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ABSTRACT

Cooperative education programs, a nontraditional blending of practice and theory, have become an important feature of current higher education. Some educators estimate that by 1984 half of the higher education institutions in the United States will have developed some form of cooperative education. The Federal government's recent involvement in cooperative education (funding authorized in 1968 through higher education amendments, with funding as an independent entity in the fiscal year 1972) has generated much interest among students, educators, employers, and communities. Under this program, colleges and universities contract with outside employers to hire students at current pay scales. Grants are awarded to institutions primarily for planning, implementing, strengthening, and expanding new or existing program efforts; in addition, some grants are provided for training and research. The latest Federal appropriation for fiscal year 1975 is \$10.75 million, with Office of Education funding being limited to programs that alternate periods of full-time academic study with periods of full-time employment. Descriptive examples of programs are included: Trenton State College, New Jersey; Brevard Community College, Cocoa, Florida; Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio. For further information: Cooperative Education Program, Bureau of Postsecondary Education, U. S. Office of Education, Washington, D. C. 20402. (EA)

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# Education Briefing Paper

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T. H. Bell, *Commissioner*

April 1975

## COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

The transition from college to the world of work is perhaps one of the most traumatic periods of life faced by many young people. Often recent graduates find that all of their thousands of hours of classroom learning and after-school studying did not truly prepare them for the day-to-day realities encountered on their first job.

It has been clear for some time that giving students an opportunity to alternate periods of full-time academic study with periods of full-time, off-campus employment is a constructive approach to a vexing problem. The blending of practical work experience with classroom learning--cooperative education--has now become an important feature of today's education scene.

Under the Federally-funded Cooperative Education program, colleges contract with outside employers to hire students at the current pay scale. Major employers are the government (Federal, State, or local) and private firms. Nonprofit organizations, such as hospitals and social service agencies, also participate.

Coordinators of Cooperative Education programs in the colleges try to match a student's job assignment to his or her career goals or academic field of study. For those students without clear-cut vocational objectives, a series of different job assignments can be provided to ensure diversity of experience. The time spent working--a semester, for example--is matched by equal time in the college classroom.

## PROGRAM HISTORY

The first Cooperative Education program began in 1906 at the University of Cincinnati, when the Dean of Engineering, noting that most professions cannot be taught wholly in a classroom setting, decided that students should receive a certain amount of practical on-the-scene experience. This idea of combining practice with theory was intended to give students a better understanding of the abstract concepts presented in class.

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From this modest beginning, the growth in Cooperative Education increased at a steady, though moderate, pace. In the 1960's, the pace accelerated. From approximately 45 institutions with programs in 1960, the figure has increased in 15 years to an estimated 1,000 colleges and universities with more than 160,000 students participating. Some educators estimate that by 1984 at least half of the institutions of higher education in the United States will have developed some form of Cooperative Education.

Although Federal funds in support of Cooperative Education were authorized by Title IV, Part D, of the Higher Education Amendments of 1968, the program was not funded as an independent entity until fiscal year 1972. Prior to this, in fiscal years 1970 and 1971, one percent of the sum appropriated for the College Work-Study program was allocated for Cooperative Education. The full funding level of \$10.75 million was reached the next fiscal year, and the latest appropriation for fiscal year 1975 equals this amount.

The Federal government's recent involvement in Cooperative Education has generated much interest among students, educators, employers, and the communities they serve. The following table reflects this.

FY	FUNDING LEVEL	AVERAGE GRANT	NO. OF GRANTEES	NO. OF APPLICATIONS RECEIVED	REQUESTS IN \$\$\$
70	\$ 1,540,000	\$20,000	74	206	\$ 8,500,000
71	1,600,000	17,582	91	344	12,300,000
72	1,700,000	20,238	84	291	11,000,000
73	10,750,000	30,281	355	642	28,000,000
74	10,750,000	33,527	371	641	28,000,000
75	10,750,000	*	*	770 (est.)	33,000,000

(\* Figures not available)

Why such interest in Cooperative Education? A number of important events from the 1960's to the present account for the upswing: the rise of the 2-year community college, declining college enrollments coupled with shrinking financial support, inflation, recession, and a generation of students seeking to make practical contributions to society. But perhaps most important is increased acceptance of the notion that practical experience adds significantly to a student's total education.

#### HOW DOES IT WORK?

Grants are awarded to institutions primarily for planning, implementing, strengthening, and expanding new or existing Cooperative Education program efforts. In addition, support may be provided for training and for research.

Training has been principally for Cooperative Education program coordinators and employers and for those personnel who directly administer the program. Research grants are being used to investigate the cost/benefit of Cooperative Education students to their employers, to determine various methods of preparing students for Cooperative Education assignments, to develop "models" of several types of Cooperative Education programs, and to suggest guidelines to higher education institutions for planning their own Cooperative Education programs.

Federal involvement is limited to those Cooperative Education programs that alternate periods of full-time academic study with periods of full-time employment. There are, however, other program variations which are not funded by the Office of Education, most notably the parallel plan, in which students work off-campus one-half day and attend classes on-campus one-half day.

Of the grants awarded for the 1974-75 academic year, 349, totaling \$10 million, are being used by institutions to administer the program; 17, totaling \$553,000, are being used for personnel training; and 5, totaling \$197,000, for research. These funds may not be used for student salaries, and no program may receive Federal support for more than 3 years.

