

Cooperative Education as Enrollment Growth Tool

Cooperative Education, or Co-op, is a program offering credit for work-related experiences (including internships) related to students' majors/programs. Portland Community College currently offers Co-op credit across the district in 34 programs, primarily in Career Technical areas. In 2015, Co-op enrollment peaked with 1561 students (headcount) participating. (Most students took multiple credits of Co-op.) Since then, enrollment has declined parallel to the college's overall enrollment with about 1150 students participating last year.

However, we have NOT seen a decline in Co-op and internship opportunities for students. In fact, the demand for interns from local employers has increased. We also have a large, untapped pool of potential Co-op interns in our transfer and general studies students. **Cooperative Education offers PCC the opportunity to increase credit enrollment while giving our students the real life experience that employers want.** This proposal will discuss how we can meet this opportunity for ourselves and our students.

Benefits

- Opportunities for Students

LinkedIn currently shows 488 internship openings in the Portland-Metro area. All of our major, local employers have internship programs. Employers who have hired PCC student interns in the past include Intel, Nike, US Bank, Amazon, Legacy Health Systems, Microsoft, Oregon Public Broadcasting, The Walt Disney Company, City of Portland, Portland Trail Blazers, American Red Cross, Darkhorse Comics, and many, many others (including small businesses and non-profits). The demand for interns has increased in the past few years as employers understand the need to recruit and train new workers earlier.

- Existing Curriculum and Support Services

Curriculum currently is in place that provides all PCC students access to Cooperative Education credits (designated by the 280 course number). These course have been SAC approved, passed through the Curriculum Committee and approved by the state. The majority of CTE programs already have Co-op courses, either as requirements or as technical electives. Transfer programs that offer Co-op courses include Biology, Political Science, Sociology and Writing. These courses are open to all credit students. Finally, all students have access to Co-op through CG 280A. This Co-op course is available to students who are in programs not offering Co-op, General Studies students, Transfer students, or non-credit students such as those in ESOL.

Jobs & Internships specialists are available at all campuses to provide coordination between employer, faculty and student. This includes internship site development, job search assistance for students, and processing of Co-op contracts and student registration. Standard Co-op contracts are provided by the J & I departments, as well as the Co-op Student Handbook and the

Co-op Faculty Handbook. All materials are also available online. Specialists can provide advice to faculty and SACs about creating new or updating existing curriculum.

Panther Works, PCC's online job posting tool, provides an easy way for employers to post and for student to access internship opportunities. All students have access through MyPCC.

- Flexibility

Because Cooperative Education is a work-based learning experience, flexibility is (and must be) built into the program. Students may start a Co-op experience any time during the term. Also, students may be registered for Co-op any time during the term. Students may pick varying credit levels depending on the total number of hours worked during the term. (30 hours of Co-op is required for each credit.) Students may also work between terms (earning credit) with the faculty grading option of "Course in Progress" or "CIP."

Departments offering Co-op also have many options. Co-op may be required or a technical elective in a program. Multiple sections of Co-op may be offered with varying credit options (based on hours worked). Departments may designate special sections for specific program goals. Co-op courses may be assigned to one Co-op faculty or assigned to multiple faculty. Unless requiring a Co-op seminar, there are no scheduling or facilities requirements for Co-op.

- "Pay As You Go"

The college pays for Co-op differently than most other credit courses. While faculty are assigned to sections, they are only paid as students are registered into the course and paid for each student separately*. This process is described in the faculty contract, but basically, faculty are paid for 5 total contact hours at the lab rate for each student registered. Consequently, if only a few students register into a section, the faculty is only paid for a few students. The more who are registered, the more the department pays. This allows for a level of departmental control over Co-op participation, as well as a built-in assessment of how popular Co-op is with students.

*If Co-op enrollment is sufficiently high to count as a full course load, departments can assign a section as part of load or an overload for faculty. In practice, this rarely happens.

- Equitable Student Success

Multiple studies have shown that internship experience is the college graduate characteristic most valued by employers. For the non-traditional student, for the economically disadvantaged, for those underrepresented in the workforce, and for any job seeker with barriers, internships offer a chance for access to employment and training otherwise not available. It allows community college students to compete directly with university students and with job candidates with experience. It also may be their first opportunity to experience workplace culture and values, and thereby build the cultural competence necessary to success on the job.

