

focus

The good and bad of co-op

Some combine their classroom studies with rewarding jobs, while other battle tough housing markets, low wages and menial labor

By STEVE MAYER

Some students working in cooperative education programs at Texas A&M University often get an inside shot at a good job after college and usually earn enough to help out with school expenses.

However, others in the program complain of hard-to-find housing, low wages and "almost manual labor."

The Cooperative Education Program (Co-op) at Texas A&M allows students in certain colleges (agriculture, architecture and environmental design, engineering, liberal arts, science and veterinary medicine) to alternate semesters of work and study.

Students can gain practical knowledge on the job and obtain theoretical knowledge in the classroom.

"Co-op gives students the opportunity to decide if they are in the type of curriculum they want — rather than graduate, go to work and then be unhappy with their careers," says Dr. Charles Rodenberger, co-op director for the college of engineering.

Engineering has the largest co-op program at A&M, with more than 600 students working for more than 150 companies throughout Texas, the nation and overseas.

Co-op programs in other colleges of the University are now being

organized and have few students involved at this time.

Mark Edmund, a graduate in chemical engineering, had praise for the program.

"It was the best way to put myself through school," Edmund said. "Experience was secondary. I flat-out needed the money."

"I enjoyed the chance to get away from course work — it was a different environment," he said, after working with Amoco Production Company of Houston. "Afterward, I looked forward to hitting the books again."

"There's always enough money for future semesters," he said, "if you keep a budget in mind."

Steve Yeary, a senior also in chemical engineering, became disenchanted with the program and dropped it.

"If someone wants to be in co-op, they should find out a lot about the company," he said. "The present system doesn't show what it's like. You can wind up doing almost manual labor. I felt the job I had was below my classification."

Yeary was working for Olin Corp. in Houston. "I was teaching basic algebra to the person above me," he said. "Most of the people I worked with were high school educated."

Yeary said that after he dropped co-op, he got a job paying \$400 more per month.

Andy Case, a sophomore in mechanical engineering, is satisfied with the program but said housing is a problem. "Getting short-term leases and moving every four months is a hassle," Case said, "but it's definitely worth it."

Rodenberger said he is aware of the problems co-op students must face.

"We make sure students can get back on campus after their work semester," he said. "As for housing where the student is working, we leave it up to him. We feel it is part of his education."

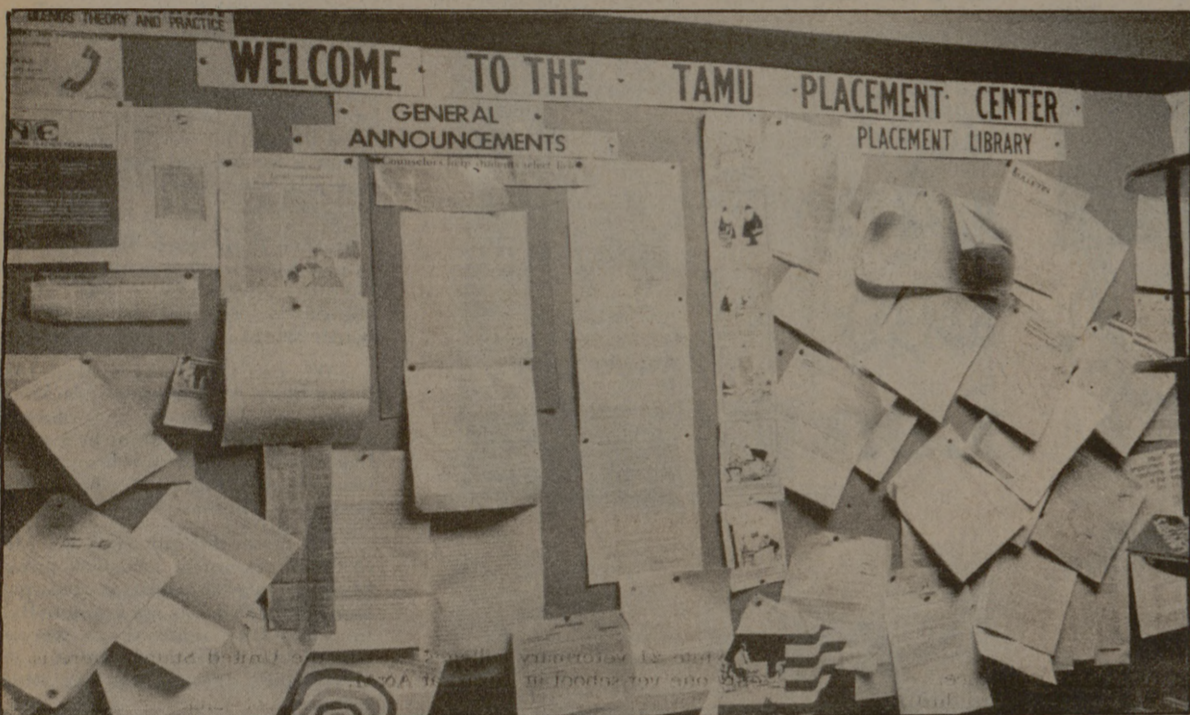
There is a bulletin board outside the engineering department where students can post notices for roommates needed in a particular locale, he said.



