Tips for supporting co-op students working remotely

Many organizations are shifting to remote work arrangements in response to COVID-19, including setting up co-op students to work from home.

We recognize that working remotely is new for many employers as well as students, so we’ve put together some tips to support you.

Visit uvic.ca/coopandcareer/remote-work for the web version, which includes digital resources to support each tip.

1) Provide students with the necessary tools to do their job

Make sure students have the proper technology to do their daily work. This includes:

- appropriate computer hardware
- appropriate software
- VPN access to the appropriate shared servers - and how to set this up
- tele/videoconferencing software that your organization is using keep in touch (e.g., Outlook, Skype for Business or Skype, Zoom, Slack, WebEx, etc) - and how to set this up

In addition, make sure that students have:

- strong, reliable WiFi - chat with the student about their WiFi setup to ensure it will allow them to connect with your team (note: students may not have WiFi at home - if this is the case, your organization may wish to explore supporting this during the work-from-home period)
- access to appropriate policy or training documents
- an understanding of your organization’s security protocols around accessing/sharing files

2) Communicate clearly and regularly

As organizations continue to adapt in response to COVID-19, it’s important to keep all staff, including co-op students, in the loop. This can include:

- being clear about changing protocols, processes and guidelines
- sharing relevant updates from your organization
- making sure students understand what is expected of them
- designating a contact person that students can contact if they have questions or need support
3) Be clear about your organization’s work-from-home expectations

Working from home presents unique challenges. Students are likely sharing the space with friends or family members and may not have a dedicated office space. Remote work can impact work flow and productivity so be clear about what’s expected and what support is available, including:

✛ whether students should be working their regular hours, or if there is flexibility
✛ how, and if, students should track their hours
✛ students’ goals and deadlines
✛ who students can ask for support
✛ how review and approval process may have been adjusted during this time
✛ how students should report on their progress and share information with the team
✛ expectations for students’ availability and productivity

4) Stay connected

Working remotely during COVID-19 can be isolating, especially if the student lives alone. Make sure to keep students informed and connected to the team. Include students on relevant email updates and check-ins from your organization so that they stay in the loop.

Students’ supervisors are also encouraged to schedule short daily video conference check-ins with the student. These check-ins can be both social and productive and are a great way to boost morale.

Other ways for organizations to stay connected include:

✛ use video conferencing whenever possible, in addition to email
✛ include students on larger team update meetings
✛ assign a buddy or mentor who is not the student’s supervisor to check in once a week
✛ share updates whenever possible

5) Re-prioritize projects based on what can be done remotely

If you’re shifting suddenly to a remote work setup, review the student’s current task list and identify what projects can be done remotely.

Adjust projects that can’t be done remotely, and assign new tasks as necessary. This could be an opportunity to have the student tackle a research project, to compile training documents, to take advantage of online training opportunities, or to tackle other projects that have been lower on the priority list.

This might also mean re-evaluating your organization’s expectations about what can been done in a certain period - deadlines might need to shift with this new work setup.

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