The college has policies in place that guarantee full access to internship and job opportunities for all students. We also have staff and resources available for students who need additional assistance finding and applying for internships and jobs. Of course, PCC is known by local employers as an excellent workforce source for their Affirmative Action recruitment.

- Enrollment Growth

Given the number of students at PCC and the number of internship opportunities in the Portland-Metro area, there is the potential for significant numbers of new Co-op enrollment. Our previous Co-op numbers point to a minimum of several hundred additional students participating in Co-op. With full college support, it would be reasonable to expect growth of about 100 new Co-op students a year across the district. But potentially, it could be higher.

Most Co-op students typically take 1-3 Co-op credits. Also, most students not in CTE programs take multiple terms of Co-op. Some students may have Co-op experiences with more than one employer. Students may also earn Co-op credits from more than one department (as long as both hours and learning objectives are separate for each).

Challenges

- Identifying and Training Faculty

As Co-op enrollment increase, departments offering Co-op will need to assess load for current Co-op faculty and make new faculty assignments as needed.

As a credit granting course, Co-op must have an assigned instructor. This instructor must meet the SAC approved qualifications. The instructor is expected to meet with the student to develop and approve individualized learning objectives, provide site monitoring, assess and grade learning. Faculty assignments and supervision are provided by the department and division as with any other instructor.

Many faculty at PCC may not have taught using a non-traditional, work-based learning model. However, the Co-op Faculty Handbook is available describing roles and specific tasks. Also, training materials were developed through the Co-op Task Force in 2009 and can be easily updated. To ensure compliance with PCC policies, it would be worthwhile to provide a refresher to current Co-op faculty of the practices expected of them.

- Support Staff Levels

Currently, there are Jobs & Internships specialists at all campuses assigned to provide Co-op support. Certainly in the short term, even with significant Co-op growth, the current staffing levels are adequate. (Again, in 2015, we had Co-op enrollments with several hundred students more than currently.)

However, we have several upcoming retirements and vacancies in Jobs & Internships. If these positions are not filled, it will be difficult to provide a sufficient level of support to grow Co-op.

- **Funding**

This proposal does not require any funds up front to initiate. We have the staffing and resources needed to begin this enrollment growth project. However, as Co-op enrollments increase, we will need to pay for additional Co-op faculty to teach the sections we will be adding. Also, in the past, some departments were hesitant to pay instructors to teach Co-op. All Co-op faculty must be paid for instructional duties as described in the contract.

- **Administrative Buy-in**

The key to success for this project is administrative support. Students will participate in Co-op if faculty encourage them to do so. Faculty will participate if their division deans encourage them to do so. Deans will participate if their Deans of Instruction encourage them to do so. And the Deans of Instruction will participate if they know Co-op is a priority for their campus and the college. What we really need is buy-in at the top levels and clear messaging from the administration that Cooperative Education is an enrollment tool we are going to use.

Recommendations

President Mitsui has made internships part of his strategic plan for PCC. Cooperative Education is the means for us to meet the needs of our students while addressing our enrollment challenges. But we must take practical and achievable steps to make that vision real.

1. Integrate Cooperative Education into PCC's Strategic Enrollment Management plan, including the Campus Enrollment Task Force. (Coordinators or specialists to participate and advise.)
2. Coordinate messaging from Deans of Instruction to Division Deans regarding Co-op priorities.
3. Identify interested faculty to receive training in Co-op. This can be formal through workshops and online training, or informal, one-on-one meetings with Jobs & Internships specialists. (We have done this both ways in the past, and both work.)
4. Market Co-op opportunities to students.
5. Outreach to employers (as needed) based on student and/or department interest.
6. Track Co-op enrollment for FTE and headcount. (Both are important.)

We have the Co-op internship opportunities for students. We have curriculum and enrollment tools available. We have staffing and resources ready to go. What is needed is the institutional will to make Cooperative Education an enrollment priority. If we do this, not only will our enrollment numbers increase, our students will receive real-life experiences that will further their career development and improve their lives.