

# Increasing Enrollment in MacEwan University's Co-op Program for Marketing Majors

---

McKenna Down, Ashley Reid, Mercedes Lam, & Denise Berry

## Abstract

The study aimed to identify barriers to enrolling in the marketing cooperative education program at MacEwan University and to develop strategies that encourage higher enrollment among marketing majors. Research focused on understanding student perceptions and the effectiveness of current enrollment initiatives, including the primary reasons for their low participation. The research design targeted non-co-op Bachelor of Commerce marketing students, employing a probability sampling method to ensure a representative sample.

Major findings indicate that a higher likelihood of recommending the co-op program correlates with better knowledge of program details, suggesting that increasing awareness could boost interest. However, the impact of current advertisements on program recommendation is low, indicating the need for improved marketing strategies. Students preferred receiving information through emails and in-class presentations, which are deemed most effective. Despite some support for mandatory work-integrated learning, there is ambivalence toward making the co-op program compulsory, signalling a need for further exploration.

Based on these findings, the study recommends establishing partnerships with local businesses for part-time co-op placements to avoid extending graduation timelines. Additionally, it suggests integrating co-op program information and promotional activities into relevant courses to enhance visibility and stimulate student interest. Another recommendation is allowing students to count co-op placements as elective credits, aligning practical experience with academic and career goals.

---

## Problem Definition

### *Management Problem*

After communicating with our community partner, we received his perspective and a detailed understanding of the current problem. The challenge lies in identifying effective strategies to increase enrollment in the marketing co-op program. This issue involves understanding deterrents and creating an environment that encourages students to enroll in co-op. The goal is to enhance the student experience and equip them with practical skills for their careers post-graduation, all of which the co-op program provides.

### *Marketing Research Problem*

Given the low enrollment numbers in the co-op program, our research objective centers around thoroughly understanding students' perspectives of co-op. This includes examining factors such as MacEwan's existing initiatives aimed at increasing enrollment, alongside delving into underlying issues. These may consist of factors that students find most deterring about the program, in addition to understanding whether the challenge stems from a lack of student

interest or insufficient awareness. Through our research efforts, we aim to acquire a nuanced understanding of the demographics and formulate actionable recommendations to enhance MacEwan's marketing co-op enrollment.

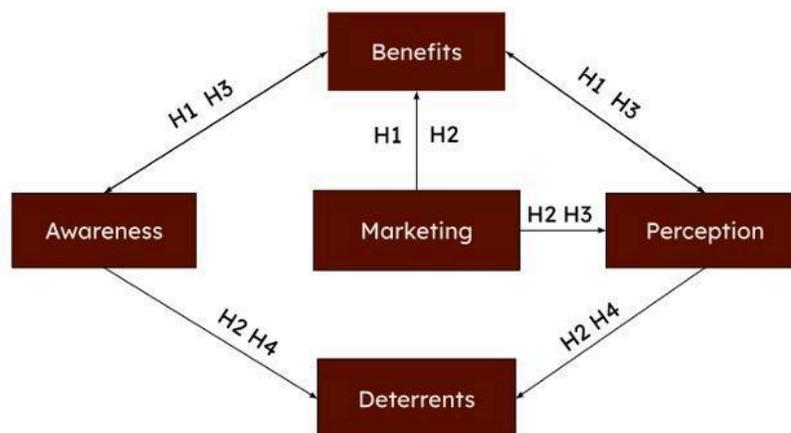
## Analytical Framework

### Analytical Model

The analytical model represents the hypothesized relationships among four fundamental constructs related to the co-op program at MacEwan: awareness, benefits, deterrents, and perception. Each construct is linked to others, suggesting that they influence the student's perception of the co-op program, as explored through the in-depth interviews and the participant profiles ([Appendix A](#)). The four hypotheses aim to examine these relationships, each tested and analyzed through the interview discussion guides ([Appendix B](#)) and their primary qualitative data analyses ([Appendix C](#)). The hypotheses suggest the following dynamics:

- **Hypothesis #1:** There is a direct relationship between awareness and benefits and between marketing and benefits. It is hypothesized that awareness and marketing contribute to students recognizing the benefits of the co-op program.
- **Hypothesis #2:** Indicates that awareness and marketing are related to perception and deterrents. The hypothesis is that the level of awareness and the nature of marketing can influence students' perception of the program and its deterrents.
- **Hypothesis #3:** Suggests a relationship between the benefits students understand and their overall perception of the program. It assumes that recognizing benefits can positively affect perception.
- **Hypothesis #4:** This hypothesis is connected between deterrents and awareness and between deterrents and perception, indicating that students' awareness can influence the perception of deterrents. Deterrents, in turn, can impact the overall perception of the co-op program.

Figure 1: Analytical Model



## Literature Review

### *Article Selection*

The following articles were found and selected using the online MacEwan University Library database. Various keywords were used to find the articles, including but not limited to experiential learning, work-integrated learning, postsecondary education, and cooperative education. Significant time was spent selecting articles to ensure they aligned with the management and marketing research problems. The vetting process included scanning of research methods, abstract and keyword reviews, and citation checks. Once the articles were assessed and deemed applicable, they were selected for further analysis and used as a source for the research report.

### *Experiential and Work-Integrated Learning in Higher Education*

The academic literature examined consistently highlights the significance of work-integrated learning (WIL) and experiential education in enhancing student career prospects and skill development. These findings directly relate to the research task, increasing enrollment in MacEwan University's co-op program for marketing majors. In a 2017 academic article, authors Govender and Wait examine the benefits of WIL projects in marketing and human resources disciplines, highlighting the positive impact of WIL on student experiences, knowledge acquisition, skill enhancement, and exposure to career opportunities. Despite perceived challenges in implementing WIL in a higher education setting, such as increased workload for students, the study demonstrates the invaluable role of experiential learning in bridging theory and practice and preparing students for future careers (Govender & Wait, 2017).

In integrating other literature, various texts continually emphasize the transformative power of experiential learning in shaping students' professional identities, skill sets, and career readiness. In articles by Chavan (2011) and Obi et al. (2022), the authors explore specific aspects of experiential learning in business education, while research by Govender and Wait (2017) delves into the broader benefits of WIL across disciplines.

The themes of active engagement, practical application, and exposure to real-world contexts emerge consistently throughout the literature, underscoring the importance of experiential learning in higher education. MacEwan University can leverage these insights by informing students and faculty of the value of WIL and experiential learning components, as discussed in various academic journals. By aligning the marketing co-op program with the benefits of WIL, MacEwan can enhance student engagement.

In addition to the insights provided in the analyzed texts, it is evident that hands-on experiences significantly impact higher education for students. Across diverse disciplines, scholars stress the importance of merging theory with external experiences to enhance student learning outcomes and career readiness. For instance, an article by Gallop et al. delves into the transformative impact of community service-learning (CSL) on social work students' professional identity formation, mirroring the broader theme of experiential learning's influence on skill development and career prospects (2023).

Internships, co-op placements, service-learning projects, and simulations offer students opportunities to engage with real-world challenges, develop practical skills, and build industry

networks. Reflective practice is highlighted as crucial, deepening students' learning experiences and facilitating knowledge transfer from the classroom to the workplace. Aligning with the research problem to improve enrollment in MacEwan's marketing co-op program, the integration of these principles can enhance student interest and equip them with the necessary skills for success in the ever-changing marketing industry.

