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A Case Study of Engineering Students' Experiences with the Co-Op Application Process

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ABSTRACT

Engineering faculty and advisors emphasize the importance of obtaining industry experience in addition to academic learning. One way universities encourage their students to obtain hands-on work experiences is through cooperative education (co-op) programs. Previous studies have examined the advantages and disadvantages of co-op participation, but the application process for students has not been closely examined. Studying this process will show how academic institutions and companies can potentially enhance the student experience of applying for a co-op position. This study examines student experiences with the co-op application process based on interviews with engineering students at a research-intensive university in the Midwestern U.S. Results indicate that barriers to co-op participation include conflicting offer deadlines established by companies and unclear processes for students in employer matching. Research findings regarding the co-op application and placement process can potentially inform universities and companies on how students use resources designed to help students during the co-op application process, as well as the challenges some students encounter.

KEYWORDS

Cooperative education, personnel selection, engineering