

University of Technology, Jamaica

# Co-operative Education at UTech

"Partnering with Industry to produce work-ready graduates"

## Co-op Ed Partners: The National Works Agency



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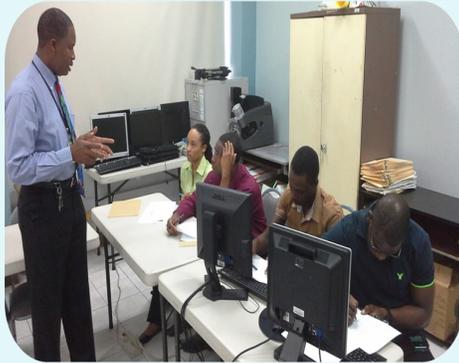
The National Works Agency (NWA) was established in April 2001 as an executive agency of the Government of Jamaica and has the mandate to plan, build and maintain the island's main road network and flood control system. The Agency, which falls under the Ministry of Transport, Works and Housing, also has responsibility for traffic management, as well as river training and sea defense.

NWA has always been committed to producing work ready school-leavers, and from its inception it has engaged students from high school to the university level. The Agency sees its partnership with UTech through the Co-operative Education (Co-op Ed) programme as a major contribution to the development of the workplace skills and competencies of the nation's future professionals. UTech students were initially engaged from Urban and Regional Planning, Quantity Surveying, Construction Management, Civil and Mechanical Engineering. However, in recent times, the company has engaged students from other disciplines namely Business Management and Statistics. "They (the students) are *excited about their attachment*," stated Mr. David Knight, Manager, Personnel and Industrial Relations. He further commented that several students, even after their engagement had ended, requested extended stay through voluntary attachments in order to improve their competencies and enhance their marketability. Some students have even gained both permanent and temporary employment with the Agency because of their good work attitude, ability to work quickly, and other requisite job competencies.

Mr. Knight stressed the important role that supervisors play in developing the students. He stated that supervisors were committed to providing guidance and an environment where students were not only comfortable, but would confidently execute their job functions, thus ensuring that they performed at optimum. This, he said, was important as students must leave the Co-op Ed experience with value-added skills in their practice. Mr. Knight added that students were admonished that in order to be successful they must approach their work with seriousness, flexibility and an open mind. Further, a professional approach was necessary when interacting with industry personnel who in the future may become referees, coaches or mentors.

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## Co-op Ed Partners: The National Works Agency



Mr. David Knight - Manager, Personnel and Industrial Relations, NWA (left) speaking with students during an orientation session.

Mr. Shawn Smith, NWA employee and a past student of UTech, also shared his perspective on the programme.

Mr. Smith recounted that when he was approached about being a supervisor/mentor he gladly accepted the challenge as he

welcomed the initiative. As a supervisor, he knew he had a very important role to play in the training of these young professionals. He remarked, *“The supervisor’s role is very critical in getting the students ready. It must be borne in mind that the employers, be they individuals or entities, are key stakeholders in the industry, a part of which the students are aspiring to be.”* He continued by saying that this was an opportunity for industry partners to mould students, identify their strengths and weaknesses and assist them in any way possible. He stated further that while the programme was a gesture of good will, some minor improvements could be made in areas such as preparing students for the Co-op Ed experience.

With respect to training, once formally placed at the organization, students participated in an orientation exercise.

This was done to sensitize students on the tasks to be completed and to allow for general integration between students and supervisors.

Mr. Smith concluded that he was generally pleased with students placed at the organization. He stated that students, while engaged at the NWA showed willingness to learn new things, which was a positive sign.

Both Mr. Smith and Mr. Knight strongly encourage other employers to become a part of the programme as they can benefit from new knowledge and skills possessed by the students and further, they can obtain much needed assistance from the students (interns) in completing special projects. This was also one way employers could observe new talents for future employment.

Mr. Knight concluded *“These programmes should be encouraged and supported, if necessary with incentives from professional organizations and groups, industry and government, to foster a robust human capital development to drive growth and success individually, organizationally and nationally.”*



Engineering students on Co-op Ed assignment location

### Student Experience: NWA



Steven Murray  
4th year student  
BEng. Civil  
Engineering

My Co-operative Education experience was truly rewarding as I was given the opportunity to utilize what was being taught at UTech while at the same time gaining experience in areas that were new to me. The fact that I was able to communicate and work with professionals who are in the field of engineering was another positive experience.