### *Co-Op Benefits For Students, Employees, and Schools*

As stated, the most significant problem the marketing co-op program faces at MacEwan is the lack of enrollment. Several factors can cause this; through our primary and secondary research, we have found that a central issue is that many participants do not realize the benefits of the co-op program. A robust literature review found that co-op programs benefit students, employers, and schools.

For students, the benefits of co-op programs consist of developing new skills and knowledge through learning by doing. Co-op programs can help students with career planning by gaining experience in different areas of marketing. Employers also benefit from having co-op participants, as it improves an organization's brand image. There is a major benefit to employers who hire eager co-op students, which can improve productivity in the workplace and provide fresh perspectives to organizations. Lastly, for employers, hiring co-op students can save time and money by not having to undergo external hiring endeavours. The last to benefit from co-op is universities; by having students participate, their learning is enhanced, and they can connect their academics to industry standards. This, in turn, creates a positive brand image for the school, which can bring future students to MacEwan alongside all of the other benefits.

In addition to these benefits for each party, they can also positively intersect. For example, having more students in co-op will benefit not only students but also the employers that hire them, creating a better learning environment throughout students' academics. Doing so also creates a better reputation for the school, allowing for more students interested in attending MacEwan University and enrolling in the co-op program. All these benefits circle back to the original problem: low enrollment. Therefore, by promoting these advantages, everyone involved will see and ideally take advantage of the true value of the co-op program.

### *Work-Integrated Learning and its Beneficial Impact on Refining Career Paths*

A persistent correlation between work-integrated learning and refining career paths can be seen in the academic literature reviewed. These scholarly journals provide the benefits that cooperative education has on students' long-term career paths. Dwesini's 2017 article examines how students leave work-integrated learning (WIL) with an awareness of personal expectations, attitudes, responsibilities, and ethical values within their career path. Dwesini also provides research on how these skills acquired could not be possible in the classroom and are only impactful when participating in WIL (2017). Through WIL, students can gain work experience in their field and acquire new skills; this is valuable to students as they can define their career paths and enhance their resumes. This also impacts the broader theme of student employability, as seen in a theme identified earlier. As there are several possible routes in the marketing industry, WIL can help narrow down which specific profession students align with best.

Zegwaard and McCurdy's 2014 research voices how students can find career clarification by contextualizing and refining their studies. The authors used an example where students perceived a relationship between the role of a technician and a scientist. Many students realized that they were different jobs and developed an accurate description of each job title. As a result, students could develop their perspectives on each role and decide which route they wanted to follow (Zegwaard & McCurdy, 2014). This finding goes hand in hand with students hoping to pursue a career in marketing, as the co-op program would provide participants with clarification on whether they want to pursue a career in research or digital marketing or become a marketing assistant.

With a low enrollment rate for marketing co-op, we found several benefits to students' long-term careers when pursuing WIL; they can refine their careers and build skills and a network within their community and beyond. Working in the marketing industry will give students a chance to further their careers and, in some cases, receive a permanent job offer from where they interned.

### *How Work-Integrated Learning Can Impact Students Mentally and In Their Careers*

Another deterrent to enrolling in the co-op program could be the negative impact on mental health and whether the career benefits are worth the time invested. With an aim to find if students participating in a co-op program or other work-integrated learning were paid substantially more than their counterparts within the same demographics, Wyonch's 2020 study titled "Work-ready graduates: The role of co-op programs in labour market success" found that students who underwent some form of work or study term were paid more after graduation. Research by Blau and Lopez found that most participants involved in a work-integrated learning program were paid while in school (2020). In exploration of what aspects of co-op or related programs most impacted participants' mental health, the results of Parsa and Golab's 2021 publication showed that many students felt self-doubt due to the competitive nature of the programs and increased stress when exams or homework schedules clashed with their work programs. Finally, Phillips et al. aimed to explore the relationship between the number of work-integrated learning terms students completed and the value they attach to employer and work attributes (2023).

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

- **Research Question #1:** Are students aware of the co-op program but lack interest; if so, could their interest increase with more knowledge about the program?
  - **Hypothesis #1:** Students have some awareness of MacEwan's co-op program but not enough to fully understand its value.
- **Research Question #2:** To what extent do students value the benefits of the co-op program?
  - **Hypothesis #2:** Students place more weight on the deterrents of the co-op program than the benefits due to a lack of awareness.
- **Research Question #3:** How effective are the current co-op marketing strategies in recruiting new students?
  - **Hypothesis #3:** The current marketing strategy of the co-op program needs to be improved to effectively increase enrollment.

- **Research Question #4:** What are student’s and staff’s perceptions towards making the co-op program mandatory for all Bachelor of Commerce students?
  - **Hypothesis #4:** Select students and staff of MacEwan University see some form of mandatory work-integrated learning as beneficial but are unsure if it is feasible.

**Research Design**

*Target Population*

The target population of our study are students (element) enrolled in the Bachelor of Commerce program at MacEwan University (sampling unit) in the current Winter 2024 semester (time) who are majoring in marketing and are not current or former co-op students (extent). We chose to exclude co-op students from our target population to better understand why students do not participate in co-op and their opinions on the program.

*Sample Size*

Since the target population of our research is students enrolled in the Bachelor of Commerce program, majoring in marketing, who have not participated in the co-op program, we had initially expected a sample size of 80-100 respondents. However, after sending out the survey to student groups and professors, we received 29 responses upon closing the survey. This sample size was lower than expected, primarily due to a lack of student availability. The survey was conducted at the end of the semester, near exam season, which made it difficult to reach the desired number of respondents in the short time we had to collect responses.

*Sample Characteristics Table 1: Characteristics of the Sample*

Characteristics	# of Respondents	% of Respondents	Characteristics	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
<b>Household</b>			<b>Gender</b>		
Family	16	66.70%	Male	9	37.50%
Partner / Friend (s)	5	20.80%	Female	15	62.50%
Alone	3	12.50%	<b>Age</b>		
<b>Employment Status</b>			18-21	8	33.30%
Employed	17	70.80%	22-25	12	50.00%
Unemployed	7	29.20%	26-29	2	8.30%
<b>Annual Income</b>			30+	2	8.30%
\$0-\$19,999	11	45.80%	<b>Year of Studies</b>		
\$20,000-\$39,999	8	33.30%	Year 5+	3	12.50%
\$40,000-\$59,999	2	8.30%	Year 4	11	45.80%
\$80,000+	1	4.20%	Year 3	7	29.20%
Prefer not to say	2	8.30%	Year 2	3	12.50%

Table 1: Characteristics of the Sample (continued)

#### Sampling Frame and Method

Sampling Frame: The target population was identified by acquiring a list of Winter 2024 marketing course sections and their corresponding

instructors. We emailed these

instructors in hopes they would share the survey link with their students. We also connected with MacEwan Business student groups on social media, such as MacEwan Marketing Club and MacEwan BCom groups. We provided the survey link and denoted the study's target population through this omnichannel approach.

Sampling Method: The sampling technique used to draw a random sample is a probability sampling method. A probability sampling method was chosen because our research must find a sample that accurately represents the target population. More specifically, we needed to gather several respondents in a short period, so we wanted each sample element to have an equal probability of being selected for further segmentation and analysis.

