

Associate Dean, Work-Integrated Learning

Annual Report 2025

The Associate Dean of Work-Integrated Learning oversees co-op and experiential learning across the Faculty, supporting undergraduate and graduate programs and lifelong learning and professional development initiatives.

Undergraduate WIL

Navigating Co-op Employment Challenges and Trends

CEE anticipates that the current challenges in the co-op job market will persist and intensify through the spring term, leading to a lower co-op employment rate than in previous years. Several economic and geopolitical factors contribute to this trend, including uncertainty surrounding tariffs, ongoing international trade disputes, and the impact of current conflicts worldwide, all resulting in fewer co-op opportunities.

In addition to these external pressures, additional challenges further restrict co-op positions. Many organizations face budget constraints that limit their ability to hire, while the increasing adoption of AI is shifting the landscape of employment, altering traditional roles and reducing demand for certain positions, disproportionately affecting entry-level positions. Furthermore, heightened competition among institutions has added to students' difficulty securing co-op placements.

The effects of these pressures are evident in employment rates year-over-year across faculties. In ENV, while past terms saw relatively strong employment figures, such as 99.0% in Fall 2023 and 96.9% in Winter 2024, more recent terms reflect a downturn, with Winter 2025 experiencing a notable decline to 91.1%. As conditions evolve, CEE expects the market to remain challenging for students seeking co-op opportunities.

Rates:

Spring 2023:	94.4%	Spring 2024:	94.6%
Fall 2023:	99.0%	Fall 2024:	95.1%
Winter 2024:	96.9%	Winter 2025:	91.1%

Student Employment Satisfaction

Students report their satisfaction with their co-op work term experience, rating this on average 8.37/10 in 2024, a rating that has remained consistently stable since 2017.

Supporting Students in Co-op Recruitment

First-work-term students sometimes struggle to find a co-op job. On March 19, CEE held a pre-first work term session for 1B students, which took place at Alumni Hall, United College, to prepare students for their first recruiting term (n=28).

The WE Accelerate program, offered through CEE, was established during the pandemic to provide first-work-term students with a skills development opportunity. In the last year, 70 ENV students have participated in the program:

- Spring 2024: 22
- Winter 2025: 48

Environment-aligned co-op and career advisors hosted co-op pop-up booths to answer co-op questions and provide support in Dana Porter Library on February 25 and at the EnviroCafe on March 14.

Enhancing Co-op Accessibility and Opportunities

CEE has enhanced job boards to improve visibility and access to pre-approved opportunities to better support students and employers in the co-op recruitment process. The Employer-Student Direct job board continues to serve as a key resource, now listing approximately 1,500 jobs for the Spring term.

Expanding beyond WaterlooWorks, CEE has partnered with Microsoft Canada to develop the Job Aggregator and Digital Advisor (JADA), an AI-powered tool that connects students with additional co-op positions. Through collaborations with ECO Canada and Canada Job Bank, JADA enables students to explore jobs not listed on traditional platforms. It also features a Digital Assistant—a chatbot offering personalized advising to help students navigate the employment process.

Contributions from ENV students and programs shaped the development of JADA. ENBUS students participated in Alpha testing in January 2025, followed by a Beta phase in March, incorporating feedback from all ENV undergraduate programs before its campus-wide rollout. JADA is now available through the UW Portal.

Additionally, CEE is actively working to strengthen co-op opportunities through several initiatives:

- Expanding recruitment strategies to align with employer hiring behaviours.
- Increasing alternatives to traditional co-op work terms, such as WE Accelerate and new programs for upper-year students.
- Engaging industry and alumni to maximize job placements through outreach and referrals.

Faculty and campus partners can further support these efforts by:

- Referring employer job leads via the [referral page](#) or contacting Kathryn Fedy.

- Connecting CEE with industry associations through Shabnam Ivković (sivkovic@uwaterloo.ca).
- Encouraging alumni and industry contacts to hire co-op students, coordinated by Jodi Szimanski (jodi.szimanski@uwaterloo.ca).
- Empowering students, whose relationships with employers are crucial throughout the hiring and work terms.

Through these collective efforts, CEE is committed to ensuring students access meaningful work experiences while strengthening employer partnerships.

Awards and Honourable Mentions

Co-op Student of the Year for the Faculty of Environment (2024):

- **Hoang Do** (he/him)
 - Environment and Business,
 - Employer: Purolator
- As a corporate sustainability co-ordinator at Purolator, Hoang Do bridged sustainability principles with real-world logistics. He made an impact by:
 - Creating a first-of-its-kind customer analysis tool to help meet emission reduction targets. His investigations into greenhouse gas emissions led to new business opportunities for Purolator with its top 10 per cent of customers.
 - Providing insights for an electrification strategy and identifying issues in the company's customer emissions calculator.
 - Independently completing Purolator's Net Zero Challenge application.

Co-op Student of the Year, Honourable Mention for Environment:

- **Francesca Girmenia** (she/her)
 - Environment and Business,
 - As a tiny home project coordinator, Girmenia excelled in her diverse responsibilities at Habitat for Humanity's Halton, Mississauga, Dufferin division. She demonstrated dedication, efficiency, and versatility in project coordination, marketing, event planning, and construction. Girmenia worked diligently to secure a 20 percent discount on a critical product, leading to significant cost savings and improved energy performance of the tiny homes.

Graduate Work-Integrated Learning (GradWIL)

The University continues to advance GradWIL initiatives, leveraging its expertise and leadership in WIL. These efforts encompass co-op programs, internships, community and industry research partnerships, and central WIL and applied research opportunities for graduate students. The Master of Climate Change (MCC) pilot with CEE will conclude at the end of the spring semester, with special appreciation extended to Director Wesley Van Wyche, Teresa Wilson, and former Director Dan Scott for their contributions to the internship pilot.

CWIL has recently introduced WIL 612: Leadership and Project Management, a co-curricular experience designed to equip graduate students with leadership, mentorship, and professional communication skills. The first offering is scheduled for Fall 2025.

Additionally, CWIL is exploring the development of a Certificate in WIL for graduate students, enabling them to earn additional credentials upon completing the required approved courses. Currently in the consultation phase, CWIL aims to launch the certificate in the coming months.

Lifelong Learning and Professional Development

WatSpeed is the University's academic support unit, promoting lifelong learning and professional development through innovative programs. As a Faculty, we are actively exploring opportunities for collaboration with WatSpeed. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out anytime.