Cooperative Education (Co-op)

Cooperative work experience is mandatory for a BS degree in Computer Science at RIT. Under the revised semester-based model of the BS degree in Computer Science, *the minimum expectation* is that students successfully complete at least *two semesters and one (full) summer of co-op*. Note, our co-op requirement is expressed in units based on RIT's academic calendar, not weeks or hours. There can sometimes be confusion about what the co-op requirement in Computer Science means. Part of this confusion stems from the fact that students may earn co-op credit by using one of two approaches. *The preferred approach* is that students find suitable co-op jobs with start and end dates that roughly align with start and end dates of an academic term and register for co-op for that term. *When registered for co-op, students are considered to have full time status.* Under the revised semester calendar adopted by RIT in 2017, we expect that when students register for co-op for either fall or spring semesters that they work at least 35 hours per week and that they work for at least 14 weeks. We expect that when students register for co-op for the full summer session that they work at least 35 hours per week and that they work for at least 12 weeks. Some students find co-op positions that involve working more than 35 hours per week or more than 14 (or 12) weeks. They certainly will benefit from picking up more practical experience as well as earning additional money, but when students register for co-op for a specific term they only receive co-op credit for that term no matter how many additional hours or weeks they work. For our purposes, we define an academic term (that is, fall or spring semester or a full summer session) as starting with the first day of classes and ending on the last day of the corresponding final exam period.

A co-op position must be full time, paid employment, of a professional nature and related to your career field. Approval is generally given for jobs that involve programming, software maintenance, documentation, testing and quality assurance, software design and other software engineering activities. Occasionally a co-op may involve activities related to computing, but more research or analytical in nature. Approval is not generally given for jobs involving data entry or simply setting up and maintaining computer labs. Approval is not automatically given to jobs involving systems or network administration or that call for creating web sites, for example (that is, jobs more appropriate to one of the other GCCIS programs such as Computing and Information Technologies, Human-Centered Computing, or Web and Mobile Computing, to name a few), but such instances will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The benefits to doing co-op are almost too numerous to mention. You get multiple opportunities to apply what you learn in the classroom to real-world settings. While on the job you will learn new skills, both technical and interpersonal, and you will bring that knowledge back with you when you return to take more classes. While registered for co-op, you are considered a full-time student, even though you are earning money (and even though you are registered for co-op, there are no tuition charges associated with being registered). You will be building a network of contacts which may ultimately lead to full-time offers once you graduate and you will certainly be enhancing your job search skills. Co-op affords students opportunities to sample aspects of the work world, such as working for a large or small company or working close to home or on the other side of the country. Not only will you get to travel, but your work experiences may help you decide on future career paths not to mention course choices when you return to take classes. Co-

op experiences tend to have a "cumulative effect". As students participate in more and more co-op blocks, they gain greater insight into what awaits them once they leave school, what talents they have already mastered, and what skills they need to sharpen.

Normally, incoming students right out of high school are expected to complete at least two semesters of full time classes at RIT before going out on co-op. Incoming transfer students are expected to complete at least one semester of full time classes at RIT before going out on co-op.

The official prerequisites for co-op are second year standing and permission of the department. Students who have not previously registered for co-op **must** successfully complete the **two-part orientation** sponsored by the Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education (http://www.rit.edu/emcs/oce/) before being allowed to register for co-op. The two-part orientation involves attending an "Intro to Co-op" workshop, which is offered each term, and completing an online orientation in myCourses. This orientation serves to introduce students to many of the policies and procedures associated with co-op as well as introduce students to the many services provided by the Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education. Students typically locate potential co-op or full-time jobs through a career platform known as Handshake (Job Zone, RIT's previous career platform, was replaced in August 2017). Students report potential co-op jobs through the main student page of the web site maintained by the Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education. Once positions are confirmed and verified, the Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education notifies the Department of Computer Science, which registers students for co-op on SIS. For each term in which a student is registered for co-op, they are considered a full time student. Students complete a co-op work report and employers submit an evaluation for each term in which a student is registered. In cases where the co-op position spans two or more consecutive terms, ***students are expected to report each term separately through the main student page of the web site maintained by the Office of Career Services and to file separate and different co-op work reports each term***. That is, while students and even some employers may view a co-op work assignment that spans multiple terms as a "single entity", it is important for administrative purposes to treat each term in which a student registers for co-op as separate and distinct!

Students must understand that in a sense they represent RIT as well as themselves. While working for a co-op employer, we expect students to behave ethically at all times and to demonstrate professional behavior. Holding students accountable in this regard actually begins before they start employment. **Once students accept a position with a company they are expected to honor that commitment.** Students who accept an offer of employment, but then renege on or back out of that offer *will* be assigned a permanent grade of "F" corresponding to that co-op experience. These students *must* also meet with the Associate Undergraduate Program Coordinator to discuss the matter further. Until this meeting takes place, the Department of Computer Science will not register the student for additional co-op blocks nor consider any petitions for co-op credit based on previous experience.

The Associate Undergraduate Program Coordinator assigns grades for co-op, authorizes permission to register, and handles all exceptions. Common exceptions include requesting to register for co-op for more than two consecutive terms or for registering for co-op during a student's last term at RIT or requesting permission to register for co-op prior to achieving second-

year standing. Other exceptions exist as well. Students should consult their academic advisor or contact the Associate Undergraduate Program Coordinator directly to discuss exceptions. Many requests related to co-op are initially made through academic advisors, department staff, or the Computer Science liaison in the Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education. Grades for co-op are either "S" (for satisfactory) or "F" (failure) and are assigned by the Associate Undergraduate Program Coordinator. Grades are not assigned until both the student's co-op work report and the employer's evaluation are filed for the same term. While it is unusual, occasionally a student files an inadequate co-op work report or receives a severely negative employer evaluation. Under these circumstances, the Associate Undergraduate Program Coordinator can request additional information or deny co-op credit (i.e., give a grade of "F").

There sometimes may be confusion surrounding how students can satisfy the co-op requirement and this stems from the fact that we support a second approach other than having students register for co-op during a specific term. Although it is *preferable* for students to register for co-op and to interleave terms in which they register for co-op with terms in which they register for classes, we recognize that different students face different constraints or have different needs. Some students may enter the program having already completed work experiences similar to what they might do on co-op. Some students return to RIT after co-op to take classes, but continue to work part time for their former co-op employer. For these and similar situations, the Department of Computer Science makes a form available to students that must be completed and submitted and which contains the specific details of what is required in order to earn co-op credit equivalent to one or more terms (which could be either semesters or summers). There are a number of important and perhaps not obvious restrictions that apply to using this approach to satisfying part or even the entire co-op requirement. **Students are highly encouraged to consult their academic advisor before making any plans that utilize this approach.** The form as well as supporting documents are reviewed and evaluated by the Associate Undergraduate Program Coordinator who determines whether co-op credit is granted and if so, how much. If you consider using this approach to satisfying part or even the entire co-op requirement, you are **still required to complete the two-part orientation** sponsored by the Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education (http://www.rit.edu/emcs/oce/) before we process your request.