#### Survey Administration

To acquire participants who fit the criteria for our questionnaire ([Appendix D](#)), we reached out to five different MacEwan University marketing professors in hopes they would distribute the questionnaire to their students. Additionally, we sent our survey to the MacEwan Marketing Club and posted it on a MacEwan Facebook group to urge additional responses. Lastly, we met with the supervisor of the work-integrated learning sector of MacEwan Careers and Experience. We asked if she would distribute our survey to BCom students, and this is where we collected more of our responses.

#### Fieldwork Data Collection

The first step of the fieldwork process is selecting the fieldworkers or those we chose to administer our survey. We wanted to find individuals familiar with our target market, BCom students majoring in marketing, as they needed to be able to reach our target demographic. Ultimately, the fieldworkers were our four group members and those we reached out to through our survey administration, such as professors, advisors, and peers. All these individuals were given a survey distribution email template to ensure consistency when reaching out to individuals and groups.

#### Pre-Test

Our pre-test consisted of five students who fit our target population: current BCom students majoring in marketing who have yet to participate in the co-op program. We contacted students from other marketing classes and asked if they would be willing to fill out our survey and provide us with feedback. With this input, we made changes to our survey to reflect the feedback given.

Characteristics	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
<b>City</b>		
Edmonton - Off-Campus	17	70.80%
Edmonton - On Campus	4	16.70%
St. Albert	1	4.20%
Sherwood Park	1	4.20%
Leduc	1	4.20%

## Ethics

The primary ethical issues that could occur when conducting a survey are providing adequate information about the purpose of the research and stating any potential risks and benefits of participation. Ensuring consent and clearly stating that respondents may withdraw from the survey at any time were also key considerations. It must also be noted that participants will remain completely anonymous and their responses confidential. Because our questionnaire clearly defined these matters, we did not run into any ethical issues. The MacEwan University Ethics Board approved this research.

## Statistical Data Analysis and Results

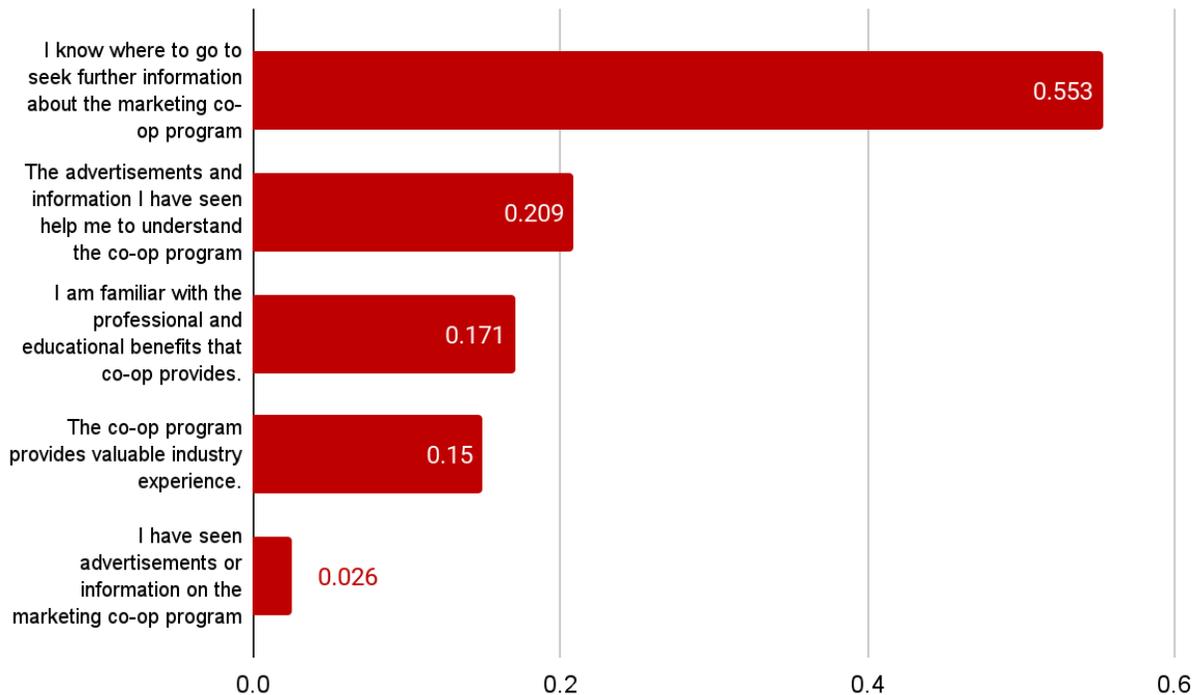
### Hypothesis #1

The Pearson correlation analysis measures the strength of the linear relationship between students' current familiarity with co-op and their likelihood to recommend co-op to prospective students. With a critical problem of differentiating whether students had insufficient awareness of the program or a lack of interest, conducting the correlation was crucial in understanding students' perspectives of co-op. After completing this analysis, it was discerned that students exhibit the highest proficiency in identifying resources for further information; however, the level of exposure to advertisements or informational material appears limited. With a substantial difference between the two, it is suggested that MacEwan University prioritizes fostering a comprehensive understanding of the advantages inherent in the co-op program. As other correlations were comparatively lower, addressing students' lack of awareness is essential.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation of Student Familiarity With Likelihood to Recommend Co-op

Current Familiarity	Correlation with Likelihood to Recommend the Marketing Co-op to Prospective Students
I know where to go to seek further information about the marketing co-op program	0.553
The advertisements and information I have seen have been beneficial in helping me understand the co-op program.	0.209
I am familiar with the professional and educational benefits that co-op provides.	0.171
The co-op program provides valuable industry experience.	0.15
I have seen advertisements or information on the marketing co-op program on campus or online	0.026

Figure 2: Pearson Correlation of Student Familiarity With Likelihood to Recommend Co-op



The numbers produced from the analysis of Figure 2 showed a moderately high positive correlation between identifying resources and the likelihood of recommending co-op; the numerical value equated to 0.553. The second highest correlation, with a score of 0.209, pertains to the efficacy of informational materials around campus. Even though it ranked relatively high, the numerical value was substantially smaller. Both of these correlations imply that as students acquire a greater understanding of the program, their inclination to recommend it grows. The analysis reveals that students' familiarity with co-op's valuable industry experiences scores at 0.150, while their familiarity with the educational and professional benefits scores at 0.171. With such numerical values falling behind the most crucial factor, these findings suggest insufficient awareness regarding the benefits of co-op among students. Conversely, the notably low correlation between program advertising and the likelihood to recommend—a numerical value of 0.026—indicates a virtually non-existent relationship. This suggests that such materials exert minimal influence on students' willingness to recommend co-op.

The numerical data accepts the hypothesis that students may have some awareness of MacEwan's co-op program but not enough to fully understand its value. The data can be categorized into two groups: factors reflecting a lack of awareness and factors indicating inadequate advertising materials. This suggests that while students exhibit a degree of awareness, they may not fully comprehend the benefits associated with the co-op program. These insights directly concern the research question: "Are students aware of the co-op program but lack interest? If so, could their interest increase with more knowledge about the program?"

When computing the numerical values for this analysis, the independent variable was students' likelihood to recommend co-op to prospective students. This variable was based on a scale of 0-10, with zero being not likely at all and ten being extremely likely. The dependent variable was students' familiarity with specific situations, such as identifying resources for further information, professional and educational benefits, and others. This variable was based on a scale of 1-5, with one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree.

