

# The University of Southern Mississippi Career Services Cooperative Education Employer Handbook

Welcome to The University of Southern Mississippi's Cooperative Education (Co-op) Program coordinated by Career Services. As a co-op employer, you are a valuable part of the students' educational experience. Through this program, students will gain professional work experience and practical application of their classroom education. Employers also attain highly motivated workers who fill valuable needs within the organization. We look forward to working with you, and we know that your experience with this educational program will be positive.

## Definition of Cooperative Education (Co-op)

The Co-op Program is a combined effort of the University, employers, and students to enhance academic studies with work experience. This is a paid work experience, directly related to the student's major, and students do not earn academic credit for this experience. Work responsibilities are very similar to what students might experience in their first jobs after graduation.

## Getting started

To help promote a co-op position, submit a detailed job description to our office or post it on [Handshake](#), our online career center database. This enables the Co-op Coordinator and faculty to market the position and identify students who meet your qualifications. The description should include preferred academic major(s), general responsibilities, and anticipated salary range.

## Tips to facilitate hiring

It is extremely beneficial to begin the recruiting process early. Complete all necessary paperwork with Career Services and provide the job description as soon as possible.

Utilize the services available on our website [www.usm.edu/career-services](http://www.usm.edu/career-services). Employers can access our online database and search for candidates to fill their position, contact qualified students and schedule on campus visits for recruiting or interviewing.

Hiring decisions should be made in a timely fashion so students can adjust their class schedule if necessary.

Please contact students you decide not to hire so they may continue to pursue other co-op opportunities.

Together, the employer, the student, and the co-op coordinator agree on one of three work schedules outlined below. With the exception of a single-semester experience, the Southern Miss co-op program requires students to work multiple semesters.

1. Alternating – The student works full time for one semester, returns to school for a semester, and then works another semester. This is repeated until the commitment is fulfilled.
2. Parallel – The student simultaneously works approximately 20 hours per week while attending classes.

3. Single Semester – This opportunity qualifies as a type of co-op by virtue of its relationship to a student’s major and for-pay status. The work schedule is based on the employer’s needs. The Disney College Program is classified as a single semester, alternating work term.

### **Co-op Company Requirements**

Register with Career Services online database, Handshake and provide a job description that clearly outlines the position requirements, responsibilities and salary range.

- Contact Career Services as soon as you hire a Southern Miss student and provide us with the supervisor’s name, title and contact information.
- Provide our office with an evaluation of the student’s performance each work term. A performance appraisal form will be provided to you. If there is an existing form used by the employer, for this purpose, this may be substituted for the form provided.
- Notify our office immediately if a student’s work performance does not meet the employer’s expectations.  
Contact our office prior to placing a student on probation or terminating the student.

### **Salary**

Employers determine the pay scale for the co-op position. The pay should increase over time, based on increasing responsibility and the number of terms the student is with the company.

### **Benefits**

Employers should outline any benefits that will be offered. In some cases employers provide assistance with living arrangements since this is a concern for students who must relocate to accept a co-op.

### **Student Program Requirements**

- Undergraduate students must have completed at least 30 class hours.
- Graduate and transfer students must complete at least one semester of full-time coursework at Southern Miss or get a letter from their academic department supporting their participation in the Co-op Program.
- Must have a cumulative Southern Miss GPA of 2.5 or above and graduate students must have at least a 3.0 overall Southern Miss GPA. \* \* PLEASE NOTE - this GPA is based only on classes completed at Southern Miss; not transfer classes.
- Have a declared major with the Registrar’s office.
- Be in good standing with the University.
- International students must work through the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) International Center, Room 411.

### **Academic Performance**

All undergraduate co-op participants are required to maintain an overall Southern Miss GPA of 2.5 or above; graduate students must have at least a 3.0 overall GPA. An employer may require a student to have a higher GPA as part their position qualifications.

A student with a GPA below 2.5 who is already in a co-op position will be placed on probation. The decision to allow the work assignment to continue will be handled on a case-by-case basis. If a student's GPA drops below 2.0, the student will be suspended from the program until his or her GPA is at least a 2.5. The student will be allowed to return to work on a probationary status if the employer, co-op coordinator, and the student believe that returning to work is in the student's best interest. A student may also be suspended from the program for failure to meet other requirements noted in the Cooperative Education Student Handbook.

### **The Student at Work**

In order to maximize the value of the co-op experience for both the student and the employer, we recommend the following:

- Place students in a position specifically designed for co-op or internship experience, with an increasing level of responsibility.
- Require students to be registered in the Southern Miss Co-op Program. The benefits to the students include recognition for their work experience on their college transcript, the ability to maintain their financial aid and on campus housing status, and avoid education loans being called due by third party lenders.
- Counsel students regarding professional work habits and contact the Co-op Coordinator if problems or concerns arise during the work term.
- Assure that students will work for the entire work term unless extenuating circumstances make continuation of employment impossible.
- Refrain from offering full employment to students until degree requirements are met.

### **Code of Ethics**

The Cooperative Education Program at The University of Southern Mississippi adheres to a Code of Professional Ethics provided by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). We are dedicated to maintaining high professional standards and for promoting those standards of professional behavior outlined in this code to both our students and employers.

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