

Aligning Co-op Practices with Company Goals

Panelists:

1. Jonda Wisotzke-Byargeon – Timken
2. Charles Ambos – SCANA
3. Kristy Carr – GE Energy
4. Jim Haney – Dow
5. Teresa Herbert – MeadWestvaco
6. David Bryson – AFL Telecommunications
7. Connie Paff – Duke Energy

Q1. Does your company use a centralized or decentralized approach to seek co-op students? What benefits and problems result from your approach?

Timken: Decentralized – There are 26 facilities, each with different needs. The advantage is that the co-op program acts as a hiring pipeline for specific locations. The disadvantage is that co-ops do not get to rotate through different locations.

SCANA: Combination – The program is centralized but recruitment is decentralized. There are engineering, IT, and accounting co-ops and all have common start dates and a common experience (similar orientation, exposure to senior staff, cross-business learning). All co-ops are treated as full-time employees as an effort to improve retention. About 18% of co-ops accept full time positions while about 40% return for another co-op rotation. The budget for summer co-ops comes from the corporate office while fall and spring co-ops are covered by the specific business unit budgets.

GE: Combination – centralized organization, localized recruitment. However, recruiters look for candidates who would fit GE as a whole and not just GE Energy.

Dow: Centralized – Co-ops go to various locations to give students a better perspective of Dow (North America). More than 80% of co-ops accept full time positions at graduation.

- Dow targets schools based on partnership with the schools, types of degrees offered by the school (say if a school offers engineering, accounting, and computer science degrees than it is ranked higher than a school offering just engineering graduates).
- Retention increased when the program went from a decentralized system to a centralized one.
- From the second rotation on, the program coordinators try to match students to their preferred locations.
- Techniques for building relationships with schools:
 - o No full time recruiters – depend mostly on employees who are alums of the schools with which Dow seeks relationships.
 - o Employees conduct classroom activities such as teaching a senior seminar class.

MeadWestvaco: Switched to centralized last year after the decentralized system proved to be difficult to coordinate. Program run by HR specialists.

- HR coordinators are learning about all businesses
- Co-ops do not rotate. The advantages are that each business can get a good view of the student and can evaluate for full time positions and that the students can get a better understanding of the business.

AFL: Centralized – Students can rotate if they want. All co-ops are currently from Clemson University.

Duke: Combination – Some groups (e.g. nuclear) have their own program while other groups have a centralized program. The company is developing the co-op program since they mostly had interns before.

Audience Question: What is the best way to coordinate interviews?

Clemson: All co-op interviews are conducted together over a set number of days.

- Recruiters prefer to separate co-op interviews from those for full-time positions.
- Most companies use their co-op programs to fill full-time positions.

GE: Prefers co-op interviews to have a set time so that companies can compete fairly for the available talent.

University of West Florida: Students can tend to procrastinate if interviews are not carried out at a set time.

Q2: How successful are you at retaining co-ops as full-time employees?

Timken: Very successful! Co-ops are treated like full-time associates and given challenging assignments.

SCANA: Co-ops brought in for retention purposes. Co-ops need to be flexible since they may be asked to perform various tasks and have long hours. They are given real exposure so that the student can decide if he/she wants a full-time job.

- Given housing allowance and completion bonus at the end of each rotation.
- Want to retain 100% of co-ops since a large group of employees is about to retire.

GE: Co-ops get real, business-impacting jobs. They also have informal interaction with members of leadership programs since GE wants them to consider joining one of these programs at graduation. Conduct “Lunch and Learns” for co-ops and senior leadership. GE has about 80% retention.

Dow: Dow would like all full-time positions to be filled by co-ops since the company has already invested time, money, and training in the students.

- Social interaction and meaningful work contribute towards high retention. Hiring managers have to have detailed work plans before they can be assigned co-ops. All co-ops live in the same housing complexes. Have approximately 80% retention at graduation. Dow offers co-ops full-time jobs before senior year usually at a location at which they have worked previously. No generic offers are made since these typically have low acceptance rates.

MeadWestvaco: Noticed that co-ops that come back as full-time employees stay with the company longer than other hires who did not co-op with the company before.

- Do not make offers to all co-ops either because of poor performance or because of a lack of jobs. The company makes extra efforts to place high performers (even if the students must be referred to other locations of the company).

AFL: Co-ops are treated as full-time employees. AFL starts talking about future positions from the beginning.

Duke: Offer \$800/month as a housing stipend for students who are 50 miles away from their home or school. Housing stipends are more important for rotational programs than for localized programs.

- 30-35 co-ops graduate per year. All have an opportunity to interview for a full-time position. Flexibility for relocation is preferred. About 12-15 new positions are accepted each year. Offers are location-specific.
- Co-ops rotate through different roles and are treated as full team members.