



## **Explaining Co-ops, to be distinguished from Internships**

In the Northeast, Drexel University in Philadelphia and Northeastern University in Boston are the schools most well known for their co-operative education programs, more commonly referred to as “co-ops.” These programs enable students to have full-time work experience in their field (or fields) of study for six months at a time while they are still undergraduates. The co-ops are essentially partnerships with businesses and non-profits that are well vetted by the universities to ensure that the student experience is meaningful, and students earn credit toward graduation for doing them. Most are paid, with Drexel students earning an average of \$18 per hour and Northeastern students earning an average of \$20. The jobs may be in the same city as the university or may be in another part of the country or in some cases even another part of the world.

Students at these schools have a choice of doing one co-op and graduating in four years or three different co-ops and graduating in five years. They pay the same tuition either way, and either way, their real-world experience gives them an immediate advantage in the job market. Also, their earnings can help defray the cost of their education without affecting their eligibility for financial aid.

Furthermore, the opportunity to integrate relevant real-world applications with what students are learning in the classroom can enhance their educational experience profoundly. They may have a greater appreciation of their initial coursework when they view it as preparation for their co-op, and when they return to the classroom after working in the field, they bring a deeper, more mature perspective to their studies.

Both Drexel and Northeastern require all their students to engage in some sort of experiential learning. This can also take the form of research, community service, or study abroad, but at both schools the most popular way students fulfill this requirement is through co-ops. Freshman year is always reserved for classroom learning, but at both Drexel and Northeastern it includes a course that introduces students to the co-op program. After that, the scheduling options differ slightly at the two schools.

Drexel has four terms per year, fall, winter, spring and summer, and students doing a single co-op must do it during the fall and winter terms of their third year, after which they take classes on campus for the next five consecutive terms to graduate at the regular time, upon completion of the spring term of their fourth year. Students who do three co-ops do them during the fall and winter terms of their second, third and fourth years before returning to the classroom for a full fifth year. Northeastern's program is similar although they have two summer terms and offer a bit more flexibility in terms of when students can do the co-ops.

Students at both schools also have an option to take night courses while they are working at co-ops during the day. Drexel allows them to take 4 credit hours for free, but Northeastern always charges per credit hour. At both schools students are guaranteed university housing for their first two years, including while they are doing co-ops. After that, Drexel has enough space that students who wish to stay on campus usually can do so. Northeastern, on the other hand, has an Office of Off-campus student services that helps them find apartments in the area.

Drexel offers co-ops in almost all of its disparate majors ranging from Business and Engineering to Architecture, Fashion Design, Film & Television and more. Northeastern, too, offers co-ops to students enrolled in all its divisions, including Health Sciences, Arts, Media & Design, Business, Computer Sciences, Engineering, and more.

Cornell University also has a co-op program, but theirs is only for Engineering students. The University of Cincinnati, which actually pioneered co-op education back in 1906, gives students credit for a total of 75 weeks of co-op work, which they alternate with classroom work for the second, third, and fourth years of their five-year program.

Georgia Institute of Technology boasts of having the largest non-mandatory co-op program in the nation, and students interested in co-op education might also wish to explore the options at University of Florida in Gainesville, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, Rochester Institute of Technology, and Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana.