Bridging the Value of International Co-op between East & West

APAIE 2018, Session 3: New Modalities in Global Engagement and Mobility

Key constructs

The University of Waterloo has one of the biggest co-op (type of work integrated learning) programs in the world whose quality and rigour results in spectacular post-graduation employability outcomes. The university has an ongoing mandate of increasing internationalization on campus, a significant portion of which is achieved by facilitating co-op work terms / internships abroad (~900 annually outside of Canada and USA; 2900+ to USA). Across 60+ countries, annually, private and public sector organizations provide co-op work term opportunities to our students.

The value of co-op at UWaterloo is as rich and rigorous as the academic programming students undertake. Students are trained intensively to be valuable additions to an organization’s core staff. Outstanding performance, deep contribution to a company’s business case, rigorous application of academic knowledge, and facilitating an excellent ‘fit’ within the organization are a few things expected of them.

However, the value proposition of co-op might not be the same across educational models in different geographic areas. The differences in this value proposition provide excellent opportunities to work with organizations and institutions outside Canada and USA towards developing a co-op platform to bridge the requirements for co-op work terms at UWaterloo and the value that co-op students can bring to the hiring organization.

Key take-away(s)

Our multi-axes framework for onboarding student supervisors in the workplace across the globe includes:
- Assigned service teams, with dedicated Account Manager: helps with engagement and retention
- In-person structured discussions on process and risk management: ‘just in time, just enough’ communication ensures that hiring organizations are not overwhelmed with information, but can act on requirements as needed
- Toolkits to facilitate the pedagogical underpinnings of co-op: provides a consistent understanding of the various aspects of expectations, mentorship, supervision, outcomes
- Standard evaluation instruments: sets the context on which our students get evaluated; is also an instrument for organizations to monitor and measure performance of their hires
- Student and employer feedback via web technologies: this is for us to better understand what stakeholders need and how to best bridge the two sides

Our experience using this framework has resulted in higher satisfaction indices reported by students and supervisors, and greater engagement by organizations and institutions who now approach us with the confidence that they shall be adequately supported in building a co-op platform par excellence.

~ Shabnam (Shay) Ivković, University of Waterloo, Canada – Co-operative Education ~