

(BLM's) Student Career Experience Program

Student Eligibility Requirements

Student eligibility requirements remain consistent with U.S. Office of Personnel, Code of Federal Regulations (See Appendix A-1, 5 CFR 213.3202). For appointment, a SCEP student employee must be:

- A student enrolled or accepted for enrollment as a degree (diploma, certificate, etc.) seeking student with a half-time academic / vocational or technical course load in an accredited high school, technical or vocational school, two or four year college or university, graduate or professional school. The school in which the student is enrolled provides the definition of half-time course load.
- A U.S. citizen at the time of non-competitive conversion to a career conditional appointment. The Bureau may appoint non-citizens provided that the student is lawfully admitted to the United States as a permanent resident or otherwise authorized to be employed.
- An individual of sixteen years of age or older. No maximum age restrictions exist for overall SCEP program. Age restrictions apply for targeted positions only, such as Fire and Law Enforcement.

In addition, the 5 CFR 213.3202(d)(8) authorizes agencies to develop qualifications standards for evaluating and promoting SCEP participants (See Appendix A-1, 5 CFR 213.3202).

DOI Personnel Bulletin No. 02-05 (338) establishes a Department of Interior qualification standard for SCEP positions (See Appendix A-7, DOI PB 02-05). The Personnel Bulletin includes a list of SCEP occupational series covered by the Departmental standard, an explanation of frequently used terms—such as academic year or pre-professional study, and a discussion of the SCEP conversion process.

In addition, the Bureau of Land Management Qualifications Standards for Student Trainees discusses the following criteria for initial appointment (See Appendix A-8, Bureau of Land Management Qualifications Standard for Student Trainees).

A student must:

- Be in good standing with his or her academic institution; and,
- Have a 2.5 Grade Point Average (GPA) or better.

Employment Issues

From selection to conversion, the same employment regulations and policies apply to all SCEP student employees. Discussed below, these employment areas include appointment regulations, required working agreements, job title and grade level, compensation and benefits, and financial assistance.

State and Office SCEP Coordinators, supervisors, and other relevant Bureau employees should familiarize themselves with the employment regulations and policies before a new student employee's start date. Traditionally, a designated Human Resources employee or relevant SCEP Coordinator shares the employment regulations and policies with the new SCEP student employee either before or on the start date.

In addition, a designated personnel officer provides the new SCEP student employee with standard forms for all new employees. The SCEP student employee completes the paperwork on or before the start date and returns the paperwork to the personnel officer or the supervisor.

State and Office SCEP Coordinators and Supervisors may contact their local Human Resources office for other requirements and a list of standard forms. State and Office SCEP Coordinators and Supervisors will find employment regulations and policies.

Appointments

Schedule B, Section 213.3202(b) governs permanent student appointments for the Bureau and other Federal agencies. Under those regulations, a SCEP appointment combines a student's educational and career goals with career-related work in a Federal agency. The work experience must relate directly to his or her academic and career goals.

The appointment begins on the initial date of duty and ends within 120 days after the completion of academic course requirements conferring a diploma, certificate, or degree. Executive Orders 12015 and 13024 permits this 120 day period; however, after the 120 days, the SCEP student employee must be separated if not converted into a position in the competitive service.

Working Agreements

A SCEP appointment requires a working agreement among the interested parties: the SCEP student employee, the student's educational institution, and the hiring agency. Typically, a working agreement, created by the State or Office SCEP Coordinator, includes:

- The nature of work assignments;
- A schedule of work assignments and class attendance;
- The evaluation procedures; and,
- Additional requirements for continuation and successful completion of the program.

A successful working agreement requires careful planning and communication. The nature and schedule of work assignments should not interfere with the student's academic performance, and the completion of the educational program and SCEP requirements should be accomplished in a reasonable and appropriate time frame.

In the planning and communication processes, the Bureau assumes the following roles and responsibilities:

- The Bureau provides the academic institution with verification of and changes in student employment.
- The Bureau provides the student employee with employment--to include training, a performance plan, and evaluations of student progress under the employment plan—benefits--to include health, life, retirement and leave—plus potential for conversion upon successful completion of academic and work requirements.

The academic institution assumes the following roles and responsibilities.

- The academic institution provides the Bureau with current contact information for career counselors and billing representatives.

