

# **Architecture Department Cooperative Education (Co-op) Guidelines ARCH 485/495**

Cal Poly recognizes the benefits of work experience to shape and refine a student's career goals. In order to assist students in making this work experience into an opportunity for reflection as well as action, the "co-op" was created.

Cooperative education is available to all Cal Poly students although individual programs may have additional guidelines. The university's specific requirements for a "co-op" experience, including a calendar and forms, can be found at the Cal Poly Cooperative Education web site located at [www.careerservices.calpoly.edu/Students/Coop/coopforms.htm](http://www.careerservices.calpoly.edu/Students/Coop/coopforms.htm).

The following supplemental guidelines have been developed in order to expand on the university procedure for the co-op and specifically address the needs of architecture students seeking credit for work experience that is related to their career goals.

## **I. The Nature of the Co-op Experience**

The co-op is a type of field experience in a particular area of interest to a student's professional career goals. The co-op is tied to academic credit so that the experience is more than "work-for-hire"; rather, it is a workplace-based opportunity supported by observations and reflection by the student on their experience. While co-op students must be paid for their position in a firm or office in order to receive university credit, the experience is intended to bring academic as well as financial benefits to the student.

## **II. Starting the Co-op**

All co-ops should begin with a meeting between the student and the architecture department faculty advisor to the co-op program. (Check with the architecture department office to find out the name of the current faculty advisor.) Students should come prepared to the faculty advisor meeting having already reviewed university co-op forms and either having a co-op firm selected or be seeking advice on potential placement in a firm.

Once the co-op firm has been selected, students complete a *Cooperative Education Form* and register for either ARCH 485, if working less than thirty (30) hours, or ARCH 495 if working thirty hours or more. Credit for these courses is six (6) or twelve (12) units, respectively. This form is available at the CAED Advising Center (05-221) or from the university Cooperative Education Program office on campus.

## **III. Course Submittals**

Co-ops are "Credit/No Credit" courses. Successful completion of the course is dependent on the submittals outlined by the university co-op program on their web site (referenced at the beginning of this document). In summary, the student needs to submit the following: (a) a work information form identifying the co-op firm, (b) monthly progress reports to the faculty advisor,

(c) a supervisor's evaluation of your performance in the firm, (d) a student (self) evaluation at the end of the co-op experience, and (e) a co-op professional (final) report consolidating the student's observations and reflections related to career goals and work performed in the firm. In addition, the faculty advisor will conduct a debriefing at the end of the co-op experience and evaluate the student's submittals in order to assign a grade.

The exception is the co-op professional report which consists of the however does not follow this pattern and must be written and composed by each student. The report represents a core summary of personal and professional experiences in the workplace. Moreover, because architectural careers involve visual as well as written expression, the department has placed emphasis on the use of visual and written material in shaping the student's final report.

The first four submittals (a)-(d) above are completed using forms coming from the Cal Poly Cooperative Education web site. The co-op professional report (e) represents a core summary of personal and professional experiences in the workplace. Moreover, because architectural careers involve visual and written expression, the department has placed emphasis on the use of visual and written material in shaping the student's final report.

The co-op report consists of three parts: (1) a journal, (2) a thematic paper, and (3) a sample portfolio. The three can be fully integrated into the document, can be presented as three chapters, or can be separate documents. The content of each is explained in more detail below.

*Journal:* The journal is a weekly summary of your personal reflections on your experiences on a day-to-day basis in the firm. The approximate length of the journal is one page per week, more if necessary to adequately describe the experience.

*Thematic paper:* Cooperative experiences are reliant on students being placed "in the field". Therefore, the report on the work experience is based on fieldwork rather than library research. The paper is not a chronology of events or activities. It is meant to be a meaningful, reflective summary of your experience in the firm. The paper can expand on aspects of practice that relate to the firm's operation that include client-architect relationships, design technology, economics of practices, and so on. Students are encouraged to add illustrations (sketches, photos, or drawings) to their paper. Usually this is in 8-1/2" x 11" format.

*Sample Portfolio:* In addition to a thematic paper and journal, students must present graphic examples of work done during the co-op in the firm. Any format is acceptable.

#### **IV. Completing the Co-op**

Although the university has broad oversight of the co-op program, most interaction during the program takes place between three parties: the co-op student, the firm or office, and the faculty advisor. All reports completed by the student and their supervisor are submitted to the faculty advisor, not the Cooperative Education Office on campus.

At the end of the term, students should make an appointment with the faculty advisor to their co-op experience. This is considered the co-op "debriefing". Students should submit their materials one week before their appointment to give the faculty advisor time to review the submission. At the time of the debriefing appointment, the student should be prepared to discuss their experience. Based on an assessment of the completed submittals, the faculty advisor will assign

either a “credit” or “no credit” grade. If a student needs additional time to complete their submittals, the faculty advisor can record a temporary grade of “RP” (Report in Progress). The grade will remain until the work has been finalized and the debriefing takes place. University regulations dictate the amount of time available to complete the course in order to receive a grade change. This is currently one-year for undergraduate students.

## V. Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can I perform a co-op for two quarters in a row? *Yes, but there is a maximum of 12 credits allowed for the co-op experience counting towards graduation.*
2. Can I get IDP (Intern Development Program) credit? *No, not for a work experience that also counts towards college credit.*
3. Does the architecture department have its own forms to complete? *No, the architecture department provides guidelines to help students with their final submittals but this requires no additional paperwork.*
4. What if I go on vacation during the co-op such as during the summer quarter? *Students must complete an average number of hours/week for the co-op experience. If an absence is necessary, the student should record the time out of the office and the reason for the absence in the journal as part of the pattern of record keeping.*
5. Does the co-op course fulfill any department requirements? *Yes. Credit given for the co-op can be used to fulfill CAED Professional Electives similar to any course with an ARCH prefix. Some of the credit may also be applied to other requirements such as Environment and Behavior or Urban Context depending on the type of co-op setting.*
6. Does a co-op in the architecture department have to be in an architect’s office? *No. There may be other settings that are applicable to career exploration for architecture students. For example, positions related to design-build or architectural education may be acceptable. Check with the architecture department’s co-op faculty advisor to determine if a particular work setting is appropriate to the co-op experience.*

## CO-OP SUBMITTALS CHECKLIST

Student Agreement Form (available from Student Career Services)

Work Information Form (available on-line)

Monthly progress reports (available on-line)

Supervisor’s Evaluation (available on-line)

Student (Self) Evaluation (available on-line)

Co-op Professional Report (consisting of the following three items)

- 1) Journal
- 2) Thematic Paper
- 3) Sample Portfolio