

# *Student Career Experience Program*

*Natural Resources Conservation Service*

*Minnesota*

You can make a difference in the conservation of our natural resources. We're looking for intelligent and motivated students who want to share their ideas and talents. The Student Career Experience Program of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can offer you the opportunity to be part of this conservation effort.

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## **What is the Natural Resources Conservation Service?**

NRCS is an agency in the U. S. Department of Agriculture that began conservation work during the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s. A series of dust storms had just ravaged the Nation's farmlands, stripping away millions of tons of topsoil. Huge dust clouds had carried the soil hundreds of miles, all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. Ever since that disaster, NRCS has been trying to make Americans more aware of the need to protect our natural resources, especially soil and water.

The employees of NRCS work with local soil and water conservation districts to encourage and assist people in conserving the Nation's resources. Our programs are aimed at reducing erosion, keeping streams clear, protecting wildlife, and promoting good land use.

NRCS offers career opportunities to high school, college, and technical school students through programs such as the Student Career Experience Program.

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## **What is a Student Career Experience Program?**

The Student Career Experience Program combines paid, study-related employment with periods of formal educational study. Students are given the chance to apply their academic studies to their on-the-job experience and earn academic credit for their work experience based on their school's cooperative education policy. This type of employment greatly benefits both employers and students. It gives employers an effective, low-cost recruitment and training method which will help meet staffing goals. It introduces students to a professional work environment and will help them explore career options.

### Types of Appointments:

- ◆ *Undergraduate certificate or diploma students*, enrolled in at least a one-year program at accredited college level technical, trade, vocational, or business institutions, must work a minimum of 640 hours or 16 weeks prior to graduation.
  - ◆ *Associate degree students*, enrolled in qualified two-year colleges or technical institutions to earn associate degrees, must work a minimum of 640 hours or 16 weeks prior to graduation.
  - ◆ *Baccalaureate degree students*, enrolled in qualified four-year educational institutions to earn bachelor's degrees, must work a minimum of 640 hours or 16 weeks prior to graduation.
  - ◆ *Graduate students*, enrolled in master's or doctorate programs to earn master's or doctorate degrees, must work a minimum of 640 hours or 16 weeks prior to graduation.
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## Compensation and Benefits

NRCS student trainees are entitled to compensation based on education and experience. Student trainees are appointed at grades GS-2 through GS-4, based on qualifications. Students are eligible for promotion after meeting qualification and performance requirements for the next grade. (NRCS employing offices can provide a current salary scale.) The following benefits are provided:

- ◆ **Work Schedules**—NRCS offers four alternative work schedules.
- ◆ **Retirement**—Students with no prior service or less than five years of civilian service are covered by the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS). FERS is a three-tiered retirement plan composed of a basic defined benefit, social security, and the Thrift Savings Plan.
- ◆ **Life and Health Insurance**—Students who are appointed for one year or more and in pay status for at least one-third of the overall time, from appointment date to completion date, are eligible for Federal life insurance and health benefits plans. Employees can choose from many nationwide health insurance plans that provide varying coverage to meet differing needs. The Government shares in the cost of the coverage.
- ◆ **Leave**—Annual and sick leave benefits are earned by students in work status at the rate of 13 days of annual leave and 13 days of sick leave per year in addition to 10 paid holidays.

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## Conversion to Permanent Employment

Students who have met the qualification requirements through education and experience are eligible to convert non-competitively to a permanent position within the competitive service within 120 calendar days of degree completion. These students must be recommended for conversion by one of the NRCS employing offices. NRCS will utilize superior academic achievement (S.A.A.) appointments when the student has a grade point average of 2.95 or higher upon graduation. S.A.A. appointments recognizes students who have achieved superior academic standing. Students qualifying for this appointment will be placed in a position at one grade level above standard entry grade level.

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## Qualifications

A student must meet the following requirements to qualify for an NRCS student trainee appointment:

- ◆ Be at least 16 years old.
- ◆ Be a United States citizen or national.
- ◆ Be in good academic standing in a qualifying educational institution.
- ◆ Be enrolled in a field of study that is related to occupations within the NRCS.
- ◆ Possess a valid state driver's license.

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## Working Agreement Between Student's School and NRCS

A working agreement is required between the student's school and NRCS. This agreement outlines the respective responsibilities of NRCS, the qualifying education institution, and students in the employment of student trainees. If an agreement does not exist, NRCS can initiate an agreement with the applicant's school. A student must be enrolled in his or her school's cooperative education program.

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## How to Apply

Students interested in positions with NRCS should contact the NRCS human resources office, 651-602-7904 or 651-602-7912 (TDD), about openings. Students should then apply through their school's cooperative education coordinator.

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