

## DEVELOPING YOUR OWN CO-OP

Each quarter, a number of students going out on co-op develop their own internships. Students do this for a number of reasons which include, among others, a desire to be in a certain geographic location or practice area in which there are few, if any, participating co-op employers, and/or to have more control over the selection process. The purpose of this memorandum is to assist you in the process of developing your own co-op. While it will give you some pointers, remember that the co-op staff is available to help you in this endeavor. Developing your own co-op includes the following:

- \* Identifying prospective internship opportunities;
- \* Preparing your resume and cover letter(s);
- \* Timing;
- \* Directing your materials to the right person and following up with him/her;
- \* Preparing for the interview(s);
- \* ***Before*** accepting an offer, checking with the Co-op Office to make sure that the internship is an appropriate placement;
- \* ***After*** accepting an offer, having the employer send a letter to the Co-op Office confirming your employment.

### **Identifying Prospective Internship Opportunities**

There are many resources, some of which are identified below, available to assist you in identifying potential legal employers. A critical word of caution: **You may NOT contact any co-op collecting employers to discuss positions with them.** All co-op collecting employers are listed alphabetically in the Participating Employer Book available in the Resource Room. If in doubt, check first with the Co-op Office.

Non-Participating Employer Loose-Leaf Binders - In the co-op section of the Resource Room, there are loose-leaf binders that contain quality questionnaires from students who have developed their own co-ops. These are a useful resource because they include descriptions of the employer and the student's responsibilities, and usually have the name of the supervising attorney and address of the employer (this information will need to be confirmed as it could have changed over time). In addition, these employers had at least one Northeastern student working in their office and, therefore, should be somewhat familiar with the Co-op Program.

The binders are organized by practice type - clerkships, corporate, firms, government, legal services and advocacy organizations, and international. Within each practice type, the quality questionnaires are organized alphabetically by state, and within each state they are filed alphabetically by the name of the legal employer.

Inactive Co-op Employers - In the co-op section of the Resource Room, there are a number of copies of inactive employer books printed on blue paper. These Blue Sheet Books contain descriptions of co-op employers who have not hired students in a number of years or requested to become inactive. This is a useful resource because these employers are familiar with the Co-op Program and may have had one or more Northeastern students working for them. On the blue sheets, under "Co-op Staff Remarks" it is noted when the employer was made inactive. Since the information on the blue sheets is current only as of the date of the employer's inactive status, students should verify the mailing address and other descriptive information prior to contacting the employer.

Career Planning Resources - In the Career Services section of the Resource Room there is literature on various types of practice, directories of legal employers, and books offering advice on career planning and job search strategies. These include directories of international legal internship opportunities. Spend some time perusing the shelves and reviewing the list of resources that is available.

Computerized Job Search – Internet searches can yield much information regarding potential co-op employers, internship programs, etc. The best way to begin is to access Career Services' list of law-related career sites listed on Career Services' web page. There you'll find links to many informative web sites with specific information regarding potential employers. These include web sites listing private, government, international and public interest opportunities.

Alumni/ae. Professors. Friends. Neighbors and Relatives - One of the best ways of finding out about prospective internship opportunities is to speak to people who have a connection to Northeastern, such as alumni/ae and professors, as well as other people you know, including friends, neighbors and relatives. They may be able to help you learn about and gain access to different legal employers. Again, remember that the non-communication rule is applicable.

### **Preparing Your Resume and Cover Letter(s)**

There are very useful tips on how to prepare your resume and cover letter(s) in the booklet entitled "Guide to Writing Effective Cover Letters in the Job Acquisition Process," available through the Co-op and Career Services Offices. The booklet includes sample cover letters, including letters for students developing their own co-ops.