The analysis aligns with the secondary research findings that co-op benefits students and enhances career prospects and skill development. Due to a lack of awareness, students must be well-educated about the program. MacEwan must understand the pivotal role that awareness plays in shaping students' inclination to recommend co-op. It can also be inferred that students who endorse the program would similarly express interest in pursuing co-op if provided the chance to revisit their academic trajectory. After analyzing the numerical data, it suggests that if students were provided with a detailed understanding of co-op within the early stages of their time at MacEwan, students would be more likely to pursue this route or recommend it to other students.

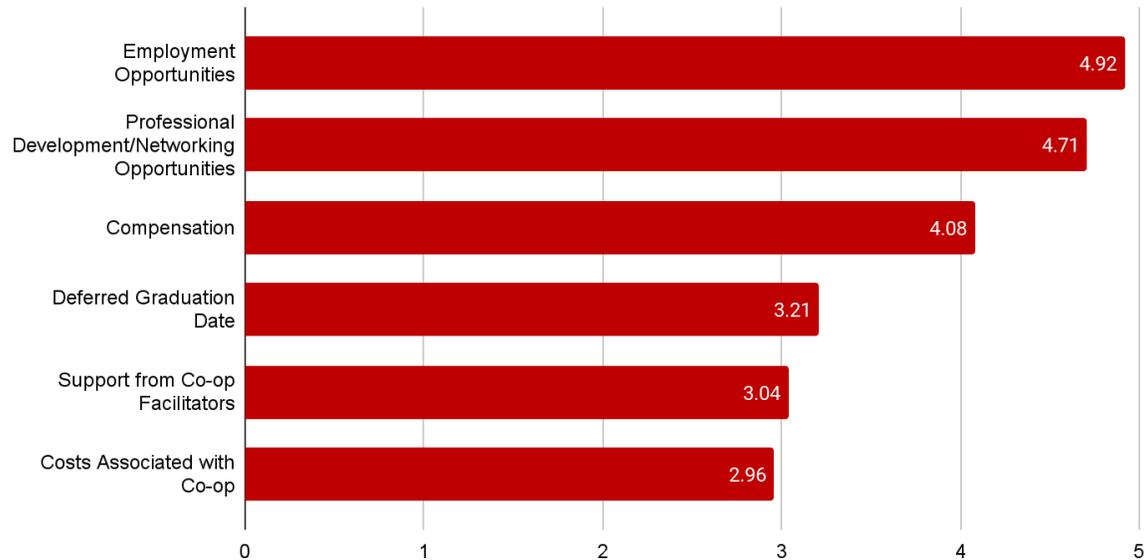
### *Hypothesis #2*

The univariate analysis conducted depicts a clear hierarchy of factors influencing co-op program participation. Employment opportunities emerge as the most crucial factor for participants, suggesting that the prospect of securing a job drives engagement in the program. Professional development and networking opportunities are closely related, underscoring the value students place on the growth and connections they expect to gain. While compensation is a crucial consideration, it falls behind the other factors, implying that although financial aspects are important, they are not a primary motivator. On the lower end of the importance averages, the impact on graduation timelines, quality of support from co-op facilitators, and the costs associated with participation are less influential. These insights suggest that while the program is well-received in areas such as professional development, there is room for improvement in the translation of employment opportunities and compensation to students.

*Table 3: Importance Averages of Co-Op Participation Factors*

<b>Participation Factor</b>	<b>Importance Average</b>
Employment Opportunities	4.92
Professional Development/Networking Opportunities	4.71
Compensation	4.08
Deferred Graduation Date	3.21
Support from Co-op Facilitators	3.04
Costs Associated with Co-op	2.96

Figure 3: Importance Averages of Co-op Participation Factors



The numerical data from the univariate analysis provides valuable insights into the importance of different aspects of co-op when determining whether to enroll. Higher numerical importance is placed on factors such as employment opportunities, suggesting a strong appreciation for tangible career benefits. In contrast, the lower importance scores for factors like support from facilitators and costs associated with co-op reject the hypothesis that students may place more weight on certain program deterrents. That said, this disparity relates to the research question, implying that increasing awareness of the co-op program's benefits that align with student importance ratings would improve enrollment rates.

To operationalize the variables in this context, the dependent variable would be the perceived importance of co-op factors, which is quantitatively measured. The independent variable could include specific program aspects such as employment opportunities, professional development, compensation, graduation timeline impacts, facilitator support, and associated costs.

The data analysis used numerical averages to gauge each element's significance for the students. For instance, employment opportunities received an average importance score of 4.92. This average suggests a high student valuation, aligning with the hypothesis that improved awareness of important co-op factors will improve program participants. Alternatively, aspects like support from facilitators and associated co-op costs have lower scores at 3.04 and 2.96, respectively, indicating areas that are perceived as less important (see Figure 3).

Interpreting these averages within the context of secondary research emphasizes the value of work-integrated learning in enhancing student career prospects, as highlighted in the reviewed academic literature. The high importance scores for employment opportunities align with findings that experiential learning significantly improves career readiness and provides necessary exposure to real-world practices. However, lower scores in aspects like support from facilitators and associated costs may correlate with the challenges mentioned in the literature,

such as increased student workload and additional stressors. Furthermore, the literature suggests that by improving awareness of the co-op program’s benefits—career advancement, skill acquisition, and networking—enrollment may increase. Addressing perceived barriers, such as compensation, could align co-op knowledge more closely with students’ interests.

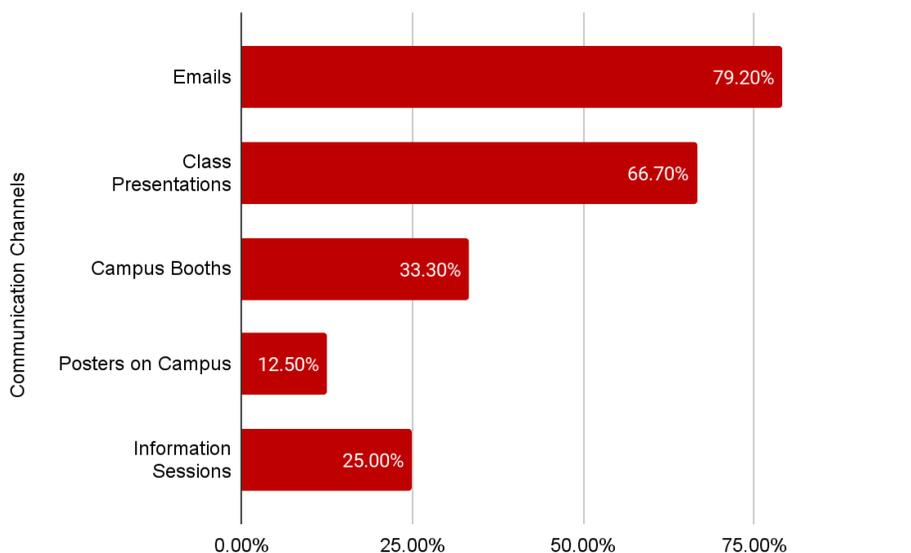
*Hypothesis #3*

The multiple regression analysis showcases what students consider their preferred communication channels when gaining information about the marketing co-op program. Emails are deemed the preferred method, and in-class presentations are a close second. What can be taken away from this is that students may find it more effective if information about co-op was brought to their attention rather than seeking it on their own time. This can be seen through campus booths, posters, and information sessions, which are the least preferred channels.

