided with information about attendance reporting (time clocks, attendance sheets, etc.), benefits, payday, overtime (requirement, reporting, reimbursement) and other vital issues, ask while you're getting signed up for payroll. FYI, if you're receiving any relocation, housing benefits, or tuition reimbursement, these are generally considered taxable income. Make sure you understand how this will affect you at tax time.

If you are not given an employee handbook, ask if you can have a copy (assuming your employer has one). You should know about general rules, safety practices and procedures.

Keep a folder for records pertaining to your Co-Op employment: personnel forms, employee handbook, job description, correspondence or business cards.

## GETTING ACQUAINTED, GETTING STARTED

You're going to be given a lot of information and meet a lot of people in those first few days - be prepared to **TAKE NOTES!** You may be provided with a comprehensive orientation, or you may be expected to pick things up as you go. In either case, here are some critical basic pieces of information you need:

- Learn your immediate supervisor's name and what you should call him/her (Mr./Ms. or maybe first name).
- Learn names, titles and responsibilities of your co-workers and how they relate to your assignment(s). Ask for an organization chart. Don't ignore clerical staff – they can be a great source for key information and support.
- If you aren't offered a tour of the facility, ask for one-including location of supplies, equipment, tools, etc.
- You should receive instructions and policies for use of company telephones, fax and photocopy machines and computers. In general, you should not expect to use any of these items for personal business (or entertainment!).
- **GET A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR WORK ASSIGNMENT** and make sure you are clear about reporting structure, expectations, deadline dates, etc. If you are not provided with a detailed job description, make sure to take notes. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

## BEING AN EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEE

- Observe your workplace, take cues (at least positive ones) from your fellow workers, and keep the following in mind:
- Observe all company rules, regulations and policies.
- Obey all safety rules and practices.
- Avoid absenteeism and tardiness; do not leave the job during work hours without permission.
- Follow through to completion any projects assigned to you. If you determine that your assigned project may be delayed for reasons beyond your control, notify your supervisor immediately (not with excuses, but with facts that may help secure additional assistance or extend the deadline).
- Listen and follow directions. Take notes, ask questions, and make sure you understand.
- Manage your time at work. Set priorities; keep a list of tasks needing attention. Do the least desirable things first-you will get through your list faster that way.
- Maintain a positive attitude and approach. Determine to make the most of every opportunity, be helpful, be a self-starter, open-minded and accepting, adaptable and enthusiastic. Show genuine interest.
- Avoid office politics! Keep your eyes and ears open and be aware of situations going on around you, but stay neutral and positive; use caution in making alliances and stating opinions.
- Be courteous to everyone, practice good manners, and don't forget the ever appreciated "please" and "thank you."

## POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

Problems such as the ones discussed below rarely occur, but must be addressed. If you have any problems while on Co-Op, you have three primary sources of help: your employer's Human Resources representative, Co-Op Director, and Department Head.

Overtime is a fact of life in many businesses. Be as accommodating as possible and, if the requests become unreasonable, try to negotiate with your supervisor. Policies on reimbursement for overtime vary from company to company.

Drug and lie detector tests are another fact of life in many businesses. If this should occur, you may be advised of consequences for refusal, noncompliance or failure to pass the test. Your decision is a very personal one.

Sexual harassment is NOT acceptable in any setting. If you encounter sexual advances, suggestions or vulgar remarks, say NO loudly and clearly to the person making the advances. Try to make your concerns known and defuse the situation. The following steps are advised, if necessary: (1) Record the incident, noting date, time, place, remarks and events of the incident, any witnesses. (2) Follow company procedures for proper notification as soon as possible. (3) Call your Co-Op Faculty Advisor immediately.

Cause for dismissal (being fired!) can include failure to comply with company rules, regulations and policies, safety procedures, insubordination, excessive absenteeism, etc. This is a real work situation and you can be fired.

## MAXIMIZING YOUR CO-OP EXPERIENCE

Although not all of the following items will apply to all jobs, use this checklist to help get the most out of your Co-Op work experience.

- **Professional Relationships** – Ask other professionals in your field to share their career journey with you. Ask hard questions about the positive and negative aspects of their journey. Learn from their experience (including their mistakes).
- **Mentors** – Find someone who is willing to be your mentor. This should be an individual separate from the immediate supervisor to provide advice, counsel or direction on personal issues related to your Co-Op experience, career plans, goals, continuing education, or other areas of importance.
- **Professional Organizations** – Inquire into professional organizations that are available to you. This may be an important resource in meeting other professionals in your field.
- **Company Social Events** – Participate in all company social events. This may include barbecues, picnics, baseball games, etc. Such events can build teamwork, strengthen working relationships, and allow you to meet new people in an informal setting.
- **Supervisor Evaluation** – Plan to meet with your supervisor regularly throughout your Co-Op experience. Ask your supervisor to provide both the positive and negative aspects of your work. Many companies utilize performance evaluation forms to record your performance. Use this as a learning experience and encourage honest feedback.
- **Reports** – Save samples of any written reports you wrote or were a part of preparing. Be sure to ask your employer for permission since some reports may contain confidential information that cannot be released. You can show these samples in future interviews to demonstrate your abilities.
- **Technical & Non-Technical Skills** – If you work with any equipment or software programs, keep a record so you will be able to use this information for updating your resume and preparing for future interviews. Also take every effort to demonstrate personal characteristics such as self-motivation, enthusiasm, independence, flexibility, etc. Employers place a high value on these skills and qualities.
- **Contacts** – Keep a list of the names, business titles, telephone numbers, fax numbers, and email addresses of your professional contacts. Be sure to include both professional and support positions. Do not overlook other key employees who can provide critical information about the company.
- **Letters of Recommendations** – Be sure to request letters of recommendation for your employment file before you leave. Turnover is not uncommon in industry and you cannot be assured your immediate supervisor will be available at a later time. Some companies have policies which prohibit recommendations on company letterhead. If this is the case, ask your immediate supervisor for a personal letter of recommendation.

## CSU STUDENT SERVICE INFORMATION

As a registered Co-Op student, you are entitled to services and benefits that go along with your status.

**Additional Classes** – You may want to take a class while you are on Co-Op, depending on the work assignment. You have the privilege of enrolling in courses at other CSU campuses (if space is available) for a single quarter/semester without going through the formal university application process. If you are already enrolled in the 12-unit Co-Op course, you have already paid the full fees. For details and enrollment forms, contact Virginia Severa at Cal Poly Academic Records (756-2396) well in advance.

**Heath Services** – If you are working near another California State University, you are guaranteed access to student healthcare services at other CSU's – Call ahead to find out what types of services are offered, hours of operation, etc. In addition, Counseling Centers at most other CSU's will provide a counseling session at no charge and make referrals to local community agencies. Again, call ahead. Make sure you have your current Cal Poly I.D. card (PolyCard).

**Library Services** – Library services at all CSU campuses are available to you. Your PolyCard should be adequate, but call your Co-Op Faculty Advisor if you need a letter verifying enrollment.

**What's happening back at Cal Poly** – Keep informed about Cal Poly and the Construction Management Department through our websites: [www.calpoly.edu](http://www.calpoly.edu) – [www.construction.calpoly.edu](http://www.construction.calpoly.edu)