

## Cooperative Education Comes of Age

### PUBLISHER'S NOTE

With many families facing hard economic times, college and university financial aid budgets stretched to the breaking point, and increasing numbers of students assuming staggering debt to get through college, an educational model that's often been treated with disdain by the academy is gaining new advocates on many campuses. It's called cooperative education (co-op), a program of study that combines classroom studies with paid, meaningful work experience in a field related to a student's major or career interests.

Our findings defy much of the conventional wisdom, which associates co-op with lower-status colleges and weaker students. In fact, a majority of the students we surveyed associate co-op with highly intelligent, motivated students and prestigious colleges and universities. A majority consider co-op superior to internships because it helps students pay for their college education. Even students with the highest SAT and ACT scores (SATs of 1270+ and ACTs of 26+) agreed that cooperative education is offered at prestigious schools. The collective findings of the research make several conclusions quite clear: Students want career-related experience, they don't assume all good colleges offer internships, and they view cooperative education as a serious and significant option in college consideration and choice.

With no end in sight to skyrocketing tuition hikes at public and private institutions and the cost of a college education climbing beyond the reach of more and more families and students, cooperative education may indeed prove to be a good choice and excellent financial solution for those intent on leaving college with significant career experience and without a mountain of debt.

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*Principal, Art & Science Group, LLC*

### Request for Research Ideas

In the next several months StudentPoll will field a new national research study with high school seniors planning to attend college in the fall of 2005. In order to cover timely, critical issues of greatest concern to senior enrollment professionals and other institutional decision makers, we want to hear from you.

Email us your ideas and thoughts about issues or questions that you would like to see included in our research study and reported in future issues of StudentPoll. Email your research ideas to Richard Hesel or Kate Cleary at:  
[Hesel@artsci.com](mailto:Hesel@artsci.com) or [Cleary@artsci.com](mailto:Cleary@artsci.com). We will take all submissions into consideration.

You can expect to receive new issues of StudentPoll beginning in late fall 2004. The deadline for submitting research questions/ideas is May 17, 2004. We hope to hear from you and other subscribers who value the timely, enrollment-related news and information StudentPoll has provided higher education for nearly a decade.