*Table 4: Preferred Communication Channels*

Communication Channels	# of Responses	% of Responses	% of Respondents
Emails	19	33.30%	79.20%
Class Presentations	16	28.10%	66.70%
Campus Booths	8	14.00%	33.30%
Posters on Campus	8	14.00%	33.30%
Information Sessions	6	10.50%	25.00%

*Figure 4: Preferred Communication Channels*



The multiple regression analysis indicates that 79.2% of respondents prefer email as their main channel for co-op information, with their next preferred channel being posters on campus at 66.7%. The following two, campus booths and information sessions, are tied at

33.3%. These channels show a significant drop in importance compared to the first two channels mentioned. Lastly, information sessions are garnered as the least preferred communication channel at 25% (see Table and Figure 4).

The research question proposed is, “How effective are the current co-op marketing strategies in recruiting new students?” The accompanying hypothesis states that “The current marketing strategy of the co-op program needs to be improved to effectively increase enrollment.” Currently, MacEwan University utilizes campus booths and information sessions as their main source of communicating information about co-op to students. The data shows this is not preferred and is relatively ineffective. Therefore, the data analysis helps us understand that information can be better communicated through email and in-class presentations, which MacEwan is currently not utilizing. Luckily, implementing these channels is very cost-effective and easy to conduct.

This data can also be tied back to our secondary research, which found that work-integrated learning has many benefits for students; however, the main issue is that many participants do not realize the benefits of the co-op program. Therefore, this study is important because it showcases how MacEwan can reach students and provide them with this information so that they will see and understand its benefits. Bringing information to students rather than having them seek out information themselves will be highly beneficial and could lead to potential increased enrollment in the co-op program.

#### *Hypothesis #4*

The univariate analysis of the research question, “Do you believe a form of mandatory work-integrated learning would benefit BCom students at MacEwan?” showed that, despite our initial hypothesis, most students favour a form of mandatory work-integrated learning. In support of these results are our analyses of the questions: “How likely is it that you would recommend MacEwan's marketing co-op program to prospective students?” and “How likely is it that you enroll in a marketing co-op in the future or if you were to start your BCom degree over?” showed that students have a positive opinion of the program. This would be undoubtedly beneficial if MacEwan decides to make the co-op program mandatory. These analyses are important to our study as they demonstrate the value that students see in the program, which can help the department decide on the option of a mandatory co-op term for marketing students.

*Figure 5: Student Opinion on Implementing a Mandatory Co-op Program*

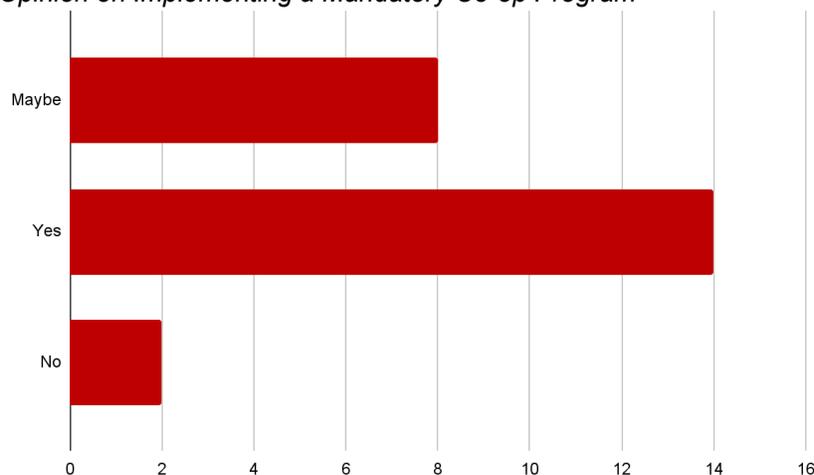
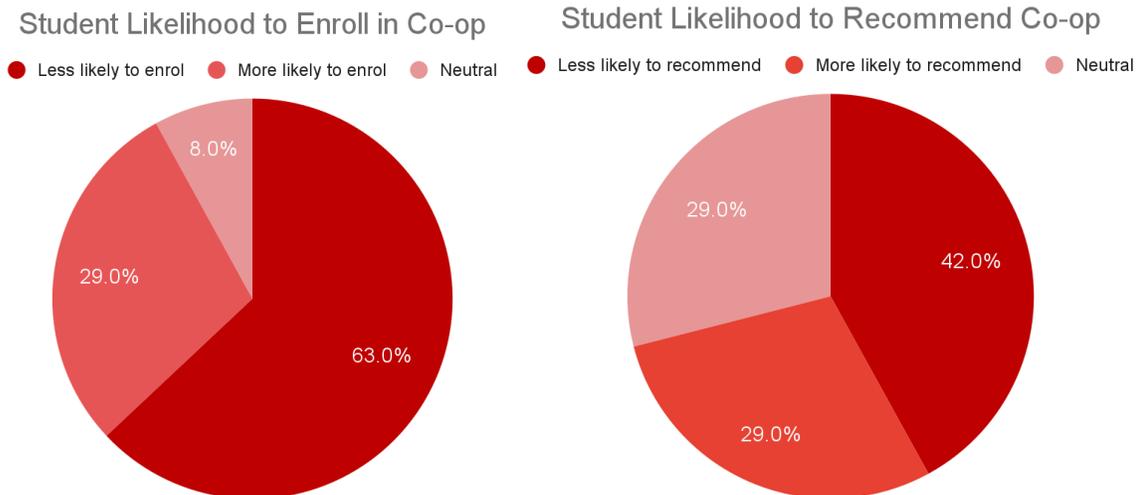


Figure 6: Likelihood to Recommend Co-op and Likelihood to Enroll in Co-op



While our initial hypothesis predicted that students would decide against a mandatory co-op program, results showed that 55.6% of respondents favoured making the program mandatory (see Figure 5). In addition, 63% of students leaned in favour of taking the co-op program if they were to restart their degree (see Figure 6)

That said, results about whether students were more or less likely to recommend the program to prospective students showed that 42% of respondents were less likely to recommend it. Another essential consideration in analyzing these results is that 29% of respondents were neutral to recommending, equal to the number of respondents against recommending (see Figure 6).

This insight shows that if making the program mandatory would be feasible on the university's end, students would have a positive reception overall. Despite this, the results were nearly half of the questions applicable to this hypothesis. Because of this factor, MacEwan University will need to ensure clear benefits both financially and in terms of reputation before implementing mandatory work-integrated learning for Bachelor of Commerce students.

## Recommendations

### *Recommendation #1: Part-Time Community Partnerships*

Research Question #2: To what extent do students value the benefits of the co-op program?

**Statistical Findings:** The statistical analyses indicated that extending graduation dates is a significant barrier to co-op enrollment. 33.3% of students indicated that the deferred graduation date is the primary reason why co-op enrollment is low, second to 51.9% believing the main reason is due to lack of awareness. Mature students (>30) and those balancing multiple responsibilities prioritize completing their degrees promptly to enter back into the workforce. However, students see the value in work-integrated learning, as indicated by 89.9% believing that some form of WIL would benefit BCom students.

