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## TTU College of Engineering Students Explore Co-Op Opportunities

(<http://www.tntech.edu/files/engineering/thumbnails/booby.png>)

For some time now, it's been common knowledge among area employers that graduates from Tennessee Tech University's College of Engineering make excellent hires, thanks to their ability to hit the ground running in a new job and roll their sleeves up to get to work. That reputation, in large part, is owed to TTU's co-op and internship opportunities.

CoE students who spend time at co-op positions emerge more than ready for the workplace; not only that, but students who have taken that route are often hired by the companies that already know them, where they have already spent time proving themselves. This is obviously a huge advantage in a job market that continues to be flat for recent college graduates. Regional employers such as NEC, Hood Container, DENSO, Lennox, John Deere, Volkswagen, Bridgestone, Nissan and Eastman Chemical all have numerous TTU CoE alumni in their ranks, many of whom served in co-op positions while still in school.



For most students, their path to co-op employment starts with Don Foster, TTU's Associate Director of Career Services.

"I help students put their best foot forward by giving them a hand in putting a resume together – just a really simple, direct, pro-forma one-page resume that covers education, computer skills and job experience – and giving them the tools they need for a good interview," said Foster. "We also work on helping students with career fair tips and networking idea for places like LinkedIn."

Co-op work counts for one semester hour per semester, and there are three schedules available for co-op opportunities. Plan A calls for three semesters of coursework before moving into co-op, while Plan B alternates semesters of co-op work. Plan C sets up the student with 15 hours a week of co-op work, with a light class load. After three semesters of co-op work, the State of Tennessee will partially subsidize a student's Public Engineer license.

Students can gain a wide range of experiences at co-op jobs, depending on what their interests are. Lauren Kirby, a Tullahoma native, is currently working for ADTRAN in Huntsville, Ala. ADTRAN started Kirby at \$16 per hour, with pay increases at the beginning of every semester.

"I have been given real some real tasks," said Kirby. "Throughout my time at ADTRAN so far, I have fixed software bugs in several different computer languages. I have learned things about computer networks that I didn't know before. I have learned how to debug my own code more effectively, and I've learned that people will always help if you just ask them. Being part of this has been a great experience." Kirby has also been offered a job at ADTRAN after graduation.

Jake Smith is a Maryville native who began in June 2012 as a co-op student with Sain Engineering in Birmingham, Ala. "I got an email from career services about a company looking for a co-op student," said Smith. "I responded and ended up getting the position...I started at \$14 an hour and got a \$1 an hour raise each semester, along with \$800 a month for housing. I have learned a lot about HVAC systems, how they work, which technologies are the most efficient. I now have a job offer from the company I did my co-op with and am waiting to hear back from another."

Students from TTU have been able to take on a wide range of co-op jobs, such as working for NASA, helping design and build Mercedes-Benz chassis and drivetrain systems at ZF Lemforder, and even working under the streets at Disneyworld, helping to keep the park's animatronic systems maintained.

Internships also can make good sense from a company's standpoint, as they can save time and thousands of dollars that might otherwise be spent in bringing a new employee up to speed. It's recommended, though, that a student complete at least three semesters before moving into co-op work situations, to be able to gather enough engineering know-how and skills to bring to a new job.

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