## Findings and Supporting Data

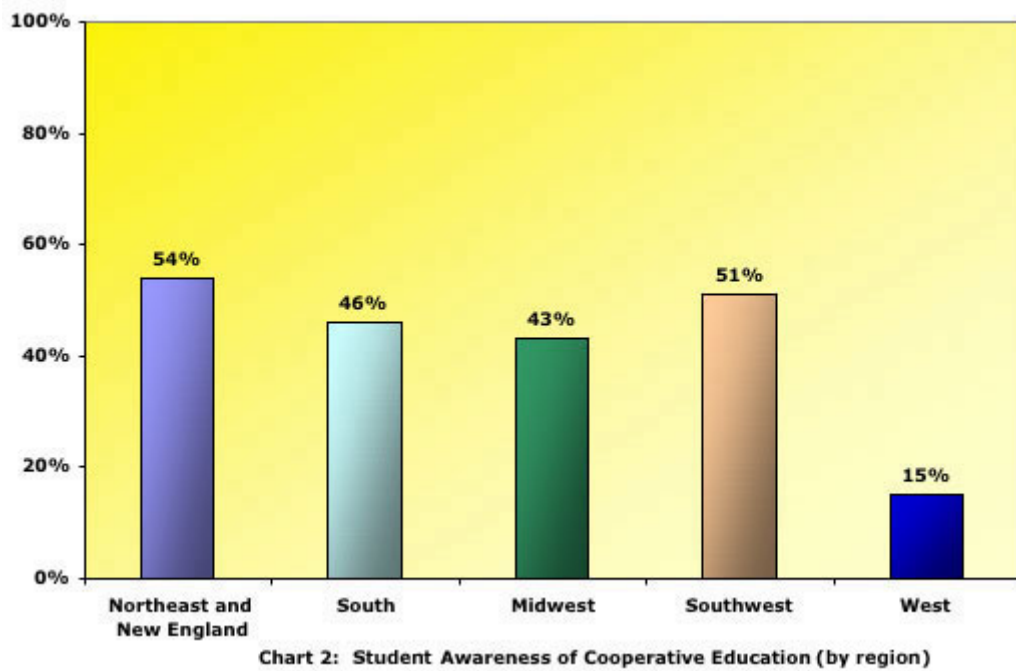
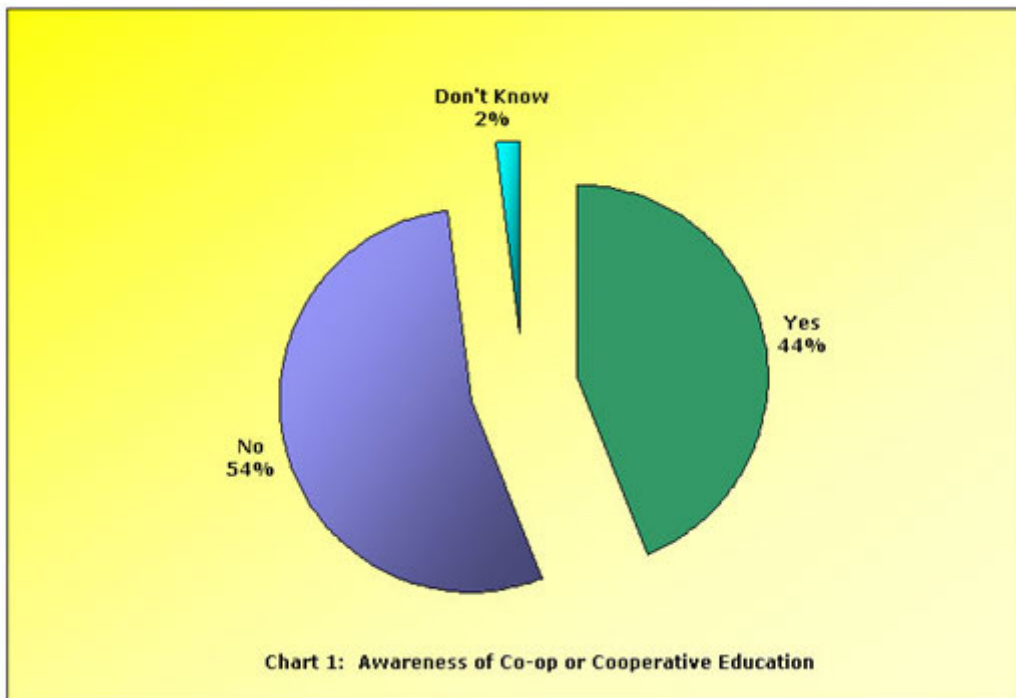
**Q** Have students heard of co-op or cooperative education?

**A** Forty-four percent of the 500 college-bound high school students we surveyed indicated that they had heard of co-op or cooperative education.

Among the interesting subgroup findings:

By region of the country, 54 percent of students from the Northeast and New England, 51 percent of those from the Southwest, 46 percent from the South, and 43 percent of students from the Midwest had heard of co-op or cooperative education. By comparison, and the only statistically significant difference by region, only 15 percent of students from the West indicated they had heard of co-op or cooperative education. The West included the states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