This experience has given me a new outlook about my area of study, allowing me to feel prepared and ready for the working world. By getting first hand experience, I have developed a sense of pro-activeness, which will follow me forever.

I enjoyed my stay at the NWA as the persons I had to work with were very receptive and everyone was friendly. I was treated like an employee and that made me work as though as I was one.

I was comfortable with tasks given to me. They were both challenging and rewarding. I have seen myself grow as a result of my experience and I have developed new skills which will enhance my employability.

I recommend that students participate in co-operative education as it not only gives you the requisite experience, but also enhances your interpersonal skills.

*Steven Murray’s Co-op Ed placement with NWA was from October 2014 to January 2015.*

## You Never Know Where the Co-operative Education Road Will Take you

Susharnna Cambridge's first encounter with Negril Treehouse Resort occurred in December 2012 when she was assigned as a Co-op Ed student in the Christmas Placement programme. Reflecting on the placement, Susharnna believes that the experience taught her a lot, such as to remain calm during tense situations, the importance of teamwork and that she was accountable for all her actions. She further explained that she now understood, for example, how her actions could affect the company's productivity, and therefore her best efforts was always required.



Susharnna Cambridge  
Food & Beverage Manager  
Negril Treehouse Resort  
& final year student BSc.  
Food Service Management

Ms. Cambridge described her experience as positive *"Negril Treehouse ensured I interacted with guests and staff on a daily basis while allowing me to provide input in making the establishment run smoothly. When faced with difficult tasks I asked questions until I was satisfied with what I produced. Also, I asked those above me and those who may have had similar experiences in the past for help or relied on the knowledge gained while in School."*

When Susharnna was offered the position of Food and Beverage Manager at Negril Treehouse in April 2014, she was filled with emotions. *"I felt elated. Words could not explain how I felt; my head was all over the place. I could not pass on such an opportunity that may never come again."*

With this positive experience, Susharnna credits her success in her field to her real life experiences gained while in the Co-operative Education programme, describing it as "really helpful" as it will enable students to get much needed experience. *"I recommend that students give the Co-op Ed programme their best shot. You never know where the Co-operative Education road will take you!"* Now as the Food and Beverage Manager of Negril Treehouse, Susharnna is more determined than ever. Even though she may encounter difficulties she will always give it her best as she is very passionate about her position. *"The benefits are tremendous!"* she affirmed.

*"The experience gained from internship allowed me to function within the real working world. This programme will assist students in making the right decisions when faced with daily tasks"*

### Christmas Placement 2014

From December 17, 2014 to January 8, 2015 Sansha Rae Johnson worked at Negril Treehouse Resort, Westmorland. Sansha Rae acknowledged that the experience gained was invaluable. *"I learnt numerous lessons and perfected the areas in which I was weak from both a personal and professional perspective. I developed my people skills, as before this experience, I was a little afraid to approach people, despite the fact that the Hospitality industry requires an outgoing and friendly personality. I however managed to overcome this fear through practice. At the end of it all I was comfortable to approach a guest without hesitation and with the appropriate attitude."* While



Sansha Rae Johnson  
Third year student  
BSc Hospitality &  
Tourism Management

engaged to Negril Treehouse, Sansha Rae worked mainly in the dining room.

Shasika Hutchinson, a third year student at UTech's Western Campus, spent her Christmas break assigned to the National Housing Trust (NHT) in Montego Bay. For the period December 29, 2014 to January 19, 2015, she was assigned as a Customer Service Representative and described her experience as wonderful as she was treated like "family". Shasika was commended by her team members for always being on time, a trait she intends to carry on through out her life. In addition to this, she said that her experience was exciting and has enhanced her preparation for the world of work.



Shasika Hutchinson  
Third year student  
BBA. Finance & Banking

Both Sansha Rae and Shasika highly commend the programme as one that all students should look forward to participating in. They also expressed appreciation to the respective organizations for the experiences gained which will assist them in the future.