**Course of Action:** Establish partnerships with local businesses to offer part-time co-op placements that allow students to gain relevant work experience without postponing graduation. This approach addresses the needs of students eager to integrate work with study but do not want to prolong their graduation by one year.

1. **Develop Flexible Co-op Models:** Collaborate with companies open to part-time employment for students, ensuring these opportunities are paid and compatible with most academic schedules.
2. **Outreach to Potential Partners:** Identify and engage with new and existing community partners who are flexible in job offerings and interested in employing part-time co-op students.
3. **Marketing Strategy:** Prominently highlight the flexibility and benefits of part-time co-op placements in MacEwan and co-op program marketing materials, preferably in emails and in-class presentations.

### ***Recommendation #2: Class Integrations***

Research Question #3: How effective are the current co-op marketing strategies in recruiting new students?

**Statistical Findings:** Current co-op marketing strategies are not reaching their full potential in influencing student decisions, possibly due to the lack of integration into students' immediate academic environment. The top two preferred methods of communication by students, indicated by the questionnaire results, are emails and in-class presentations (see Table 4). These methods are the least two prominent channels MacEwan University currently focuses on when advertising the co-op program. Based on results from the questionnaire, 74.1% of students' main reason for not enrolling in co-op is due to a lack of awareness, not a lack of interest. 51.9% believe that the current marketing efforts of the co-op program at MacEwan are ineffective, with only 3.7% indicating that it is effective and 0% indicating it is extremely effective.

**Course of Action:** Integrate co-op program promotions and information sessions directly into the curricula of relevant first- and second-year BCom classes, such as BUSN 201. Integrating this program into a student's current academic schedule reduces the barrier to awareness and makes the program more visible to all students. It is important to note that students are paid above minimum wage by participating while building their resume and network in the process.

1. **Curriculum-Based Promotions:** Work with faculty to incorporate brief presentations or community partner seminars about the co-op program into courses related to students' majors or introductory business courses.
2. **Co-op Endorsements:** Identify and support faculty members and previous co-op students who are advocates of experiential learning to share the benefits of co-op programs during the in-class presentations.

3. **Assessment Integration:** Explore possibilities for class projects or assignments that could promote or reference co-op experiences, simultaneously offering students academic credit and co-op program awareness.

### **Recommendation #3: Option to Replace Out-of-Faculty Electives**

Research Question #1: Are students aware of the co-op program but lack interest; if so, could their interest increase with more knowledge about the program?

**Statistical Findings:** Some students feel that out-of-faculty electives are irrelevant to their educational and career goals; this can be viewed as an opportunity to promote other programs like co-op. Other students chose not to participate due to the fear of balancing classes and work. According to some students, the thought of partaking in co-op is put on the back burner while taking courses that lack relevance and interest yet cause stress.

**Course of Action:** MacEwan can offer students the option to replace out-of-faculty elective requirements with co-op placements, aligning more directly with their career interests and academic goals. Choosing co-op placements over faculty minors to complete their 120 credits would not only offer flexibility to students but also increase program awareness and enrollment. This option would also positively impact MacEwan's reputation, as the school would be viewed as an innovative and accommodating university.

1. **Elective Replacement Policy:** Develop a policy that allows co-op placements to count as elective credits for necessary out-of-faculty minors. This policy should be clearly communicated to students through advising sessions, emails, presentations, posters, and the MacEwan University website.
2. **Academic and Co-op Coordination:** Ensure that the careers and experience office works closely with academic advisors to help students understand how co-op can fit into their degree plans without extending their graduation data.
3. **Promotional Campaigns:** Prepare a campaign to inform students about the new elective replacement option, focusing on new student enrollment and emphasizing how it can make their education more relevant and beneficial to their long-term goals.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

#### *Recommendation #1: Part-Time Community Partnerships*

- Establish partnerships with local businesses for part-time student co-op placements.
- Develop flexible co-op models compatible with academic schedules.
- Outreach to potential partners who offer part-time positions for students.
- Promote the flexibility and benefits of part-time co-op placements in marketing materials.

#### *Recommendation #2: Class Integrations*

- Integrate co-op program promotions into relevant BCom classes.
- Incorporate brief presentations about the co-op program into first- and second-year business courses.
- Identify and support faculty and previous co-op students as advocates of experiential learning.

- Explore possibilities for class projects or assignments related to co-op experiences.

*Recommendation #3: Option to Replace Out-of-Faculty Electives*

- Offer students the option to replace out-of-faculty elective requirements with co-op placements.
- Develop a policy allowing co-op placements to count as elective credits.
- Coordinate with academic advisors to help students fit co-op into their degree plans.
- Prepare a campaign to inform students about the elective replacement option.

**Limitations**

*Quantitative Limitation: Sample Size*

**Limitation:** The response rate to the questionnaire was significantly lower than anticipated, with only 29 responses received out of a targeted sample size of 80-100 participants. This small sample size limits the generalizability of the results and may not accurately reflect the broader student body's perspectives.

**Impact:** A small and potentially non-representative sample could lead to biased findings and recommendations that may not effectively address the needs or opinions of all student segments, particularly underrepresented groups.

*Questionnaire Limitation: Timing and External Factors*

**Limitation:** The survey timing coincided with busy academic calendar periods, such as ending classes and final exam periods. This timing could affect both the number of responses and the attentiveness of the responses due to preoccupied schedules.

**Impact:** Students may have been less likely to participate or provide less thoughtful responses due to time constraints or stress, impacting the quality and reliability of the data collected.

*Qualitative Limitation: Lack of Comparative Data*

**Limitation:** There was limited access to in-depth qualitative data about other universities' co-op programs and their enrollment rates and trends. This limitation restricted the ability to benchmark MacEwan's co-op program against those at similar institutions.

**Impact:** Without comparative data, it is challenging to evaluate the program's relative success or to identify best practices that could be adapted to enhance MacEwan's co-op offerings. This lack of benchmarking data may hinder efforts to competitively position and improve the program based on industry standards or successes observed at other universities.

## References

- Anderson, E., Mcrae, N., Johnston, N., Reed, N., Iles, L., & Walchli, J. (2012). Co-operative education and student recruitment, engagement and success: Early findings from a multi-institutional study in British Columbia. *Journal of Cooperative Education & Internships*, 46(1), 58–76.
- Blau, G., & Lopez, A. B. (2020). Exploring correlates for paid versus unpaid internships or co-ops for graduating business students. *Journal of Education for Business*, 95(6), 393–401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2019.1668744>
- Gallop, C. J., Guthrie, B., & Asante, N. (2023). The impact of experiential learning on professional identity: Comparing community service-learning to traditional practical pedagogy. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 46(4), 474–490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10538259231154888>
- Braunstein, L.A. (2001). Employer benefits of, and attitudes toward postsecondary cooperative education. *Journal of Cooperative Education*, 36(1), 7-22.
- Chavan, M. (2011). Higher education students' attitudes towards experiential learning in international business. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 22(2), 126–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08975930.2011.615677>
- Obi, B. I. N., Eze, T. I., & Chibuzo, N. F. (2022). Experiential learning activities in business education for developing 21st century competencies. *Journal of Education for Business*, 97(1), 36–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2021.1884521>
- Drewery, D., Truong, M., & Fannon, A.-M. (2023). Gen Z students' work-integrated learning experiences and work values. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 13(5), 1023–1036. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-02-2023-0050>
- Dwesini, N. F. (2017). The role of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in enhancing employability skills: Graduate perspectives. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 6(2), Article 7163688. [https://www.ajhtl.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article\\_40\\_vol\\_6\\_2\\_2017.pdf](https://www.ajhtl.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article_40_vol_6_2_2017.pdf).
- Gellerstedt, M., Johansson, K., & Winman, T. (2015). Work integrated learning - A marriage between academia and working life. *Journal of Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics*, 13(6), 38–46. <https://www.iiisci.org/Journal/pdv/sci/pdfs/IP005LL15.pdf>
- Govender, C. M., & Wait, M. (2017). Work integrated learning benefits for student career prospects-mixed-mode analysis. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 31(5), 49–64. <https://doi.org/10.20853/31-5-609>