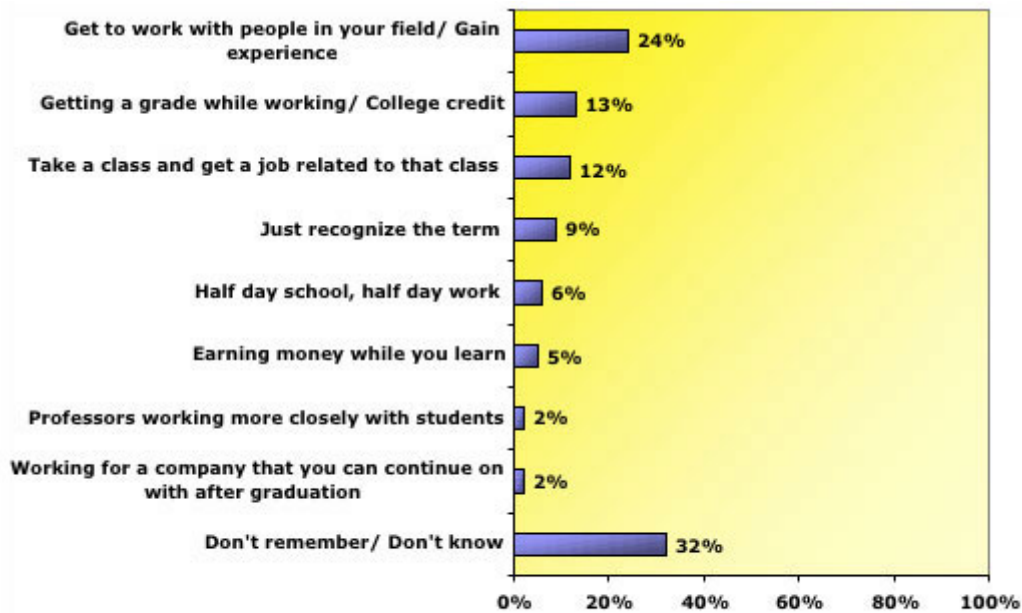
By SAT and ACT score, a larger proportion of students reporting the highest scores indicated they had heard of cooperative education/co-op. For instance, 57 percent of students with SAT scores of 1270 or higher had heard of co-op compared to 45 percent of those with scores of 1090-1260 and 44 percent of those with scores of 1080 or lower. Similarly, 51 percent of students with ACT scores of 26 or higher indicated they had heard of cooperative education, compared to 37 percent with scores of 22-25 and 41 percent with scores of 21 or lower.



**Q** What benefits or features do students most strongly associate with cooperative education?

**A** To understand students' own level of awareness or knowledge of cooperative education and the features or advantages this educational approach offers them, StudentPoll asked respondents, on an open-ended basis, to tell us what they knew about co-op/cooperative education. This question was posed to those students who said they had heard of co-op/cooperative education.

Nearly one-quarter described cooperative education as an opportunity to work with people in your field of interest and gain valuable career-related experience. Another 13 percent described cooperative education as a way for them to get a grade and college credit while working. Twelve percent said co-op gave them the opportunity to take a class and obtain a job related to that particular course. Only 5 percent described co-op as an opportunity to earn money while you learn. However, when pressed, nearly one-third of those indicating that they had heard of co-op/cooperative education, reported that they didn't remember or didn't know anything about co-op.



**Chart 3: Student Associations with Cooperative Education (open-ended responses)**  
Total responses: 220

**Q** What are students perceptions about cooperative education and internships?

**A** To understand students' perceptions about cooperative education and internships, StudentPoll read them a series of statements and asked them to indicate whether they completely agreed, somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed, completely disagreed or didn't know/weren't sure how to respond to the statement. Before reading each statement, we explained that cooperative education allowed students to experience different career-related jobs that help pay for their college education. Then we described internships as opportunities for students to gain career-related experiences, but not necessarily for pay.

Overall, these findings reveal that a majority of the students surveyed have very positive perceptions about cooperative education, agreeing that it "is better than internships because it would help you pay for your college education" and that "students who participate in co-op are highly motivated and intelligent." In fact, students expressed the strongest level of agreement with the statement about co-op providing a way to help finance a college education: More than three-quarters of students surveyed completely or somewhat agreed that co-op education is better than internships because it can help pay for a college education.

While some in higher education may view co-op as an educational approach of lesser quality and prestige, students appear to have a very different opinion. For example, 61 percent of all students surveyed, completely or somewhat agreed that students who participate in co-op are highly motivated and intelligent. More than half also agreed that co-op is offered at prestigious schools including 60 percent of students with SAT scores of 1270 or higher and 55 percent of those with ACTs of 26 or higher.

StudentPoll also asked students to what extent they agreed that "you wouldn't want to attend a college where co-op experiences are a requirement." A small segment of students with the highest SAT and ACT scores were more likely to completely agree with this statement, perhaps reacting to the required nature of co-op. By comparison, a small segment of students with ACT scores of 22-25 were more likely to completely disagree with this statement than their counterparts. By income level, 63 percent of students who reported family incomes of less than \$50K disagreed that they wouldn't want to attend a college that required co-op compared to 54 percent of those with incomes in the \$50K-\$75K range and 49 percent of students with family incomes of greater than \$75K.

