Cooperative Education Standards

STANDARD ONE: Mission and Goals

The program's mission clearly defines its purpose in the context of its host institution and identifies the distinctive nature and benefits of cooperative education.   In addition, the mission clearly states who the program serves and what it seeks to accomplish.   The program's goals describe how its mission will be achieved. The program's mission and goals are developed with and recognized by institutional leadership and in consultation with program constituents. Mission and goals are used to guide the program's practices and policies and to evaluate effectiveness.

Guidance:

The program's mission defines the scope of the program, its values, and character. It is prepared after thoughtful consideration of its purpose and is periodically reviewed and updated. The views of program constituents, generally students, faculty, employers, and the host institution are considered and the mission is approved by the appropriate institutional authority. For example, institutional evaluation may occur during the institutional reaccreditation self-study.

Program goals describe the benefits constituents can expect as a result of participation. Goals should be stated as outcomes or competencies. Goals are expressed in observable terms so that achievement can be evaluated. From goals, measurable objectives are developed. Objectives are the activities that programs conduct to achieve a goal. This would include effective definitions and literature that match the standard and defined parameters.

An ACCE accredited co-op program is expected to demonstrate:

1.1   Clearly defined and guide program activities

1.2   Developed through collaborative participation

1.3   Periodically evaluated and approved by the host institution

1.4   Publicized to constituents and available to potential participants

1.5   Aligned with the institution's mission and goals and consistent with ACCE Standards

STANDARD TWO: Institutional Relationships

The institution has effectively included cooperative education as in integral part of the academic program and has implemented policies and practices appropriate to the achievement of program mission and goals.

Guidance:

Effective cooperative education programs are integrated into the academic and administrative life of the host institution. Program integration, stability and institutionalization are processes that can take decades to fully establish. All successful and sustainable cooperative education programs have attained substantial progress in these areas. Success may be demonstrated through academic and administrative policies and practices; partnerships and collaboration with faculty and other departments, such as sufficient staffing and funding; ethical standards that govern program activities; and a process for program evaluation.

An ACCE accredited co-op program is expected to demonstrate:

2.1   How effectively the program is integrated into the academic and administrative culture, policy, and practices of the institution

2.2   How the academic nature of the program is ensured including the awarding of academic credit

2.3   Effective role of faculty in program support, endorsement, development, and evaluation

2.4   Finances, staffing, and administrative processes that are sufficient to achieve program mission and goals

2.5   Qualified professionals to lead the program and to carry out program goals

2.6   Ethical standards that govern behavior of all program participants are established, communicated, and periodically reviewed

2.7   Processes used to periodically evaluate program effectiveness

STANDARD THREE: Employers

The program effectively selects, prepares, engages and monitors employers so that students achieve learning outcomes consistent with program goals. In addition, employers are included in periodic reviews of program effectiveness.

Guidance:

An essential element of effective cooperative education programs is employers who provide high quality cooperative education work assignments to students. Qualifying employers prior to the start of work assignments is essential to student safety and to determine employer willingness to support the goals of cooperative education and to abide by program requirements. Program quality is enhanced by employers who consistently hire students year after year, compensate them, and provide opportunities for students to develop knowledge and skills through multiple work terms. Employers also have an important role in the supervision and evaluation of student performance and program effectiveness. Success may be demonstrated through documentation of the level of employer involvement and effective processes for communication between the program and employers throughout the co-op cycle, reflecting commitment and promoting collaboration and student learning. Some examples may be documentation of student employment and compensation, agreement forms, tracking of interactions with supervisors and processes used to solve problems during the work term.

