

Opportunity knocks

Co-op program provides students a career jumpstart

By KATHY COOK

They come from varied backgrounds and schools. They have diverse majors, languages, outlooks and aspirations. But the young men and women who are participating in the Boeing cooperative education program do have one thing in common: they all believe that being a “co-op” is one of the best career opportunities.

“The job experience is terrific,” said Adam Conners, a senior in aerospace engineering at St. Louis University in that Missouri city. “You experience so much more, things you never learn in class.”

The Boeing co-op program, which has been in place since the 1980s, allows students to work and attend school in various sessions. The typical path for a Boeing co-op includes one six-month instructional period, during which the student works full-time at a Boeing site, followed by two additional, shorter 10- to 12-week periods, usually over the summer. These sessions usually are not consecutive; most co-ops begin as sophomores or juniors in college, work one session during a regular fall or spring semester, then head back to school before completing the second and third sessions. Boeing does not limit the number of students in the co-op program, but relies on various departments to request co-ops.

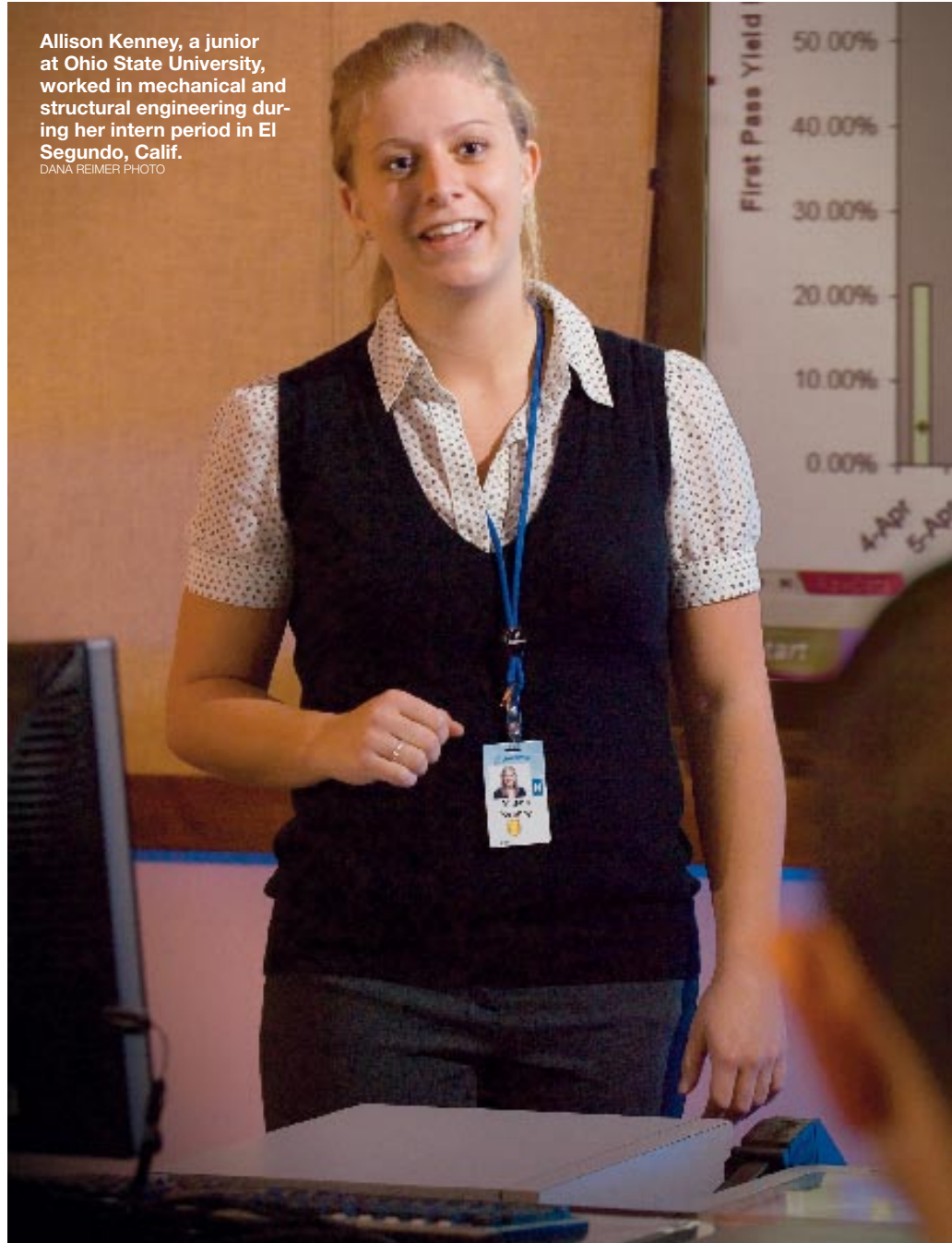
Jeffrey Busby, who has had summer intern positions with other companies, rated his co-op experience with Boeing as “the best one.” He’s not only recommended the program to several of his friends at the University of Missouri–Rolla, where he is a senior in engineering management, but has actually participated in a career fair at the university as part of a Boeing team.

“Boeing’s program is very well organized,” Busby said. “They have a great orientation, they really prep you for the job, and the job itself is really challenging. I’m just like part of the team, and I’ve had opportunities to really make a difference.”

Having an impact was a key factor for Brittany Wingfield, a junior in industrial en-

Allison Kenney, a junior at Ohio State University, worked in mechanical and structural engineering during her intern period in El Segundo, Calif.