Finally, the student employee assumes the following roles and responsibilities:

- The student maintains good standing with his or her academic institution and completes his or her degree path with a 2.5 Grade Point Average or better.
- The student completes his or her assigned duties for the Bureau and works the full hours required for conversion into career-employee status.
- The student provides the Bureau with transcripts at the end of each quarter or semester and provides the Bureau with a certificate of completion at the end of his or her designated degree path.

All three parties notify the others if a change or interruption in work agreement becomes necessary.

Job Title and Grade Levels

A SCEP student employee subject to the General Schedule receives a Student Trainee (99 series) classification for the appropriate occupational group. For example, a future biologist becomes a Student Trainee (Biology), GS-499-4. A SCEP student employee covered by the Federal Wage System receives a Student Trainee (-01 Series) classification for the appropriate occupational group. For example, a future Maintenance Mechanic becomes a Student Trainee (Maintenance Mechanic), WG-4701-4. SCEP students subject to both the General Schedule and Federal Wage System fall under Tenure Group 2 (See Appendix A-12, 5 CFR 351.502).

A SCEP student employee qualifies for grade levels as described in the Bureau of Land Management Qualifications Standard for Student Trainee (See Appendix A-8, BLM Qualifications Standard for Student Trainee).

Compensation and Benefits

A SCEP student employee receives a salary at the current rate authorized by the Classification Act and receives authorized payment for overtime. Human Resources base's the student pay rate on grade level and step of appointment (Visit www.opm.gov for current pay rates).

In addition, a SCEP student employee receives the following benefits and considerations (See Appendix A-1, 5 CFR 213.3202).

Promotions and Awards

A SCEP student employee may receive promotions to a higher-grade position with continued satisfactory performance and upon meeting appropriate qualification standards. In addition, a SCEP student may receive within-grade increases when he or she achieves critical results level on performance plans.

Finally, a SCEP student employee may receive a performance-based award from his or her employing office.

Work Schedules

Generally, a SCEP student employee works full-time (40 hours per week) during the summer months, and then, the student and supervisor agree upon a mutually beneficial work schedule for the academic school year. The student and supervisor may arrange work schedules for a full or part-time basis at any time, as long as the work load does not interfere with the student's academic schedule. However, the student must submit an SF52 when he or she changes the work schedule from full-time to part-time or from part-time to full-time for more than one pay period.

An intermittent work schedule is only appropriate when the nature of work is so sporadic and unpredictable that a regularly scheduled tour of duty cannot be scheduled in advance. It is not the intent of the SCEP to have students working in these types of positions. However, students can work full or part-time schedules, as best meets their needs and the needs of the agency.

During work periods, a student earns sick leave at the rate of four hours per pay period and annual leave at the rate commensurate with his or her total federal service, including military service. The student may use earned leave on the same basis and subject to the same rules and regulations as other federal employees.

However, the student becomes on leave-without-pay when not in working status. For example, the student becomes on leave-without-pay when he or she returns to an academic institution without continued assignment for the Bureau. The student does, however, remain on the official Bureau roles for the full period of the SCEP appointment. However, he or she must submit an SF52 with a written reason for and period of leave-without-pay to the supervisor; the leave-without-pay status continues only at the request of the student and submission of these forms.

Training and Performance Management

While specifics vary, all SCEP student employees receive employment tools, such as mentoring, orientation and on-the-job training, performance criteria, as well as performance review. The following section discusses the employment tools and the roles and responsibilities of the SCEP Coordinator, Supervisor, and Mentor as they provide these tools to each SCEP student employee.

The SCEP Coordinator, The Supervisor, and The Mentor

The State or Office SCEP Coordinator, the Supervisor, and the Mentor share the various responsibilities of training and evaluating each new SCEP student employee.

From the hiring process to the conversion process, the State or Office SCEP Coordinator participates actively in each step of the SCEP student employee's professional development. *The SCEP Coordinator:*

- Oversees the recruitment efforts for projected vacancies;
- Tracks the application and selection processes;
- Ensures that the student and supervisor provide and complete the appropriate documentation for employment;
- Sends the student a welcome pack with work site and community information before the employment start date (See Appendix B-12, Suggested Welcome Pack Checklist);
- Works with the student, supervisor, and mentor on the Individual Development Plan;
- Ensures that student receives proper orientation, training, and mentorship;
- Tracks student progress through the supervisor's performance appraisals and progress reports, plus individual contact intermittently;
- Ensures the completion of paperwork and requirements for conversion; and,
- Documents every step of a SCEP student employee's employment (See Appendix B-13, List of SCEP Documentation Requirements).