When you are developing your own co-op, you must send a cover letter along with your resume. Since you are not usually applying for an advertised position, your cover letter is particularly important. It is an employer's first impression of you and is also a sample of your writing skills. The cover letter should generally include the following: an introductory statement of

who you are and the type of position in which you are interested; a brief description of what is unique about Northeastern (co-op, written evaluations); a statement explaining why you are interested in that employer, the skills and experience you have which make you qualified for a position with that employer; and a closing paragraph indicating that you will follow-up, would like to arrange an interview, etc. You may want to enclose the co-op program brochure that provides a brief overview of the Co-op Program. Copies are available in the Co-op Office. Remember to keep cover letters short (usually a four paragraph maximum), *error-free* and, if possible, try to convey genuine interest.

### **Timing**

If you are developing your own co-op, you must plan ahead. The difficult thing about timing is it all depends. You want to make sure that you start early enough and are aware of common vacation times (Thanksgiving, Christmas, summer vacations).

For co-ops within the United States: For the fall, winter and spring quarters, you should try to send your cover letters and resumes to employers five to six months in advance of the beginning of the quarter in which you will be going out on co-op. Make sure that you state clearly in your cover letter the time period in which you will be available for work.

The summer quarter may be much more difficult to plan for because law students from other schools are also actively looking for summer positions. Therefore, if you are looking for a summer position, begin researching and contacting legal employers during the previous fall. Find out from each employer in whom you are interested when s/he would like to receive resumes for a summer position.

For co-ops abroad: While you must plan ahead in developing any co-op, you should plan way ahead in developing a co-op abroad. There is a longer lead time for international jobs than many other kinds of work.

Think carefully about which rotation you pick. Although there are many students competing for summer internships, many government and non-governmental organizations, such as the UN, may be used to having summer interns and it may be easier to compete for a position in a formal internship program than to develop an internship position on your own at other times of the year. Some organizations pay stipends only during the summer. The deadlines for applying to summer internship programs vary and may be as much as nine months in advance of the summer. On the other hand, some organizations may welcome full-time student interns during other quarters. In any case, you generally should begin contacting prospective employers at least six to nine months in advance of the beginning of the quarter in which you would like to work for them.

You should also be aware that there might be special requirements for an internship abroad, such as work visas or permits. Therefore, you need to leave yourself plenty of time to secure a position and process the necessary paperwork.

### **Directing your Resume to The Right Person and Following-Up With Him/Her**

You should be aware that legal employers receive many unsolicited resumes from law students seeking internships and post-graduate employment. The chances of your resume appearing on the right person's desk when they happen to be contemplating hiring an intern may be slim. Therefore, to enhance your chances of obtaining an internship, we recommend that you direct your letter and resume to the right person and follow-up with a telephone call.

To identify the right person, call the employer *before* you send your resume and find out the name, including the spelling, and correct title of the person to whom you should address your cover letter and resume. This person may be a recruitment coordinator (who may not be an attorney), a hiring partner or another lawyer in the firm or organization whom is responsible for hiring law students. This telephone call may also enable you to find out additional information about the employer and the likelihood of an internship there. ***Do not forget to follow-up with the employer after you send your materials by calling to find out whether they have been received and whether there is any interest in interviewing you.*** Do not be afraid to be assertive.

### **Preparing for the Interview**

To assist you in preparing for an interview, the Co-op and Career Services Offices hold several workshops during the year on interviewing skills and publish written materials, including a booklet entitled "The Interview Process: Strategies & Techniques for Successful Interviewing." In addition, the Co-op staff is available to assist you, individually, with preparing for an in-person or telephone interview.

An interview for an internship that you develop on your own will be very similar to other co-op interviews. Some differences may be that: you may not be competing with other law students for a position; you may have to spend time convincing the employer that having a full-time legal intern for a three-month period will be worthwhile; you may have to articulate more clearly what you want to get out of the co-op and what the employer responsibilities will be; and you may have to discuss and negotiate salary.

### **Before Accepting an Offer, Check with the Co-op Office to Make Sure that the Internship is an Appropriate Placement**

Before you accept an offer, you must check with the Co-op Office to make sure that the internship is an appropriate one. We will ask that you describe the employer and the anticipated responsibilities and confirm that you will be working full-time (minimum of 35 hours per week) under the supervision of an attorney or judge for 11 weeks.