When StudentPoll read students a similar statement about internships - "you wouldn't want to attend a college where you have to participate in internships"-31 percent of students reporting incomes of less than \$50K completely disagreed with this statement compared to 22 percent of those in the \$50K-\$75 range and 17 percent of students with family incomes greater than \$75K.

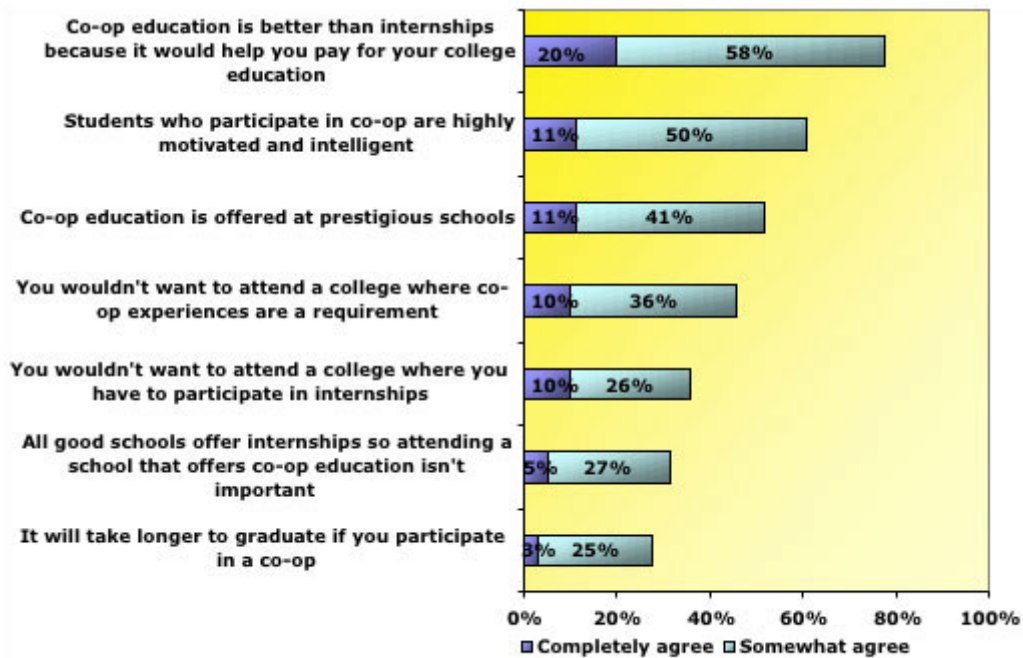


Chart 4: Agreement with Statements about Co-op and Internships

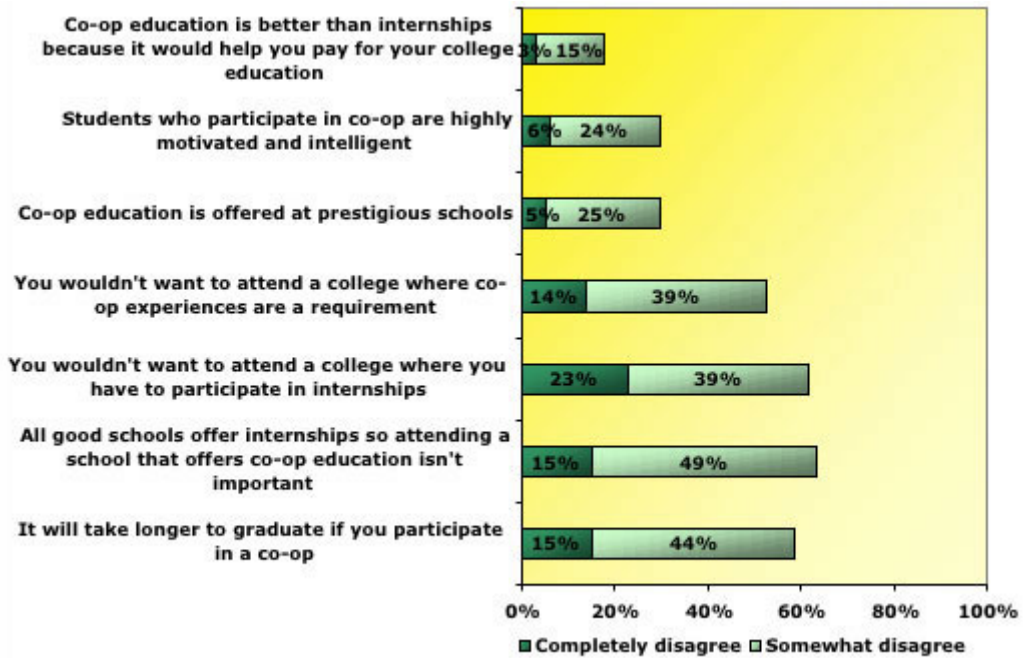
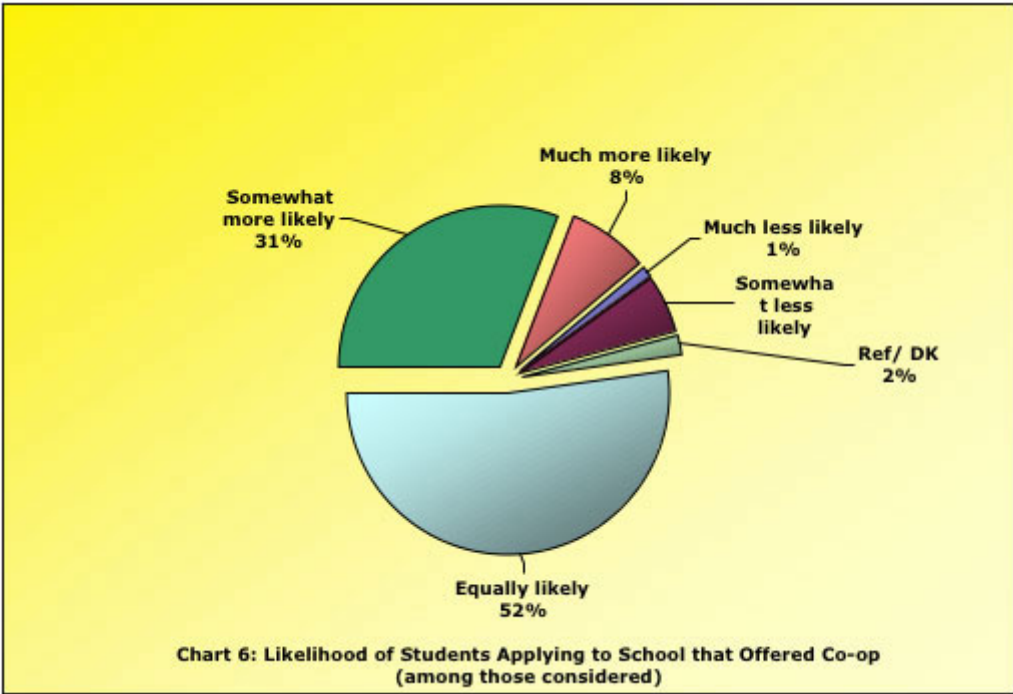


Chart 5: Disagreement with Statements about Co-op and Internships

**Q** If a student was considering a college, would the availability of co-op make that student more likely to apply?

**A** For a not insignificant number of students, the availability of cooperative education would have made them more likely to apply to that institution. Specifically, 39 percent of students surveyed reported that they would have been much more likely or somewhat more likely to have applied to an institution they were considering if that college offered co-op experience. In terms of any negative effect co-op would have on college applications, only 7 percent of respondents indicated that they would have been less likely to apply to an institution if cooperative education was offered. The majority, 52 percent, said they would have been equally likely to apply to a college whether or not it offered co-op.



StudentPoll is published by [Art & Science Group, LLC](#), a national leader in providing market intelligence to higher education and the non-profit sector.