# COOPERATIVE EDUCATION IN THE LIBERAL ARTS

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Despite the acknowledged importance of exposing liberal arts students to the world of work, it is apparently difficult to establish cooperative education in the liberal arts. This study attempts to find out if the difficulty actually exists in a representative group of programs and, if it does, how practitioners resolve the problem. To this end, a questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 100 institutions, taken from the listing of *A Directory of Cooperative Education.* The findings give evidence that difficulties abound, and that both diligence and ingenuity are needed to overcome and manage the many problems associated with coop in the liberal arts.

The questionnaire established the context, at each institution, for a liberal arts cooperative education program, and provided data for comparing the liberal arts component with the rest of the cooperative education program. From the sample of 100 institutions to which questionnaires were mailed, 82 responded. These included 52 institutions that offer baccalaureate or higher degrees and 30 that offered diplomas, certificates or associate degrees. Five respondents reported that their coop programs no longer existed; one had established a program that was "not yet off the ground"; one submitted coop material, but did not answer the questionnaire; and three had programs that were not coop education, but self-analysis. Thus, a total of 20 were not necessarily the genuine article in terms of alternation of classroom and work experience. Because this matter makes little difference to the intent of the study, these 20 programs are included in a total of 75 respondents whose data make up the substance of this report.

The 75 programs have been in existence from one to 58 years; the mode is five years; and 52 of the 75 programs have been in existence for five or more years.

To summarize the general findings of the questionnaire, the majority of cooperative education directors "report" to academic supervisors of top rank. They come, almost to a person, from the institution in which they currently work, on the average have less than one staff member to assist them, and make large use of faculty who are awarded for the most part by release time or extra compensation for filling any coop roles. Coop programs, in the majority, include one or two

work experiences for the student, as a minimum: regular tuition is paid for the work experience; and the majority of coop programs are not self supporting.

Most respondents reported that it was easier to establish and maintain coop programs in a large rather than small unit of an institution and for the most part they used the same criteria for coop students who already had paying jobs as for those who were not at the time employed. On the average there were 48 students in each parallel and 56 in each alternating program.

Twenty-two respondents thought students in business or occupational courses were easiest to place. In order of priority, respondents thought the easiest disciplines from which to place students were business courses, engineering, chemistry, social sciences, secretarial science, and biology. The least easy were liberal arts, business courses (including accounting), education, chemistry, music, data processing, and foreign languages. There was virtually unanimous agreement that it was more difficult to establish coop ed in the liberal arts than the career areas. Only four respondents stated that coop in the liberal arts was less difficult or not any more difficult to create and maintain than coop in the professional areas. However, there was also general agreement that stidents in the liberal arts needed work experience as much as, or more than, career students. What were some of the reasons given for the difficulty, and what is being done about it?

Liberal arts faculty, employers, and students, in that order, are perceived to be the stumbling blocks toward successful coop programs in the liberal arts, according to many of the respondents. For example: "The faculty of professional programs see value of coop to their programs more clearly than do many liberal arts professors," "Less resistance from faculty in career areas," "Getting liberal arts faculty involved is difficult," and "Co-op work more accepted by career/ professional faculty."

A few of the comments about employers and liberal arts students follow: "Engineers, printers, technologists, etc. are more career oriented," "Liberal arts students tend to be non-directed," "Career students have identified specific areas of employment possibilities and have entry level skills earlier in college than pure liberal arts students" (but one respondent warned against "forcing premature career decisions"), "There is strong demand for co-ops in career areas by employers," "Co-op is a recruiting device in career areas," and "Just what is it that Liberal Arts Students want to do?"

What is being done about resistance to coop education in the liberal arts? There appears to be no magical formula for success. Diligence and continuing education seem to help. More often than not, however, practitioners have reported that they are "still working on it," "It is still not resolved," or "It's quite a problem."

Wherever the resistance, faculty, employers, and students seem to be getting "sold." In terms of faculty involvement, the Eastern Oregon State College respondent wrote, "We involve faculty in defining what types of employment experiences would benefit their students and then develop student demand for placement opportunity." Other comments include "Press educational content of experiences and promote department ownership of programs," "Educate, involve, and pay" (Mt. St. Mary's College), "Bring off-campus people from other geographic areas" (Saddleback College), and "Give faculty support, honoraria, release time, direct payment" (South Central Cooperative Education Consortium).

The following suggestions were made for committing employers to employing liberal arts students: "Lots of time spent on job development . . . employers have to be educated to appreciate liberal art's value" (Beaver College), "Try to sell 'people-oriented' approach – enlisted instructors' help in making contacts" (Walters State Community College), "Invited local non Co-op heads of big industry and business to 'sales' luncheon. Had Co-op employers and students make short sales talks — very effective" (Pitt Technical Institute), "Use employers to teach mini-courses on campus" (Antioch College), "By persuading the employer that liberal arts students are capable, well-rounded individuals, able to quickly learn tasks that the employer wants to have carried out" (Eastern Illinois University), "By trying to sell more industries on the advantages of coop" (University of Idaho), "Through diligent efforts to develop job slots" (Southern University), and "Determine transferable skills and 'sell' these to prospective employers" (University of Northern Iowa). As stated earlier problems are overcome usually by both diligence and ingenuity.