- Jackson, D. (2016). Developing pre-professional identity in undergraduates through work-integrated learning. *Higher Education*, 74(5), 833–854. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0080-2>
- Parsa, M., & Golab, L. (2021). Social media mining to understand the impact of cooperative education on mental health. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 22(4), 521–537.
- Phillips, M., Howard, H., & Brewster, G. (2023). Examining business students' workplace information use during internships and co-ops. *Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship*, 28(1), 36–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08963568.2022.2137973>
- Wyonch, R. (2019). Working to create work-ready graduates: Successful transition to the labor market and the role of co-op. *Journal of Organizational Psychology*, 19(6). <https://doi.org/10.33423/jop.v19i6.2665>
- Wyonch, R. (2020). *Work-ready graduates: The role of co-op programs in labour market success* (Vol. 562). C.D Howe Institute.
- Zegwaard, K. E., & McCurdy, S. (2014). The influence of work-integrated learning on motivation to undertake graduate studies. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 15(1), 13–28. [https://www.ijwil.org/files/APJCE\\_15\\_1\\_13\\_28.pdf](https://www.ijwil.org/files/APJCE_15_1_13_28.pdf)

## Appendix A: In-Depth Interview Participant Profiles

Profile of Participants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Participant 1: Cooperative Education Coordinator; works alongside students and employers participating in co-op.</li> <li>2. Participant 2: Assistant Professor in Marketing at MacEwan's School of Business; teaches numerous marketing courses.</li> <li>3. Participant 3: Third-year marketing major at MacEwan; no plans to participate in marketing co-op.</li> <li>4. Participant 4: Fifth-year marketing student at MacEwan, has completed all co-op requirements.</li> <li>5. Participant 5: Completed BCom and co-op; now taking a Business Management diploma at MacEwan.</li> </ol>
Moderator Profile	Encouraging, flexible, sensitive, and active listener with strong communication skills. These characteristics allowed for a comforting environment for participants.
Time Duration	15-30 minutes
Recording	Phone audio recording if the participant consented.
Physical Setting	Four interviews were done virtually via Google Meet. One interview was done in person.

## Appendix B: In-Depth Interview Discussion Guides

### Student Discussion Guide

#### Introduction

1. Introduce ourselves and thank participant for signing up to be a part of our in-depth interview.
2. Share rules/expectations:
  - You are entitled not to participate.
  - You can choose not to participate by leaving or saying “no” as you consider it appropriate.
  - Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with.
  - You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time, without explanation or penalty of any sort.
  - Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on how you will be treated.
  - Should you wish to withdraw, there will be no penalties associated with it.
3. We will be recording the discussion (either visually or audio recording) upon your approval.
4. Explain the purpose. We are going to be talking about your knowledge and participation (or lack thereof) in the co-op program for marketing majors available at MacEwan.

Script: Hi, thank you for agreeing to participate in our (focus group/interview) today. We would like to start by sharing our rules and expectations for this (focus group/interview). Firstly, there are no right or wrong answers, we would just like to discuss your knowledge and participation (or lack thereof) involving the BCom co-op program for marketing majors at MacEwan. This is an open discussion where we encourage respect and honest feedback from all participants.

#### Warm-Up

- Starting questions should be broadly related to the topic/research issue.
  - Go around the room and introduce yourself to the group.
- Introduction:
  - State your name.
  - What year of study are you in?
  - What are some of your hobbies outside of school?

#### Core Discussion of the Research Topic

- Current Studies:
  - Why did you choose to study at MacEwan?
  - Why did you choose to be a marketing major?
- Career:
  - Do you have an existing job? What kind? If so, could your job be replaced with co-op?

- What are your career goals after you graduate from MacEwan?
- What is your financial situation?
- What motivates you in personal, educational, and professional settings?
- Co-op:
  - What do/don't you know about the marketing co-op program?
  - Why did you/did you not choose to participate in co-op?
  - How did you hear about the co-op program?
  - For those who chose to participate in co-op, what do you hope to achieve from co-op?
  - What are your thoughts on co-op becoming mandatory for all BCom students?

#### Closing

- Summarize comments and attempt to get a final read on the respondent(s).
- Thank everyone for their participation.
- One final question before they leave:
  - How could we encourage you/others to participate in the marketing co-op program?
- If given an incentive, hand it out.

---

### Advisor/Expert Discussion Guide

#### Introduction

1. Introduce ourselves and thank participant for signing up to be a part of our in-depth interview.
2. Share rules/expectations:
  - You are entitled not to participate.
  - You can choose not to participate by leaving or saying “no” as you consider it appropriate.
  - Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with.
  - You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time, without explanation or penalty of any sort.
  - Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on how you will be treated.
  - Should you wish to withdraw, there will be no penalties associated with it.
3. We will be recording the discussion (either visually or audio recording) upon your approval.
4. Explain the purpose. We are going to be talking about your knowledge and participation (or lack thereof) in the co-op program for marketing majors available at MacEwan.

Script: Hi, thank you for agreeing to participate in our interview today. We would like to start by sharing our rules and expectations for this interview. Firstly, there are no right or wrong answers, we would just like to discuss your knowledge and participation (or lack thereof) involving the

BCom co-op program for marketing majors at MacEwan. This is an open discussion where we encourage respect and honest feedback from all participants.

#### Warm-Up

- Starting questions should be broadly related to the topic/research issue.
  - Go around the room and introduce yourself to the group.
- Introduction:
  - State your name.
  - What is your job title at MacEwan?

#### Core Discussion of the Research Topic

- Marketing Co-op:
  - How many people are currently enrolled in BCom, and how many people are enrolled in the marketing co-op program?
  - What are the benefits of co-op?
  - Do you have any contacts you could provide of people who are currently enrolled and previously enrolled in marketing co-op?
  - What are the requirements to apply/get accepted into marketing co-op?
  - What are your current initiatives to enroll students in co-op or marketing co-op specifically? Is there anything you want to try that you haven't?
  - What are your thoughts on making co-op mandatory for all BCom students?

#### Closing

- Summarize comments and attempt to get a final read on the respondent(s).
- Thank you for your participation.
- If given an incentive, hand it out.

## Appendix C: Analysis of Primary Qualitative Data

The main themes generated using the coding and categorizing methods are as follows:

The co-op program creates many student opportunities. They can gain work experience in the marketing field while also getting paid. This is also an excellent opportunity for students to explore different career paths and find out what kind of job they want after post-graduation. Additionally, it can be beneficial because many students who participate in co-op can find a job placement with the organization from their co-op work term after graduation.