## Career Corner

### Working in Teams

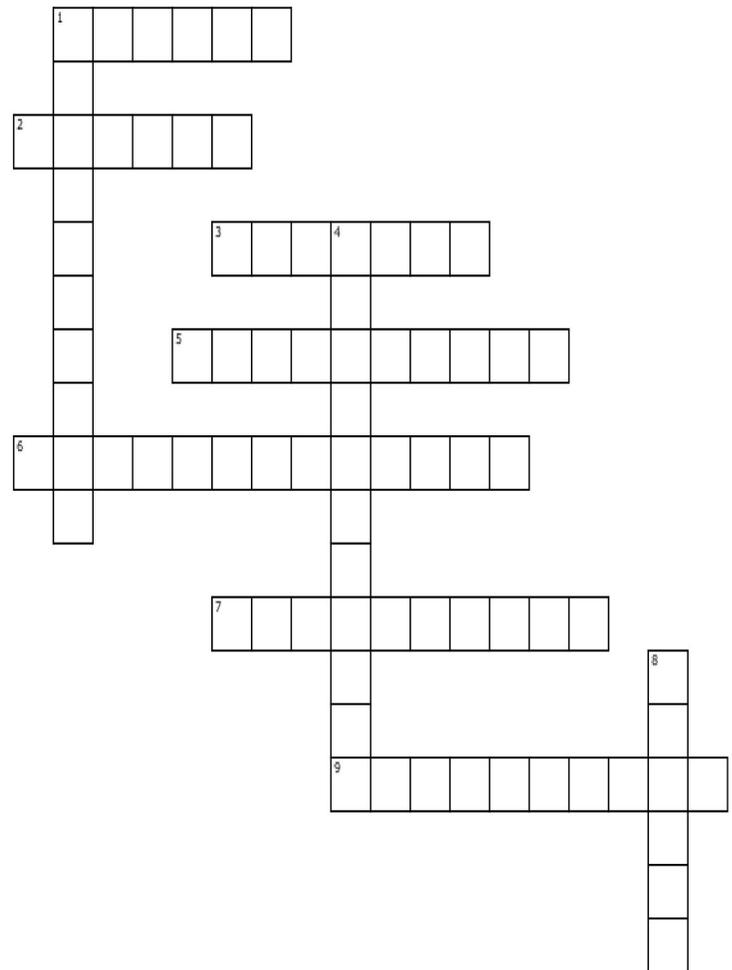
In any and every organization, you are expected to work with other employees. Below are keys to successful teamwork:

- ⇒ **The team understands the goals and is committed to attaining them.** This clear direction and agreement on mission and purpose is essential for effective teamwork.
- ⇒ **The team creates an environment in which people are comfortable taking reasonable risks communicating, advocating positions, and taking action.** Team members trust each other. Team members are not punished for disagreeing.
- ⇒ **Communication is open, honest, and respectful.** People feel free to express their thoughts, opinions, and potential solutions to problems. People feel as if they are heard out and listened to by team members who are attempting to understand. Team members ask questions for clarity and spend their thought time listening deeply rather than forming rebuttals while their coworker is speaking.
- ⇒ **Creativity, innovation, and different viewpoints are expected and encouraged.** Comments such as, "We already tried that and it didn't work" and "What a dumb idea" are not allowed or supported.
- ⇒ **Participative leadership is practiced** in leading meetings, assigning tasks, recording decisions and commitments, assessing progress, holding team members accountable, and providing direction for the team.
- ⇒ **Members of the team make high quality decisions together** and have the support and commitment of the group to carry out the decisions made.

*If a team can get these factors right, success and a rewarding sense of teamwork will follow.*

For more information and tips, please visit [http://humanresources.about.com/od/teambuilding/f/team\\_work.htm](http://humanresources.about.com/od/teambuilding/f/team_work.htm)

## Co-operative Education Cross Word Puzzle



### Across

1. Moral principles that govern a person's or group's behavior.
2. An occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person's life and with opportunities for progress.
3. A fixed regular sum paid as a salary or allowance
5. Able to be sold : wanted by buyers or employers
6. The act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings
7. Be the first to take action in a particular situation
9. Interact with other people to exchange information and develop contacts, especially to further one's career

### Down

1. To judge the value or condition of (someone or something) in a careful and thoughtful way
4. The action or process of making ready or being made ready for use or consideration.
8. An experienced and trusted adviser.