At the worksite, the Supervisor provides the most important information about work-related issues. *The Supervisor:*

- At times, participates in the recruitment and selection process;
- Provides and completes the appropriate documentation for employment;
- Provides the student with a professional mentor; ensures that the student receives orientation and training;
- Works with the student, SCEP Coordinator, and mentor on the Individual Development Plan;
- Provides the student with an understanding of his or her work duties;
- Arranges additional training or supervision, if necessary, to complete those duties;
- Evaluates the student appointee in performance appraisals and progress reports;
- Communicates progress and other pertinent information to the student and the SCEP Coordinator; and,
- Facilitates the process of conversion to permanent employment (See Appendix B-14, Checklist for Supervisors).

Before the start date, the SCEP student employee's supervisor assigns a Mentor to him or her. *The Mentor:*

- Initially, works with the student, the supervisor, and the SCEP Coordinator on the Individual Development Plan;
- Then, provides professional guidance to the student employee;

- Answers questions about the SCEP guidelines and employment requirements; and,
- Serves as a role model for the student (See Appendix B-15, Information Bulletin for Online Mentor Training Course).

The responsibilities of training and evaluating a SCEP student employee require great commitment from the SCEP Coordinator, the Supervisor, and the Mentor. In return, *the Student Appointee*:

- Submits standard application and employment materials for the position and SCEP program;
- Works with the SCEP Coordinator and / or Supervisor on the Working Agreement, housing and transportation arrangements, and other initial employment issues;
- Participates in initial on-site orientation, a general orientation to the Bureau, a mentorship relationship, on-the-training, and additional training as necessary;
- Works with the SCEP Coordinator, Supervisor, and Mentor on the Independent Development Plan;
- Completes assigned duties and training for the appointed position;
- Completes academic workload necessary for successful completion of the relevant academic degree, diploma, or certificate;
- Provides the SCEP Coordinator and / or Supervisor with appropriate information about academic and work status;
- Completes all administrative duties and paperwork for the appointed position as well as conversion process; and,
- Communicates regularly with the SCEP Coordinator, Supervisor, and Mentor.

In sum, a successful employment experience requires effective communication as well as the collaboration and cooperation of all four parties.

Orientation and Training

New SCEP student employees receive several types of work-related training: an initial, site-specific orientation, a more general orientation to the Bureau, and on-the-job training. The site-specific orientation may occur before the general orientation to the Bureau, or just the opposite may occur. The order or specific orientation and training opportunities depends largely upon the start date versus the general orientation dates.

In addition, each SCEP student employee completes work duties related to his or her academic field and career goals. These work duties and accompanying hours provide hands-on training for the employee. When necessary, a SCEP student employee may complete training courses when the mentor, supervisor, and student consider additional training necessary to job performance. In this case, the hiring office should finance all training expenses, including travel, lodging, and per diem.

Individual Development Plan

Within thirty days of the SCEP student employee's employment start date, the SCEP Coordinator, supervisor, mentor, and SCEP student employee develop an Individual Development Plan for the student (See Appendix B-19, Sample Individual Development

Plan). The Individual Development Plan or IDP outlines the student appointee's learning objectives and specific work activities and expectations. These objectives and expectations reflect the student's career and academic interests as well as the Bureau's needs for the position.

The IDP serves the student employee and Bureau in two ways. First, the IDP provides the student appointee and related Bureau employees with a clear understanding of career direction and professional development needs. Second, the IDP serves as tool or the performance standards for future evaluation of the student employee.

Final Performance Review and Progress Review

SCEP student employees are eligible for noncompetitive conversion to career conditional status and, therefore, must be appraised on their performance.

The SCEP employee must serve a minimum of ninety work days before undergoing a performance appraisal. This ninety day or more work period should fall between the standard appraisal period, between October 1 and September 31. If not, the student's appraisal period should be extended until he or she meets the ninety day requirement, and then, the supervisor should complete a Performance Appraisal (See Appendix B-20, Performance Appraisal Sheet). If the final work date extends beyond the Performance Appraisal date, the supervisor may conduct a Final Review in addition to the Performance Appraisal (See Appendix B-21, Final Review Sheet).