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gineering at Purdue University. Her assignment at Boeing includes working with manufacturing engineers on work instructions for spares of tactical fighter platforms.

“I get to have input and make a difference in my department through continu-

ous improvement teams, staff meetings and daily work,” she said. “I love having the opportunity to see more of Boeing through a number of assignments. The year or more of experience I get will really make me more competitive when it comes



Harold Santiago (right), a junior at the University of Puerto Rico, checks out an F-15 in final assembly with his manager, Dave Voss. Santiago, in his first co-op experience, worked in the F-15 structural design group.

RICH RAU PHOTO

time to interview for a full-time career.”

Allison Kenney, a junior in mechanical engineering at Ohio State University, was influenced by professors, other students and her sister, a mechanical engineer, to apply for what she calls “a once-in-a-lifetime experience” as a co-op at Boeing in El Segundo, Calif. “I’ve been involved on several different projects which allow me to be a part of the big picture here at Boeing,” she said about her role working with functional processes that span several programs.

Kenney, who has had two previous internships, is not sure whether she wants to go into the automotive field or aerospace, but she has been impressed with the managers she’s worked for. “They let us get involved in projects that spark an interest, and they help create a very encouraging work environment,” she said.

While most of the co-ops are engineering students, others have opportunities in different fields. Among them: Kassy Kennedy, an accounting and computer information systems major at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, Mo. She said her manager stressed from the beginning that she was there to learn, but she has otherwise been treated like anyone else on the team.

“They gave me a project, gave me the tools to complete the project, and told me to ask for help if I needed it,” she said. “This experience is so much more than learning in class.”

Other co-ops at Boeing agree.

“This program gives me hands-on experience and a chance to see what in-

dustry is doing,” said Harold Santiago, a mechanical engineering student from the Mayaguez campus of the University of Puerto Rico. “I can compare our school curriculum with what’s really happening in the industry and make sure I’m meeting the needs employers have.”

“Co-op assignments give you what the classroom can’t,” said Paul Creekmore, one of the program’s few graduate co-ops. He has a double degree—in electrical engineering and theater from Kansas State University—and considers co-op experience “a very important part of education. ... There is so much specific information that you can’t learn in a classroom.”

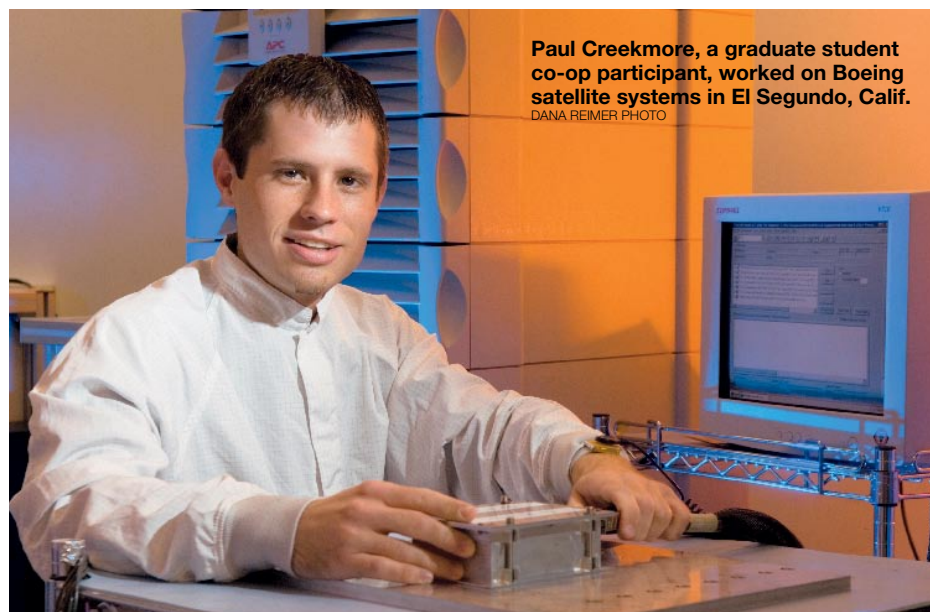
Jim Young, vice president of engineering for Global Strike Systems, said being a co-op helps students in two key ways: “It gives them the broad range of experience they can’t get in a classroom, and it really helps them understand what it’s like to be in the ‘real world,’” he said. “This teaches them practical applications for what they learned in school and lets them know that we don’t just sit at a desk all day running numbers.”

The program also helps Boeing, company representatives said. Robert Poole, the senior manager for Global Staffing—college and diversity programs, said the program gives Boeing access to candidates with sought-after skills and backgrounds, as well as a means for cost-effective long-term recruitment and retention. In fact, he said, more than 80 percent of all Boeing co-ops go on to a career with Boeing. What’s more, he said, the program gives Boeing a chance “to partner with schools and to provide input on the quality and relevance of schools’ curricula.”

For Kyle Broadway, a sophomore at the University of Missouri—Columbia, the benefits of being a co-op with Boeing are obvious as well. “I figure I’m going to school to start a career. With the Boeing co-op program, I’m getting an unbelievable head start at a place I want to work. This program jumpstarts your career and your salary. What could be better?”

For more on the Boeing co-op program, go to www.boeing.com/collegecareers. ■

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Paul Creekmore, a graduate student co-op participant, worked on Boeing satellite systems in El Segundo, Calif.

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