

# 2nd National Conference on Work-Integrated Learning

*1 October 1997  
Perdana Hall 1, Perdanasiswa Complex  
University of Malaya*

Essential Of An Effective  
Work-integrated Learning  
Programme

**Robert Vozella**

Thank you \_\_\_\_\_.

I am delighted to have once again been extended an invitation to address a Malaysian National Conference on Cooperative Education. Over the past several years, I have had the honor and pleasure of working with Tan Sri Dr. Sanusi in a number of forums and on a number of issues pertaining to cooperative education. I can therefore speak to his deep commitment to this form of education and to his being one of the foremost, effective and articulate spokespersons for it in all of Southeast Asia.

Cooperative Education has alternately been referred to at various times and in various places as a distinctly unique educational model, concept and strategy. Additionally, it is referred to in countries such as the U.K. as Sandwich Education, in Australia as Work Integrated Learning and close by in Indonesia as Link and Match. But irrespective of the particular terminology attached to it, the underlying guiding principle is always the same - that what students learn in the workplace is a valuable complement to what they learn in the classroom.

Having said that, however, when one examines how cooperative education is structured and implemented in institutions throughout the world, one is struck by the tremendous diversity in models. Indeed, in the U.S. alone, there are well over 500 institutions that profess to having some form of cooperative education, with no two being exactly alike.



Perhaps Dr. James Wilson, a noted expert in cooperative education, offered the most plausible explanation for this when he stated "there are no rigid rules for building a co-op program. The final character of any program will have been shaped from the conception of cooperative education adopted and from a determination of what 'will work' in the institution. The resulting program must reflect what is sought by instituting co-op in the first place and the institutional culture within which it will operate."

My presentation this afternoon will focus on the significant variations which are to be found in the structure and administration of cooperative education programs throughout the world. In considering how you may implement a co-op program at your own institution, it would be well for you to keep in mind the vast array of options which are available to you.

## **Overarching Principles Applicable to All Co-op Programs**

- There must be a formalized plan in place that involves alternation of campus based classroom study with multiple periods of work experience of approximately equal length.
- Co-op work experience periods are considered a formal part of the student's curriculum.
- A student retains his/her status as a student at the University during periods of co-op work experience.
- The co-op work experience should be related to the student's academic, career and/or personal goals. The scope of work and/or areas of responsibility should increase with advanced formal education.
- Students are considered employees of the hiring organization during cooperative work periods and are compensated for work performed.
- A process must be in place to monitor student workplace experiences and student performance in each work period must be evaluated.

## **Variations in Models of Cooperative Education Programs Worldwide**

### **Required vs. Optional**

Decision carries with it pros and cons and implications for the way in which the program is perceived and marketed.

### **Required Program**

#### **Pros**

Inclusive - all students meeting minimum academic standards eligible

Category of students who can benefit significantly from co-op

#### **Cons**

Program loses some appeal to students & faculty

Marketing somewhat more difficult

Necessity of developing wide range of co-op jobs

Entry level to highly sophisticated

Satisfaction/frustration level of co-op staff high

**Optional Program**

Elective - includes pros and cons stated above

**Selective Program****Pros**

Work with and market academically qualified students

High employer receptivity

More uniform performance on the job

Acceptance into program viewed as honor

Faculty acceptance of concept may be higher

**Cons**

Job development may be more intense

Expectations of students greater

High risk/high gain element

If jobs aren't good, students get turned off

Program reputation suffers

Average students generally can't participate

Often stand to benefit the most

Testimonials from successful alumni

## **Disciplines Involved**

### **Selection Criteria**

Faculty support

Student interest

Employment prospects

Probability of success

Co-op most prevalent in professional curriculums

Noteworthy programs in humanities/social sciences in U.S.

## **Alternating vs. Parallel Programs**

Proximity to employer base

Needs of employers

Student interest

Impact on curriculum/budget

Need for "trailer" courses in alternating program

## **Eligibility Requirements**

### **Preparation**

Ranges from individual counseling sessions to group orientations to formal introductory courses

Co-op starting points extend from latter part of freshman year to beginning of junior year

Readiness of students and availability of entry level jobs key to when students first begin working

### **Single vs. Multiple Employers for Students**

Philosophy guiding program the determining factor

Student Oriented vs. Employer Oriented

Post graduation employment prospects vs. career exploration

Minimum commitment to employer advisable



## **Integration of Work and Classroom Experience**

Non existent to significant emphasis

Students tend to compartmentalize their experiences, hence the need to promote integration

Faculty need to be creative in modifying their teaching to take full advantage of their students' experience and incorporate it in their presentations

## **Role of Technology**

Impact on job search, referral process and academic advising

Access to co-op positions available in hard copy listings, newspaper want ads format and on-line

New initiatives in distance learning, integration and cross training

It is obvious then that cooperative education is a viable, flexible concept that can be adapted to almost any institution in most any culture. The primary point that I wish to leave with you today is that irrespective of the model that you believe best suits the needs of your institution and your student body, significant benefits will accrue to both constituencies from a well designed co-op program.

For your students, co-op brings academic study to life. They apply abstract principles and ideas discussed in the classroom to real work situations and come back to the academic environment with new understanding. Seeing the connection between work and study sharpens a student's intellectual curiosity for a lifetime.

Co-op also allows students to evaluate their career decisions early on in their college years. They discover how their skills, personalities and interests match up with the occupations they have in mind. By the time they graduate, students not only have relevant experience, they know they are pursuing a career that's right for them.

In addition to providing this dimension of practical knowledge, co-op also greatly assists in fostering personal development. Graduates of a co-op program are often more mature, sophisticated and well rounded than their counterparts. By having had the opportunity to apply their classroom learning to real world work problems, they invariably enhance their problem solving,

communication, critical thinking and team work skills - all of which attributes are demanded by the corporate community in today's college graduates. Finally, co-op significantly improves after graduation job prospects by virtue of the interaction with potential employers on a regular basis.

From the vantage point of colleges and universities, co-op affords the following benefits:

It expands the range of educational opportunities for students by integrating learning at the workplace into the academic program.

It builds a positive relationship between the institution and the local business community.

It assists in the recruitment and retention of students.

It improves student and faculty access to state of the art equipment and technology by using the workplace as a laboratory extension of the classroom.

And finally, it helps keep college curricula up to date with changes in industry through constant input from the employment sector.

Thus, in summation, cooperative education is in many respects an ideal model of education for the 21st century, one which is sufficiently flexible to be implemented in a wide variety of institutions and one which responds so well to the needs of today's and tomorrow's students and the companies which will ultimately employ them.



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## **Length and Number of Work Periods**

Length varies from a few months to a full year

Normal time frame is a semester

Work periods should be multiple in nature

Accreditation requirements should be considered

Employers feel "longer is better"

## **Credit vs. Non Credit**

In U.S. about a 50/50 split

Perception of faculty, students, external public regarding the program

Impact of academic constraints on the work experience

Additive vs. non-additive credit

## **Fee Structure**

Separate registration fee for co-op

Costs of program rolled into cost of tuition