If the work phase lasts less than ninety days, the supervisor should complete a Progress Review Sheet and not a Performance Appraisal or Final Review Sheet (See Appendix B-22, Progress Review Sheet). In addition, the supervisor may complete Progress Report / Review Sheets intermittently as he or she tracks the SCEP student employee's progress.

The SCEP student employee and supervisor should discuss the completed evaluation(s), and both parties should sign and date the document(s). The Supervisor should, then, retain the original(s) and provide the SCEP student employee and SCEP Coordinator with a copy. All three parties should keep the document(s) and other notes in a work folder with the SCEP appointee's IDP, training, and other performance-related materials.

Termination

The Bureau invests valuable resources into the professional development of each SCEP student employee. However, unforeseen events, listed and discussed below, may end the working relationship between the Bureau and the SCEP student employee.

1. The student resigns, withdraws from the employment program.

For employee resignation, ideally, the student provides written notification of his or her intent to the supervisor, and the supervisor forwards the notification to the local Human Resources office. If the employee resigns verbally, the supervisor must send the local Human Resources office a memorandum for the record.

2. The educational institution suspends or expels the student.

3. The student withdraws from the educational institution.
4. The student does not maintain the academic standards of the school.
5. The student changes his or her current academic curriculum to an academic curriculum that no longer matches the job position or duties, which disqualifies the student from the SCEP program.

When academic status changes—due to suspension, expulsion, withdrawal, low academic standards, or a change in curriculum—the supervisor or SCEP Coordinator contacts the local Human Resources office, and that office handles the termination procedure.

6. The program office cannot employ the student due to administrative reasons, such as budget constraints or Reduction-In-Force (RIF).

A SCEP student employee who has completed his or her academic requirements and is within the 120 day conversion period has no vested right to remain employed and no mandatory right to be non-competitively converted to a competitive service. Therefore, the Bureau may terminate the student without regard to RIF regulations. However, a SCEP student employee who has not completed his or her educational requirements is placed in excepted service, tenure group 2.

7. The student does not perform his or her work duties successfully or conducts him or herself in an unsatisfactory manner.

When the student's work performance or conduct warrants termination, the supervisor or SCEP Coordinator contacts the local Human Resources office, and that office handles the termination procedure.

Employment after Graduation

The Bureau converts SCEP student employees into career, career-conditional, or term appointees upon completion of the designated academic degree and the SCEP program requirements (See Appendix A-7, DOI PB 02-05). These SCEP program requirements include:

- The completion of 640 or more career-related work hours before graduation;
- Successful job performance as measured by performance appraisal and / or progress reports;
- A recommendation for conversion by the supervisor and / or career-related work station officials;
- The successful completion of course requirements for a degree related to the target position (not the graduation date); and,
- The continued good standing, academically and otherwise, at the degree-providing academic institution.

The SCEP student employee and related Bureau employees must complete the necessary steps for conversion no later than 120 days after the student meets the diploma or degree requirements (See Appendix A-9, Executive Order 12015 and Appendix A-10, Executive Order 13024). The necessary steps for conversion include:

A successfully-converted SCEP student employee receives several benefits from the Federal service and the Bureau.

1. The converted SCEP student employee receives credit toward the one-year probationary period required for all new Federal employees, with a few conditions. The work experience must fall within the same line of work, with the same qualifications. The work experience contains or is followed by no more than a single break in service that does not exceed 30 calendar days. And, leave without pay in excess of 22 working days is not creditable and extends the probationary period by an equal amount.
2. The converted SCEP student employee receives travel expenses for the student and his or her immediate family, to include: en route per diem for the student, mileage for the student and the family, shipment of household goods, and 90 days of storage of household goods.

The successfully-converted SCEP student employee receives information about these benefits and the converted status in a letter from the hiring office (See Appendix B-24, Sample Conversion Letters to SCEP Appointees). In addition, the letter requests information from the converted SCEP student employee, such as a transcript and employment forms.

Note: Upon conversion, the SCEP student employee may be assigned to the same duty station; however, the duty location is based upon the availability of position and at the discretion of management. If the region cannot convert a student based on lack of availability, the State or Office SCEP Coordinator will identify other placement opportunities within the Bureau for the SCEP student employee. In addition, the student may transfer their non-competitive eligibility for conversion to another Federal agency as long as the transfer occurs within the 120 day window.