To decrease the number of students unhappy with their employers, Rodenberger said the program tries to match the two by knowing what the company offers and what the student wants. He said he encourages the students to interview with as many companies as possible.

The average co-op salary per month for the spring of 1977 was \$798, the lowest was minimum wage and the highest was \$1,433.

Rodenberger estimated that 70 percent of the co-op students work for their co-op employer after graduation.



Looking for a job? A good place to start would be Texas A&M University's Placement Center in Rudder Tower. Notices list various positions

open in government and private industry, as well as grants available and reports on the job market.

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Higher minimum wage advocated

United Press International — WASHINGTON—The director of the Texas Department of Human Resources Tuesday endorsed a Carter administration proposal to create jobs for welfare recipients, but said the jobs should pay more than the minimum wage.

Jerome Chapman, in remarks prepared for U.S. House welfare subcommittee hearing, said a work requirement will help financial as-

sistance payments gain acceptance. "Work requirements attached to public assistance are attractive to many taxpayers who support the costly welfare system, but it is jobs — not required participation — that are needed to make the plan work," he said.

Chapman said the Better Jobs and Income Act will create jobs for 1.4 million persons, but said Texas

alone needs 300,000 jobs. "Of more concern than that, however, is that Texas needs several times that number of higher paying jobs to enable its working poor to gain economic independence," Chapman told the subcommittee.

"It is our concern that Texans will continue to be forced into work of little substance at wage levels that will leave them still dependent. A

full-time worker earning the current minimum wage takes home less than those at the poverty line."

He said Texas has no need for thousands of minimum wage jobs that would require permanent federal subsidies. "We have plenty of those," Chapman said. "The program should provide a helping hand to economic independence for the working poor, not a permanent crutch of dependency."

Women denied bananas

United Press International — HOUSTON—Three women dockworkers filed a federal court suit Tuesday claiming they were illegally denied jobs unloading banana boats because of their sex.

Maria J. Garcia, Rose M. Mendoza and Sylvia H. Cooke charge International Longshoremen's Association Local 1576 and Southern Stevedoring Co. Inc. illegally discriminated against them.

The company claimed the pressure of a box against a woman's breast could cause cancer. The suit

said the three women were cleaning ships as members of another longshoremen's local when the alleged incident occurred May 6, 1975.

They complained to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which ruled in their favor but failed to negotiate a settlement with the defendants. The EEOC authorized the lawsuit Aug. 10, as provided by law.

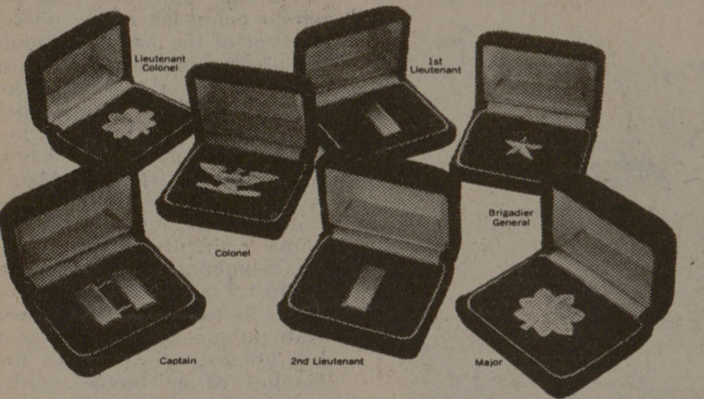
"We don't believe it's possible for a woman to do the work our people are now doing," the company told the EEOC. "To expect a woman,

hour after hour, to maintain an average of 150 boxes of 46.5 pounds each doesn't seem practical."

But the complainants' lawyer, J. E. Turner, said that although cleaning ships was their normal function, the women had done unloading in the past and could "hook a cable" to operate a crane as well as anyone. He said cleaning could sometimes be harder work than unloading.

"Obviously, employing women to do such a job is not an everyday occurrence, but it is a trend," Turner said.

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