

Are Interns or Co-ops Right for My Business?

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April 15, 2013

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Could your company use more resources? Fresh ideas? Help with special projects? Then the various cooperative education or internship programs in North Dakota may be right for you. The following information comes from David Lehman, NDSU Extension Service Manufacturing Specialist.

With high turnover and the challenge of finding labor in many industries and areas in North Dakota, these programs can be another tool in many companies' labor pool toolbox.

The terms "cooperative education" (co-ops) and "internship" often are used synonymously, but here they will be referred to as internships. Internships essentially are career-related, paid work experiences provided for high school, college or university students.

Employers hire students as interns to achieve company goals by providing work opportunities. Students apply their newly acquired skills and gain valuable work experience in their respective fields. This also allows them to become part of a network that has the potential to serve them later as they enter the job market.

Internship programs are available for almost any industry or position. The underlying factor is that the position must provide the student with valuable experience that they can apply in their future careers. Internship programs are commonplace in many fields, including engineering, information technology, human resources, safety, health care, marketing and general business, but many businesses don't realize that internship programs extend well beyond that.

The duration of these work experiences vary by educational institution, company and individual student's needs. The most common scenario would have the student working for a company full time for one or two semesters (while taking a break from on-campus learning), but that isn't always the case.

Employing a student is less costly than hiring graduates in their fields. The cost will vary by industry, field, company, location, etc. There are also a couple of programs in North Dakota that may match employer contributions to help offset the cost of employing students. This compensates employers for their role in offering valuable work experience to students.

Companies utilize the various intern/co-op programs across North Dakota for many reasons. The following are reasons these programs may be a good fit for your company:

- Your company experiences high turnover and/or has a difficult time finding labor.
- Students are an excellent potential labor pool for future full-time hires (hiring local talent leads to lower turnover).

- Interns are ideal for special projects.
- Hiring interns frees staff for other responsibilities.
- Interns provide a fresh perspective and enthusiasm.
- Internships/co-op programs provide a potential link to advances in your field or industry.
- Interns offer potential for increased workforce diversity.
- Having interns allows employees to build supervisory skills.
- Employing intern's costs less than hiring additional full-time employees.
- You are helping students gain real-world experience and creating a smooth transition for them to full-time employment.

If you are not sure whether an internship/co-op program would be a proper fit for your company or you would like additional information regarding the various programs available, visit www.ag.ndsu.edu/manufacturing/article-archive/lehmans-terms-fact-sheets/ or www.ag.ndsu.edu/manufacturing, or contact David Lehman, NDSU Extension Service manufacturing specialist, at (701) 730-3956; 2720 E. Broadway Ave., Bismarck, ND 58501; <mailto:david.lehman@ndsu.edu>; or www.facebook.com/ndsumanufacturing.