Many marketing students and staff need more knowledge on the co-op program; this is one of the reasons that co-op enrollment is so low. Students with little interest in participating in co-op feel that it needs to be promoted more at the beginning of their time at MacEwan University and are unsure of the various benefits. Those who have participated in co-op heard about it through word of mouth from other students or friends rather than from MacEwan's promotions.

As stated above, many students do not know much about co-op, such as the requirements to get in, how to apply, and how many work terms are required. Even though co-op has many benefits, it is still just as important to inform students how to participate. Letting students know about these simple things will ease their questions or concerns, which may be why they hesitate to partake in co-op.

After the benefits and knowledge of the co-op program have been addressed, it is important to focus on how MacEwan can get students' attention to inform them of the co-op program. Ways that were addressed through discussion were information sessions and tables. However, word-of-mouth and interactive presentations are two of the most significant ways. This can be done by having former co-op students visit 100- and 200-level classes and give presentations on their experience. Keeping teachers informed about the program so they can mention it to their students and providing resources and support regarding enrollment would also be beneficial.

Lastly, one solution discussed was making co-op mandatory for all BCom students. However, through discussions during the in-depth interviews, most interviewees stated that they did not support this suggestion. Not all students want to or can extend their studies for an additional year, and some students may not need co-op as they may already have a career plan in place. This also may not be possible for MacEwan as a school because a sufficient number of job opportunities would need to be available to thousands of students of different majors over 12 months of required work experience.

## Appendix D: Questionnaire

# Increasing Enrollment in MacEwan University's Co-op Program for Marketing Majors

MARK 312 Student Research Study

\* Indicates required question

## Consent

### Project Overview

The research study delves into the Bachelor of Commerce Co-op Program for marketing majors at MacEwan University, aiming to address declining student interest and participation. Through qualitative secondary data collection and analysis, the study identified deterrents to program enrollment through in-depth interviews with faculty members and marketing students. Moving forward, the research proposes further exploration of feasible methods to increase awareness and improve enrollment in the co-op program for marketing majors through quantitative research and analysis.

### Consent Information

For full consent information and research questions, please visit this

link: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mhU7qloiNmoCnsTMnp8Z\\_XlRuzYWzU6t1-sl2LJ3kMU/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mhU7qloiNmoCnsTMnp8Z_XlRuzYWzU6t1-sl2LJ3kMU/edit?usp=sharing)

### 1. 1. Do you agree to participate in this study? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, I agree    Skip to question 2
- No, I disagree    Skip to section 5 (Thank You)

## Screening Questions

These questions ensure every participant belongs to the target population of the study.

2. **2. Are you a current Bachelor of Commerce student at MacEwan University?** \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No Skip to section 5 (Thank You)

3. **3. Which BCom major are you pursuing? \***

Mark only one oval.

- Accounting Skip to section 5 (Thank You)
- Human Resources Management Skip to section 5 (Thank You)
- International Business Skip to section 5 (Thank You)
- Legal Studies Skip to section 5 (Thank You)
- Management Skip to section 5 (Thank You)
- Marketing
- Supply Chain Management Skip to section 5 (Thank You)

4. **4. Are you a current or former co-op student? \***

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to section 5 (Thank You)
- No

### Main Section

These questions aim to answer the research questions posed in Section 1.

5. **5. Have you ever considered enrolling in the marketing co-op program at MacEwan?** \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No  
 Maybe

6. **6. Do you believe a form of mandatory co-op/work-integrated learning would benefit BCom students at MacEwan?** \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No  
 Maybe

7. **7. Which of the following are your preferred communication channels for co-op information from MacEwan? Select all that apply.** \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Emails  
 Posters on Campus  
 In-Class Presentations  
 Campus Booths  
 Information Sessions  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. **8. In general, which factor do you think plays the most significant role in deterring students from enrolling in marketing co-op?** \*

Mark only one oval.

- Lack of Awareness
- Lack of Interest
- Deferred Graduation Date
- Financial Considerations
- Academic Workload
- Application Requirements
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. **9. How likely is it that you would recommend MacEwan's marketing co-op program to prospective students?** \*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

---

Not             Extremely Likely

10. **10. How likely is it that you enroll in marketing co-op in the future or if you were to start your BCom degree over?** \*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

---

Not             Extremely Likely

11. **11. Which of the following best describes why you chose not to enroll in the co-op program?** \*

Mark only one oval.

- Lack of Awareness  
 Lack of Interest

12. **12. Rank the following factors in order of importance when considering participating the co-op program. (1 = least important, 6 = most important)** \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Employment Opportunities	<input type="radio"/>					
Compensation	<input type="radio"/>					
Support from Co-op Facilitators	<input type="radio"/>					
Costs Associated with Co-op	<input type="radio"/>					
Professional Development/Networking Opportunities	<input type="radio"/>					
Deferred Graduation Date	<input type="radio"/>					

13. **13. Rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "The current promotion of the co-op program for marketing majors at MacEwan University is effective."** \*

Mark only one oval.

1   2   3   4   5

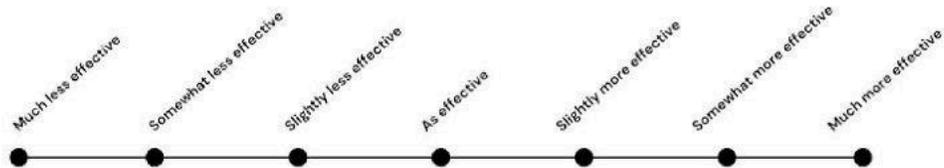
Strongly      Strongly Effective

14. **14. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.\***

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	1 (Strongly Disagree)	2 (Somewhat Disagree)	3 (Neither Agree Nor Disagree)	4 (Somewhat Agree)	5 (Strongly Agree)
I know where to go to seek further information about the marketing co-op program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am familiar with the professional and educational benefits that co-op provides.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have seen advertisements or information on the marketing co-op program on campus or online.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The advertisements or information I have seen (if applicable) have been beneficial in helping me understand the co-op program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. **15. How effective do you find the awareness initiatives of the co-op program compared to other MacEwan programs?** \*



Mark only one oval.

- Much less effective
- Somewhat less effective
- Slightly less effective
- As effective
- Slightly more effective
- Somewhat more effective
- Much more effective

16. **16. How would you recommend MacEwan increase co-op enrollment for marketing majors?** \*

### Classification Questions

These questions are needed to segment statistics; all answers are confidential.

17. **17. What is your gender? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

18. **18. What is your age? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-29
- 30+
- Prefer not to say

19. **19. What year of studies are you in? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- Year 1
- Year 2
- Year 3
- Year 4
- Year 5+

20. **20. Where do you live? \***

Mark only one oval.

- Edmonton - On Campus
- Edmonton - Off Campus
- St. Albert
- Sherwood Park
- Spruce Grove
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

21. **21. Who do you live with? \***

Mark only one oval.

- Family
- Partner / Friend(s)
- Alone

22. **22. Are you currently employed? \***

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

23. **23. What is your annual income? \***

Mark only one oval.

- \$0-\$19,999
- \$20,000-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$59,999
- \$60,000-\$79,999
- \$80,000+
- Prefer not to say

Thank You