

Student Insights into Co-operative Education Services

Study Purpose:

This study explored student views about Co-operative Education services and program content to help identify challenges faced by Co-op students in terms of securing work term(s). By interviewing students who were withdrawing from the Co-operative Education program, we hope to improve the services and supports offered to future Co-operative Education students. To graduate from Saint Mary's University, co-op students must withdraw from the co-op program if they have completed less than a total of three work terms.

The Exit Interview was conducted with the student's Work-Integrated Learning Advisor while the Exit Survey was distributed online via Qualtrics to each withdrawing student who completed an Exit Interview.

Exit Survey:

Two out of 135 students polled completed the Exit Survey. Service and support provided by the Work-Integrated Learning Advisors for these students was rated as "excellent", based on receiving information and support about career and co-op job postings. The Co-op program overall was rated as "excellent" and "good".

One student mentioned there was limited availability of Arts positions, but still had a great experience in the program. Students felt there was an adequate number of workshops, networking, and professional development events and would 100% recommend the Saint Mary's Co-operative Education Program to other students, citing the benefits of skill development and the potential of full-time job offers even before graduation.

Exit Interview:

Out of 135 possible student responses, we received 51 interview responses.

When we analyze the data collected during the Exit Interview, we can see that over 64% (33 of 51) of participants reported their reason for leaving the program as a desire to graduate from Saint Mary's University. 12% (6 out of 51) survey responses confirmed students received full-time job offers prior to graduating.

Results showed that 13% (7 of 51) stated they were unable to find work terms in their field, suggesting more emphasis could be placed on finding jobs in those areas. 30% (15 of 51) indicated that the job opportunities did not meet their expectations. This suggests that the expectations of students coming into the program regarding the available jobs was varied, and differed depending on student, faculty, and career goals.

Future research should include the majors and degree programs of students who expressed limited availability of jobs in their field, so that the co-op office can seek out these positions and offer more options to co-op students.