An ACCE accredited co-op program is expected to demonstrate:

3.1   Employment locations are appropriate working/learning environments and employers participate in the learning aspect of the program

3.2   Work assignments are planned, professional, progressive, and supervised

3.3   Participating employers support program goals including providing compensation and opportunities for student development through multiple work assignments

3.4   Long term relationships with employers

3.5   Ethical standards that govern the conduct of program staff, employers, and students are established, communicated, and periodically reviewed

3.6   Employer recommendations for program improvement are considered in the program evaluation process

The program demonstrates that it provides an environment at employer locations that supports the achievement of student learning outcomes.   In addition, programs demonstrate that a student learning and development focused approach guides preparation, reflection, and monitoring activities

Guidance:

Effective Cooperative Education programs provide a means for students to apply course content in real-world settings to enhance the educational process. Education occurs inside and outside the classroom where students can develop, through experience and reflection, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to succeed in their academic programs and upon graduation. The alternation of courses and work experience provides a developmental model for students to apply major/career-related information from the classroom as they are learning it. Criteria for program participation serves to assure that, students have the ability to succeed academically. Ethical standards guide what programs promise and are included in student preparation and expectations for student conduct. Program policies and characteristics consistently contribute to an intentional system aimed at producing student learning outcomes. Success may be demonstrated through productive partnerships with faculty and employers, work schedules that allow for sufficient time for learning to occur, academic documentation, sites that are focused on learning, appropriate supervision, completion of learning objectives and reflection assignments structured to enhance the development of defined learning competencies and methods to link learning from student work experience back into the classroom, Examples may include program plans, academic policies and manuals, documentation of student participation; experience identified as part of the curriculum, such as on transcripts, curriculum requirements, and grades., job descriptions that reflect relatedness to student preparation, and syllabi focused on promoting learning outcomes.

An ACCE accredited co-op program is expected to demonstrate:

4.1   How effectively student participation criteria and implementation supports student learning outcomes and applying course content

4.2   How work is structured and learning objectives established to insure that major or career-related learning outcomes occur in real-world situations.

4.3   Formalized processes exist for the alternation of campus-based classroom study with multiple periods of work experience. Work sequences may be full time (40/hr/wk), part time (20 hr./wk) and/or combination, but others (e.g. yearlong assignments) may be acceptable if they are consistent with program goals and ACCE standards.

4.4   To what extent students are prepared for work experiences, provided opportunities to reflect and be monitored during and be debriefed at the conclusion.

4.5   Ethical standards governing student behavior are established, communicated, and periodically reviewed.

4.6   How effectively students persist in fulfilling the minimum time requirement.

4.7   How progressive responsibility is promoted and documented

STANDARD FIVE: Student Learning Outcomes and Program Effectiveness

The program demonstrates the effective use of a student learning assessment process for each work term and a cumulative one at the end of the student's participation. In addition, the program has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness and its impact on its constituencies.

Guidance:

Effective cooperative education programs assess that program curriculum, activities and processes are relevant and producing educational benefits. Evaluation methods and goals are consistent with the institutional environment and measure incremental and cumulative learning as they relate to personal, academic, work, and career competencies for students. All constituencies contribute to assessing overall program effectiveness and the impact of their participation on their respective entities. The effective use of assessment data toward institutional commitment and program improvement is a sign of the health of the program. Success can be demonstrated through surveys, assignments that provide documentation, measurable objectives, cumulative resumes or interviews, and examples of adjustments made in program or curriculum structure based on the analysis of assessment data to improve outcomes for all constituencies and to better align with institutional mission and goals.

An ACCE accredited co-op program is expected to demonstrate:

5.1   An evaluation process is in place through which results are used for improvement.

5.2   Student learning achieved compliments or advances knowledge that is in alignment with the student's educational goals and the institution's educational goals.

5.3   Assessment of learning outcomes is in place for each work experience and cumulative assessment for the entire co-op experience.

5.4   Assessment results are used to improve the student learning experience

5.5   Assessment results are used for program improvement.

5.6   Assessment results are used by the institution and other departments, for instance to support institutional goals or to provide feedback into the classroom.

5.7   Assessment results may be used to provide feedback into the classroom

5.8   Assessment of the impact of participating on employers and faculty partners may be used to improve relationships and to document impact on the community and the classroom environment.