

Co-op means experience in more ways than one

Students learn valuable on-the-job skills without losing any schooling

By KIM MAGEE

Special to The Champion
Summer is almost here and students are beginning their ritualistic search for employment.

Some high school students however are ahead of the game. They have been working since the beginning of the school semester — and gaining credits for it.

These students are involved in a co-operative education program, known as co-op, which places them in a professional job setting where they are trained in a field of their choice.

Students are expected to fulfill various objectives set out by the employer and a supervising school teacher.

Practical experience

The program was developed by the Ministry of Education because "students needed practical experience in the kinds of things that they have been learning in school," explains E.C. Drury High School co-op teacher Helen Wettlaufer.

"The focus of the program is for students to learn work-related skills on the job, and to practice skills and techniques that they learned in a classroom."

Students are not only required to meet course requirements including a weekly log, they must also adhere to the demands of their employers.

Barbara Downs, 18, has been working in the kitchen of the Harrop House Restaurant and Gallery for her co-op term.

One of her supervisors, Lisa Andruszczyszyn explains, "A co-op placement is a job. It is a responsibility. Students have to act like professionals."

Barbara hopes one day to become a chef and is thankful for the experience she gained on her placement.

"I have an advantage over students who are entering college without any experience," she says.

Many jobs require skills that cannot be learned in a classroom. Rob Del Papa's placement at Burlington Cablenet, a community programming channel, is a prime example.

His own show

His responsibilities include operating a camera on various productions and assisting with the assemblage and the tearing down of sets. On top of these responsibilities, Rob must produce his own bi-weekly half-hour show.

His supervisor Janice Birch explains, "In the film and television industry, you have to have experience."

Says Rob: "A lot of the skills used at the station can't be learned from reading, you have to do them."

Of the more than 50 students presently in the E.C. Drury co-op program, nearly 10 are placed at

schools or day-cares centres. The placements vary in location and include anything from teaching drama to primary school.

Heather Krauss, 18, has worked at Martin Street Public School with Donna Funnel's Grade 1 afternoon class for the past five months. She has helped with classroom preparation, supervision and she has even planned some of the lessons.

Teaching Grade 1 can often be a time consuming job so Mrs. Funnel is grateful for Heather's work. "With her help, it is a lot easier for me," she says. "It is going to be awful when she is finished."

As for Heather, she hopes to pursue teaching.

"I love children and they seem to like me and teaching is an interesting career where there are never any dull moments," he says.

Although most co-op students don't get paid for working, they receive credits toward their high school diplomas. Placements also often result in summer and part-time employment for students.



Photo by JOHN WARREN
E.C. Drury High School student Heather Krauss helps teach Grade 1 Martin Street Public School students Adam Baxter and Katie Decaire as part of the co-op program.



Photo by JOHN WARREN
E.C. Drury High School co-op student Barbara Downs, a budding chef, enjoys her placement at the Harrop House restaurant.

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