**After Accepting an Offer, Have the Employer Address a Letter to the Co-op Office Confirming Your Employment**

After you have accepted an offer *and before the end of the academic quarter preceding your co-op*, it is your responsibility to get a letter from your supervising attorney addressed to a co-op advisor that includes the following:

- \* The Employer plans on hiring you or taking you on as a “full time” legal intern, for at least 35 hours per week for at least 11 weeks (specifying the exact dates);
- \* The name of your supervising attorney;
- \* A brief description of the employer and the type of legal work the employer does;
- \* A paragraph specifying what your anticipated legal internship responsibilities will be;
- \* A statement of understanding that the supervising attorney will complete a written evaluation of your work at the end of the co-op and that this evaluation will become part of your transcript.

The letter should be addressed to Gerald M. Slater, Director for Administration, Jeffrey A. Smith, Director for External Relations, or Caitlin Palm, Assistant Director, at the following address:

Northeastern University, School of Law  
Office of Cooperative Legal Education  
Room 125KN  
400 Huntington Avenue  
Boston, MA 02115

Upon receipt of this letter the Co-op office will send your employer a letter confirming your placement and a short guide to supervising law students.

## **Developing an International Co-op**

Perhaps you are interested in a career in international law or for personal and/or professional reasons, are interested in doing one or more co-ops abroad. Where do you start?

As you can probably imagine, there are a wide variety of opportunities for individuals with a law degree in the international arena. You may have a very definite idea of the type of international work you want to pursue. If you do not, there is a great deal of information available that can help you focus your search.

The most valuable job qualifications for post-graduate international work are foreign language proficiency (although this is not a requirement for many jobs), relevant work experience, and demonstrated interest in international economics, policy, human rights, etc. Practical work experience in the field, through an internship, is an invaluable credential.

International law can be practiced in a number of settings which include:

1. the United Nations (including the World Health Organization, the U.N. High Commission on Refugees, the U.N. Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Labour Organization, the International Finance Corporation, International Monetary Fund, and the U.N. Industrial Development Organization);
2. government;
3. business and banks;
4. communications;
5. non-profit organizations, including international service organizations, and foundations;
6. private law firms; and
7. educational institutions.

There are also alternative legal careers in the international field. These consist of positions in which one may use legal training to solve non-legal problems. The primary responsibilities of these positions would not be the delivery of legal services. Some examples are lawyers who are managers in multi-national businesses and lawyers who work primarily on international policy, economics, human rights or environmental issues for the government or nongovernmental organizations.

Almost all of the literature on careers in international law stress that the threshold requirement for any position is good basic legal research, writing and analytical skills. These skills can be developed and enhanced in many settings, including ones that are not directly related to the international arena. With this in mind and depending upon your background, you should carefully consider when you want to do your international co-op(s).

### **The Process**

The process of developing your own co-op in the international law field in the United States or abroad is very similar to developing any co-op. The first task is to identify prospective opportunities.

The first place to look is the International Law Opportunities section of the school's website accessed via the Co-op Office web page at <http://www.slaw.neu.edu/coop/international.html>. There you will find a list of participating co-op employers with an international focus, a list of international co-ops developed by students organized by country, links to potential international legal internship and career sites, the NUSL international and comparative law curriculum, and a list of NUSL international law faculty advisors. This will provide you with ideas and/or specific leads to pursue in developing your own international law co-op, as well as faculty and web-based resources available to assist you in identifying potential opportunities.

In the Career Services section of the Resource Room, there is a section containing materials on the international law field. Included in this section are publications that provide information regarding international law careers and possible co-ops, including M. Janis & S. Swartz, eds., Careers in International Law (ABA 2001); International Public Interest Law, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harvard & Yale 2002); M. Kelly, ed., Serving the Public: A Job Search Guide Vol. II- International 2004 - 2005 (Harvard 2004). Be sure to refer to the most up-to-date Career Services Resource list for a complete list of materials.