**"My short-term goal is to bluff my way through this job interview. My long-term goal is to invent a time machine so I can come back and change everything I've said so far."**

## Coordinator Feature



**Mrs. Naheel Brown-Ledgister**

Co-op Ed Coordinator  
Caribbean School of Sport Sciences

**Describe your role/responsibilities as a school coordinator.**

*I work alongside the heads of divisions, placing students in suitable locations that are aligned to their course of study. In addition, I*

*communicate with the respective host organizations, ensuring that the internship placements meet the requirements of the University.*

**What has been your most rewarding experience as the school coordinator?** *For us, being a new School, what I like the most is the fact the organizations are acknowledging our students. The feedback we got last year regarding our first cohort of interns was very good. We had persons approaching us for students this year, which makes me proud.*

**Explain a feature of the Co-operative Education process you would change/modify.**

*One of the challenges that we have is with respect to the offering of the module. Based on the characteristics of the Programme, there are limited facilities that can accommodate our students for their practicum. To solve this, I think opening up the practicum, allowing students to do it in other semesters will alleviate the issue. This is the only real issue as everything else is fine.*



**What opportunities and/or benefits have the Co-operative Education experience provided for the students?**

*This experience has allowed one student in particular to gain employment at the location where he was placed last year. Students, especially our athletic trainers, have gained valuable experience such as working with children. It has exposed them to other industries such as media and the hotel industry. Some students who have never worked before got a feel of employment. One student worked closely with the Digicel's grass roots programme, at which she reportedly excelled.*

**What advice would you give to students who express reservations about engaging in the programme?**

*Students should see the programme as an aspect of self-marketing. When students actually go into an organization and make their mark, they are networking, selling themselves and the programme. Books can teach them so much and no more, but when they obtain that first hand experience they will gain a lot.*

**What are your perceptions on the role of the industry in providing students with relevant work experience?**

*They are the ones who will be hiring these students. Our youths are our future. For us to ensure that there are capable hands out there, students must work with/ in industries to gain the experience. In order to build our nation we must work as a team and the industry must be a part of that team. They are very important in the students' professional development.*

**Do you believe that the Co-operative Education programme has added any real value to the student's course of study?**

*Yes, I do believe it has added value.*

*The feedback from our students is that they enjoyed the experience. Some students have gained employment through the programme. Many students use the employers as references on their job applications. It is a good feeling to hear student's feedback as well as those from the industry partners giving them complements and stating how much they have learnt. This allowed us as lecturers to measure how much we have done and achieved. Co-operative education has its place and is very valuable.*

**COORDINATOR'S REMARKS**



In each issue we are equally excited to highlight our stakeholders' stories of successful Co-op Ed engagements. Special thanks to the NWA, our featured industry partner, for sharing in this issue. We would be more than happy to share your story; just let us know.

During the 2013-14 academic year, over 600 students successfully completed their Co-op Ed engagement. This year, as we approach our summer placement period, we hope to improve upon that record with the help of our new, as well as, longstanding and committed industry partners.

To our employers, we wish for you a mutually rewarding experience and anticipate receiving your positive feedback.

To our students, do not be afraid to use your initiative and demonstrate your competencies. You have what it takes; make a difference!



*La-Presha Gordon-Brydson*  
University's Co-op Ed Coordinator

**Important Dates**

Date	Activity	Location
May 6 – August 15, 2015	SUMMER PLACEMENT PROGRAMME	Participating Employers

Co-operative Education Unit  
Academic Affairs Division  
237 Old Hope Road  
Kingston 6, Jamaica



- [www.facebook.com/utechcooped](http://www.facebook.com/utechcooped)
- <https://twitter.com/UTechCoopEd>
- <http://utechco-opedu.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.utech.edu.jm/services/OCE/>

Email: [ced@utech.edu](mailto:ced@utech.edu)

**Acknowledgement**



Special thanks to **Shanice Forbes** for this issue of the Co-operative Education Newsletter. She is a second year student in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies, where she is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Arts and Technology.

**ANSWERS TO CROSS WORD PUZZLE**

**DOWN**

- 1 . evaluation
- 4 . preparation
- 8 . mentor

**ACROSS**

- 1. ethics
- 2. career
- 3. stipend
- 5. marketable
- 7. initiative
- 9. networking