#### BENEFITS FOR EVERYONE

The benefits of Cooperative Education are reaped equally by students, employers, and the institutions that offer the programs.

Students are aided in many ways. Cooperative Education incorporates actual work experience into the educational process, thus helping to enrich a student's academic and occupational aims. This experience will enable students to try early career choices and to change programs or academic majors before graduation if they feel unsuited to a particular area of employment.

Also, students are able to use money earned in Cooperative Education jobs for their college education. Their earnings can help pay for tuition, room and board, books, and other college expenses. Also, most institutions award credit hours for each period of academically related work experience completed.

Because of their previous work experience, students who participate in Cooperative Education in college often have a head start on their contemporaries in the job market. In addition, on-the-job training increases self-confidence, self-awareness, and a sense of responsibility.

The public and private agencies and businesses that contract with the colleges to hire Cooperative Education students benefit by filling their immediate manpower needs and by having a pool of proven talent to draw on later when students graduate.

In addition, the time and expense of job orientation and training are measurably reduced by hiring former student-employees already familiar with company policies and the demands of the job. Many Cooperative Education employers say that the turn over rate is usually lower with Cooperative Education students who are hired after graduation than with other professionals.

Institutions also benefit when they become involved in a Cooperative Education effort. Besides helping to bolster enrollments by offering this non-traditional blend of practice and theory, Cooperative Education promotes cooperation with the community and helps the college or university to make better use of its facilities.

#### PROBLEMS

Despite its success, Cooperative Education still faces problems. For example, because of the present economic situation, some employers are cutting back on the number of new Cooperative Education students they are hiring. As a result, coordinators have to hunt harder for jobs for their students. In some cases students must themselves search or are permitted to use jobs they now hold as their co-op experience.

Another potential problem occurs when a Cooperative Education program receives only half-hearted support from the administration and faculty. Some faculty members feel it contaminates the academic atmosphere of a university. Others balk at the idea of giving classroom credits for jobs. Without the undivided support of the university community, even the best Cooperative Education program may fail.

Despite these problems, most colleges and universities involved in Cooperative Education classify it as a success.

#### EXAMPLES

Within the general framework of the program, many schools initiate their own variations. Here are some examples:

New Jersey. The Cooperative Education program at Trenton State College is tailored to the needs of the individual. Students are permitted to earn up to six credit hours per semester of work. In consultation with their academic advisers they write a contract which states their goals and objectives, their qualifications, and how they plan to document what they learned on the job (usually through research reports or projects).

There are, however, a few unusual approaches. For example, one student, an art major with a co-op job as a museum guide at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., suggested in his contract that he would earn art credits after hours and on the weekends by copying the masters whose paintings hang in the museum. When his co-op assignment ends, his art work will be evaluated by art instructors and the grade assigned on that basis.

Trenton State is also involved in cooperative programs with inmates of the New Jersey State prison system. Once an inmate qualifies for the prison's release program, he is able to enroll at the college. If he wants practical experience to use upon his release from prison, he may choose to participate as a co-op student. The arrangement provides obvious benefits: it gives the student an opportunity to gain both practical job experience and college credit, and it increases his sense of self-worth and self-respect as he prepares himself for a career upon his release.

Florida. Like Trenton State, Brevard Community College in Cocoa, Florida, also uses a learning contract, yet it believes the success of its program is centered around the extensive use of its faculty co-op coordinators. These coordinators -- 22 in all, representing each academic discipline on the campus -- act as combination counselors and evaluators. The coordinators help the students prepare their learning contracts, meet with each student every 3 weeks while he or she is on a work assignment, and evaluate performance through on-site visits. To gain the nine credits earned in a co-op job, the student is also required to demonstrate newly acquired skills through mid- and end-term reports, examinations, and/or employer evaluations.

Community colleges usually attract students who are older, have families, and have part- or full-time jobs. Many are veterans or women returning to the classroom. To better serve this kind of student, Brevard has its own distinct program.

For example, since students at a community college are less likely to travel, most of the 96 employers participating in the program at Brevard are located in the vicinity. A great majority are connected with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and nearby Cape Canaveral.

Also in an effort to ease the economic crunch, Brevard is inviting students already employed in a particular field to use their jobs as Cooperative Education training. The stipulation here is that the outside job must relate to the major field of study. For instance, a disc jockey studying for a degree in communications works part-time at a radio station and receives credit for it through Cooperative Education.

Ohio. Central State University, a predominantly black institution in Wilberforce, Ohio, defines its Cooperative Education effort as an "optional, academic, career-oriented program." Fifteen of the 25 curriculum offerings at the school participate in Cooperative Education and students are placed in jobs from Minneapolis to Boston to Tampa. Work assignments operate on a 6-month basis and a student may earn 24 quarter hours (the approximate equivalent of two terms in school).

A \$30,000 training grant was awarded Central State to help develop inter-institutional training programs. Working with 10 other colleges and universities, Central State, through on-site workshops and technical assistance, helps these schools coordinate student recruitment, program management and operation, and employment opportunities.

The success of Central State's Cooperative Education program is attributed to two key factors: strong enthusiastic support from the college administration and faculty members, and the qualified, well-organized staff whose management skills are instrumental in implementing the program.

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For further information:

Cooperative Education Program  
Bureau of Postsecondary Education  
U.S. Office of Education  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Telephone: 202/245-2147