To break down the resistance of liberal arts students to coop ed, career development courses and seminars were advocated by many respondents. Also, North Carolina State University's School of Engineering suggested that one can "get at students through the faculty – give students wide geographic job opportunities"; Clinch Valley College recommended the use of "advertising, posters, school paper, media, and talking to students." Fort Lewis College wrote: "Our original emphasis was on full-time placements. We are now including more part-time placements. (1) Some are local internships for psychology, sociology, and political science majors, unsalaried, but worth credit and (2) We also grant some Co-op general elective credit to students in our Japan Program under the concept of practical living experience in a foreign culture as opposed to a practical job experience."

Despite the resistance to coop ed in the liberal arts by many groups, respon-

dents seem to feel that it is important for liberal arts students to have some kind of work orientation. Although many respondents call their own approach, "traditional," many of them too have practices and procedures that are creative and useful as models. This study was directed toward finding out how practitioners solve some of their problems in the liberal arts, and the following listing suggests a variety of approaches:

1. "The Life/Work Planning course as a prerequisite to students going out for work experiences. As part of this course, having professional recruiters from local industry come in to do mock interviews of students in our television studio so that students can watch themselves interviewed on video tape to see how they might improve" (Asnuntuck Community College).

2. "The succeeding cooperative education student is trained by the outgoing Co-op student causing the least amount of interruption to the employer" (Lewis Business College).

3. "Certificate of appreciation to employers. Encourage participation of extended day students" (Leeward Community College).

4. "Job development with international corporations to utilize foreign students who live in a country where the corporation has a plant: one work period in U. S. and one work period in the native country" (Elmira College).

5. "(1) Co-op Club, (2) Decentralization (faculty are served by decentralized co-op assistants), (3) Incorporated co-op into Career Services Center from the beginning, and (4) Close cooperation with Placement" (Brookdale Community College).

6. "We give a non-credit s/u grade which goes on the student's transcript. Also give a special Certificate upon graduation; also give certificates to Co-op employers" (Auburn University at Montgomery).

7. "High school female 'career-orientation' programs on campus; Project 'Comet' (Career Opportunities for Minorities in Engineering and Technology) for high school minorities on campus; a panel of co-op students speak to each Division (i. e., Business, Humanities, Engineering, etc.); required Freshman Orientation course" (West Virginia Institute of Technology).

8. "We have worked out our coop program with our 3-2 dual degree program. A student begins his/her coop program during the 3 years at Westmont and completes the coop program during the 2 years at an engineering school" (Westmont College).

9. "Development of a new 'general education' syllabus for students going off on co-op. Development of new integrative techniques with classroom faculty. Bringing employers to campus more often" (Antioch College).

10. "Established a network of sharing coop employment opportunities with other colleges" (University of Minnesota).
11. "The local school board has given us $3400.00 per year to place education students in the schools" (Clinch Valley College).
12. "Parallel plan – 1971. Measurable learning objectives – 1973. Agreements with upper-division schools to establish 4 year track. Career planning workshops. Assessment of experiential learning" (Broward Community College).
13. "Established a complete curriculum with students' using their work place as learning center. On-campus seminars supplement and enhance internship learning" (University of San Francisco).
14. "Students are placed with approval of their faculty advisor, coop director *recommends* award of credit, but *faculty* awards credit by counter-signing (with Director of Coop) a Grade Report" (Roger Williams College).
15. "Our workshops for employers to educate them on deafness and other handicaps and value of co-op. Our unique preparation process for employers and supervisors introducing them to deafness before jobs are even discussed, creating job markets for deaf previously untapped. Our Job Bank with other deaf institutions. Our co-op exchange program with other institutions. Highly individualized approach to job development" (Gallaudet College).
16. "Placing students in volunteer positions with non-profit agencies in jobs that relate to their majors. We used CETA funds that were granted to pay students' wages" (Philander Smith College).
17. "Combination of straightforward work experience after the first year nursing with preceptorship program after second year . . . I think the only one of its kind in Canada" (Okanagan College).

**Summary**

The apparent difficulty of instituting and maintaining cooperative education in the liberal arts has been discussed, argued, and questioned many times in the past. This study of 100 institutions with coop programs, with a response rate of 82%, produced findings that tend to document the difficulty, but the study also points to a number of policies, procedures, and conclusions that should be helpful in indicating how institutions manage their coop programs. Most practitioners feel that getting liberal arts students into coop education is worth the effort, and in this study they have provided numerous suggestions for integrating cooperative education and the liberal arts that should help others resolve their problems.