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Supervisor’s Guidebook to Managing and Mentoring Your Co-op Student

Introduction

This guide is intended to support the Co-op student’s direct supervisor in assessing and developing the Co-op students’ learning during their Co-op semester(s).

The Computing Science Co-operative Education Program requires students to complete a minimum of three Co-op semesters (each spanning a minimum of 13 weeks) of full-time paid employment during the program.

The program integrates semesters of full-time study on campus with full-time employment. At the completion of the program, students are awarded a Bachelor of Science Degree with a Co-op certificate or designation.

The employment period coincides with regular academic semesters.

§1 Supervisor as Mentor

1.1 What do mentors do?

- Helping the student set long-term career goals and short-term learning objectives
- Helping the student understand the organizational culture
- Recommending and/or creating learning opportunities
- Transferring knowledge in areas such as communication, critical thinking responsibility, flexibility, and teamwork
- Pointing out strengths and areas for development

1.2 How does mentoring benefit the mentor?

The opportunity to:
- Contribute to a student’s development
- Develop leadership skills
- Reflect upon one’s own career
- Share experience and knowledge
- Discover new ways of thinking

1.3 How does mentoring benefit the student?

- Increases personal knowledge and organizational awareness
- Enhances understanding of one’s role in the organization
- Develops an environment that supports constructive criticism
- Provides an effective learning tool
- Stimulates thinking about potential future employment options

Some suggestions for ensuring a positive mentoring experience include:

- “Start where the Co-op student is”, by building on his or her strengths, interests and abilities
- Set your student up to succeed at the activity, by offering achievable challenges
- Allow the student to take small risks, but within a safe, supported setting
- Expose the student to activities, experiences and opportunities that he or she would not otherwise have
- Set consistent, scheduled meetings with the student
- Develop a tracking/reporting system for ongoing assessment
§2 Learning Objectives

2.1 Purpose

To learn and practise the skill of writing objectives. Objectives are a common management tool in today’s business world.

To establish a method of communication between the student and the direct supervisor, at the beginning of each work placement the student and supervisor will meet to ensure that both agree on expectations for the semester.

Some objectives will come directly from the requirements that the supervisor has regarding the work to be performed by the student (i.e., in order to carry out the specified job duties an objective will need to be achieved).

Some objectives may reflect the student’s desire to learn a specific skill or carry out a specific activity as part of their job (i.e., the student may ask the supervisor if they can become involved in, and so learn about, something related to the job and in which the student has an interest).

2.2 Characteristics of Objectives

Objectives must be clear and convey the same message to both the student and the employer. There are three essential characteristics:

End Result: An observable, what action is required? For example:
- Complete a task
- Learn to use a computer application
- Write a report

Conditions: In what time frame will this occur? Examples include:
- By when will this be done?
- Will the student do the activity unaided or with the assistance of others?

Measurement: How will success or failure be measured? This must be clearly stated so that all parties know the standard by which the work [con’t] For example:
- If the design is adopted for production
- If the modification solves the problem
- If the work meets specific internal quality standards
- How many times must the activity be done to demonstrate competence?

Students are required to prepare at least four learning objectives at the beginning of the Co-op semester, using the standard form.
§3 Site Visit

Typically each student and supervisor are visited on site at least once during their work placement (students outside the Metro Vancouver may receive a visit from a program coordinator or via phone/email).

The purpose of the visit is to allow the co-op coordinator to support and assess the student’s progress in personal, professional and social development in the work environment. This visit is intended to provide feedback for the student’s development and in some cases may lead to referral to university or employer resources. While on site, the appropriateness of the work being undertaken is also reviewed.

§4 Work Report

The formal academic assessment is based on a written work report prepared by the student. The work report will be evaluated by one of the Co-operative Education Coordinators in the School of Computing Science and will be graded as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Pass/Fail).

The work report is required for each semester of placement and will typically include: Work Environment; Reflection of Experiences; and Job Objectives.

As the student progresses through their co-op placements the genre of the work report may be adapted to better suit the student’s/employer’s overall goals.

4.1 Weekly Activity and Reflection Journal

To be better prepared to reflect and share meaningful feedback regarding the student’s progress during the site visit and within the final evaluation, we recommend a monthly review of the student’s weekly activity and reflection journal (see below). This will greatly improve the communication between students and their supervisors. We find that students who have this communication feel better connected to their supervisor, team and company, ultimately increasing the level of overall experience for both the student and employer.

Purpose
To provide a mechanism for:
- Regular documentation of work placement activities in a format that supports recording of experience (e.g. status reports for example in CS)
- Review of activities taking a wider, reflective view
- Establishing a regular channel of communication between the student and the company supervisor (note that informal day to day meetings or weekly team meetings do not necessarily address student’s specific learning)

Format
Attached you will find a copy of the student’s weekly activity and reflection journal. The first section asks the student to list a direct summary of activities for the week. Emphasis should be made on those activities that are new or which relate to the learning objectives. Each activity should be categorised using the STAR methodology - Situations, Tasks, Actions, and Results.
The second section deals with reflection on the activities of the week. This provides the opportunity to convey ideas or thoughts students have that are related to the work done.

Examples might include:
• How being involved in the activity might influence the student’s career goals
• Opportunities for improvement or savings for the company related to the activity (how the student could do it better!)
• Courses/topics that Simon Fraser University could include in the curriculum which would help prepare students for this type of work
• The role of the activity in shaping the company’s public image and consequently its social impact

This section also provides the opportunity to record any successes or issues experienced by the student.

The third section requires the student to rate their learning experience for the week. This feedback will be helpful to the company supervisor.

Each month the weekly journals are to be compiled by the student and submitted to the Supervisor for their comment, any action they think necessary, and signing.

§5 Employer Evaluation of Co-op Student

An evaluation of the student as an employee is done by the supervisor near the completion of the Co-op semester using the “Employer’s Evaluation of Co-op Student” form. The student should be aware of the contents of the evaluation at the early stages of their work placement. This is particularly important for the student’s growth and development. It is expected that employers discuss the evaluation with each student as this benefits their personal and professional development.

Students must ensure the evaluation is completed by their supervisor for submission by the due dates for each semester (Dec 15, April 15, Aug 15).