In the Co-op section of the Resource Room, there are the internship evaluations (Quality Questionnaires) completed by students returning from international co-ops developed individually. The student evaluations of their experiences can be found in the non-participating employer looseleaf binders categorized under International law and organized by country.

Finally, as in developing any job, networking is an essential way to gather information and make contacts in the international law field. Speaking with practitioners will help you educate yourself about the nature of the day-to-day practice of international law and the types of internship and post-graduate opportunities in the field. When networking, do not overlook bar associations. For example, the Boston Bar Association has free student membership and has an international law section (there is a \$20 annual fee for section dues). The Massachusetts Bar Association has a \$20 annual student membership rate and a business section with an international law committee (there is a \$20 additional fee).

## **Pointers**

The most significant differences between developing an international co-op and a local one are **timing, resourcefulness, persistence and perseverance**. In addition, there are also very real dollar costs involved with setting up and undertaking an international co-op, which will fall, for the most part, on you.

Timing: As noted earlier, there is a longer lead time for seeking international jobs than co-ops within the U.S. Plan on 6-9 months!

Resourcefulness, Persistence and Perseverance: If there is a common thread that runs through all of the efforts of students who have successfully developed their own co-ops abroad, it is probably resourcefulness, persistence and perseverance. It is often difficult to find the right contact person and interview and negotiate the terms of an internship with individuals in other countries (who may be operating under different time frames, may not have a formal internship program and are from different cultures). Therefore, it is essential that one approach this task with a high degree of motivation and a willingness to follow through -- through the long haul!

Costs: You should be aware that there are costs associated with sewing up your own international co-op, which may include telephone calls and mailing or faxing materials. While the co-op telephone policy is fairly generous with regard to calls within the United States, we must be more restrictive with regard to international telephone calls, due to the high cost. Students are allowed to send limited numbers of faxes and make limited international telephone calls only after receiving advance approval from co-op staff.

*Can you afford to go abroad?* Most public sector international co-ops are volunteer positions. Students doing such co-ops can apply for funding through the Co-op Office and CISP. Funding decisions are made at the very end of each quarter and there is no guarantee of any particular funding amount. Students working for private firms and corporations are not eligible for co-op funding. Students may need to identify outside funding sources for themselves.

In search of your international law co-op, do not overlook the basic job search tools -- a well-written cover letter and a great resume highlighting relevant work experience. Again, because international jobs, for a number of reasons, are difficult to land, it is particularly important to follow through with employers after you have sent them your materials.

Interviews for many international co-ops will be telephone rather than in-person interviews. As noted in the Career Services booklet entitled "The Interview Process: Strategies & Techniques for Successful Interviewing," in a telephone interview you have only your voice through which to convey interest, enthusiasm and professionalism. You cannot rely on visual clues, such as nods and body language, to establish a rapport and get feedback on how you are doing. Therefore, you must pay particular attention to the tone and volume of your voice and your inflections. Since you cannot see the employer or the work environment, you may want to ask many questions to gather relevant information. Remember, the big advantage of a telephone interview is that you can have your materials in front of you, which can include a resume, a description of the position, notes on what you would like to highlight about yourself and a list of questions you may want to ask.



***Finally, as with any co-op that you are developing on your own, check with the Co-op Office to make sure that the internship you are pursuing is an appropriate placement, and ensure that the Co-op Office receives a letter from your supervising attorney confirming your employment prior to the end of the academic quarter preceding your co-op.***

While developing your own co-op position takes some work, it can also be a valuable “life skills” learning process and confidence builder. It can increase your networks and knowledge of the market, which will be helpful for your post-graduate job search. Your efforts may also create opportunities for other students. Many of the current Co-op employers joined our program because students had developed their own internships with those employers and sold them on the program and the school.

Good luck, and remember the Co-op staff is always available to assist you with any and all steps of this process.