A. Co-op Work Assignment

LMI is a not-for-profit company consulting company whose main clients are government agencies. Our biggest client is the DoD (Department of Defense). There are a total of three business units, Infrastructure, Logistics, and Resource Management. Each business unit has a vice president to oversee operations. Within each unit, there are program groups headed by their respective directors. I worked in the Logistics Analysis group, headed by our program director, Eric Gentsch (a Cornell alumnus). My group mainly works with logistics, so we work with a lot of data. We do data mining, cleansing, and analysis. A client will usually come to us with a problem and we will analyze data that they give us and come up with a solution to their problems.

I worked on a project that dealt with DLA (Defense Logistics Agency) procurement of fasteners (nuts, bolts, screws, etc...). The DLA is a government agency that mainly controls distribution of military items. I worked on a VBA computer program that grouped fasteners together for long term contracts. The algorithm basically assigned a score to a pair of fasteners and then we grouped the two that had the highest score. This was repeated until all fasteners were grouped. This project was very interesting for me as I am one (of the few) that enjoys computer programming.

Another project I worked on is the characterization of high demand backorder items for DLA. By characterization, I mean we did data mining to find out which item numbers were of high demand and what each item was. I also had to do data cleansing and some database management to prepare the raw data that they provided us. It was a valuable learning experience to work with databases.

LMI has an abundance of training sessions to attend. I attended sessions on fundamentals of consulting, writing in plain English, presentation skills, and orientation. There is always help around as long as you go ask for it. People will not look down upon you if you don’t know things. After all, the purpose of co-op is to learn. LMI also hosts a business case study competition for minority students. I, unfortunately, was out of town during that competition. I heard it was very interesting though.

Every co-op is assigned a mentor, but I felt very comfortable asking anyone a question I didn’t need. Everyone’s door is always open and they are all willing to answer questions as long as they don’t have a very immediate deadline that they have to meet.

B. Assessment of Learning and Development

When I first came in, I still wasn’t completely sure what an Operations Research major did. However, LMI’s logistics-based problems were all very interesting and have pushed me towards an interest in logistics consulting. It is interesting to tackle other people’s problems. You also get a sense of achievement when you help your client better their own business.
A big thing I have learned about the professional culture is that if you want work, go out and find it. It’s not like college, where a professor will keep you busy with assignments. Networking is also needed. If you do little things for people and you impress them, they will come back to you with more work.

If I were to do this all over again, I would be a lot more proactive and meet as many people as I can. This way I can get my name out there and get my foot in the door for interesting projects in the company.

C. Life Outside of Co-op

Housing in the area is a little steeper than Cornell, however I rented a room from a friend of a family friend. Seeing as I was the only co-op from Cornell this rotation, I didn’t feel like paying a lot of money for a one-bedroom apartment. D.C. is a popular place to live for younger people but housing is a lot steeper. LMI does provide you with a housing stipend though.

The traffic in Northern Virginia leaves much to be desired. The level of congestion is very bad. The only way it’s not too bad is if you live in D.C. and commute west (against the normal flow of traffic) or you live near a metro line. LMI is not walking distance (1-2 miles) from the nearest Metro, although there is talk of a new metro station closer to Tysons (right by LMI). I lived west of the Tysons Corner area and traffic in the morning (around 8:00 A.M.) is a gridlock. I learned to leave the house by 7:00 A.M. in order to not spend a long time on the highway (30-45 minutes). Next time around, I will try to live closer so my commute isn’t as bad.

In my free time, I joined some tennis leagues. I play on club tennis at school so I didn’t want to not play for a whole semester. Tennis down here is very competitive so it has been fun. If you work during the fall semester, you will most likely get to attend the Holiday Dinner Dance. This event is like a corporate prom and it is held in the Ritz Carlton. It’s very elegant and the food is wonderful. There’s also an Army Ten-miler running competition that a lot of LMI employees participate in. Running was not my thing so I did not participate. The Northern Virginia area is very diverse and there are plenty of things to do. You do have to go out of your way to find people your own age. Most LMI employees are a generation ahead of me.

D. Evaluation

One of the best features of this job was it provided me with a first glance at the world of consulting. I got a glimpse of how the proposal process works and what is required to win a contract of work from the government. I also gained glimpse of the types of problems that plague the government. Another great feature was that everyone was incredibly helpful. They never turned me down when there was an aspect of the business that I questioned or when I didn’t know how to do something.

One of the worst features maybe the slow start to the first rotation. It was the end of fiscal year and projects were closing. That and the other project leaders didn’t know my skill set from the beginning. Therefore it was slow to get started.

E. Additional Information
Overall, I would say that I had a wonderful first rotation. The laid back company culture was perfectly suited for my personality. However, that does not mean people are not professional here. The people here are incredibly nice and helpful. I would highly recommend being a co-op for LMI.
A. Co-op Work Assignment

This was my second rotation at LMI, so I was already used to the government work that my company did. I worked in the same group as last time (Logistics Analysis). My group mainly works with data mining, cleansing, and analysis.

I continued on a project that I worked on my previous rotation. It was creating an automated method in Access for a parts forecaster for Army helicopters. It involved creating VBA code, queries, and macros. I got more practice in Access while working on this project. After I finished creating the automated method, I helped run tests on different periods using my method. I was actually there for the end of the project so it was nice to see my work contribute to the final presentation to the client.

Another project I worked on was internal research into the creation of a wiki. We wanted to use the wiki to present logistics information to multiple services (Army, Navy, etc.). We wanted a wiki so subject matter experts across services can share their information with ease. From this project, I learned the basics behind wiki creation. The software we used was very similar to the software that Wikipedia is based off of.

Finally, I worked a major project at the end of my rotation. It involved creating charts for data analysis. The only problem was, there was an immense amount of data coming from each service. We had to create a skeleton structure (in Excel) to handle the data, send the data into Access (through VBA code), query the data, and then resend it back to Excel for chart generation. I worked on the last sending, querying, and chart generation of this project. It was interesting in that there was so much data to handle and we had to automate the whole process. This project was near the tail end of my rotation so I didn’t get to work too much on it, although it was turning out to be an interesting project.

B. Assessment of Learning and Development

A major thing I learned was, it pays to have a lot of contacts in a company. Since there were about 14 interns this summer, there was a lot of competition for work. However I knew many people in different groups, so I was able to consistently find work during the slow times of the summer.

I got to further improve my skills in Access and Excel to the point where I am comfortable tackling almost

C. Life Outside of Co-op

I didn’t manage to find a sublet that was convenient with timing and price so I just stayed with my family friend again. It was a little farther away but the price was cheap and I got a home cooked meal, so I didn’t complain.
The traffic in Northern Virginia was better during the summer but it still leaves much to be desired. It was better because school was out and parents didn’t need to take their kids to school in the morning. It is still better to live closer to DC because the commute against the flow of traffic.

In my free time, I joined some tennis leagues again. Tennis down here is very competitive so it has been fun. I also worked out daily and played basketball after work too. Northern Virginia offers a lot of athletic things to do, which is nice because I enjoy playing sports.

Also, there were a lot more interns this summer so I went out to DC and happy hours much more this rotation. We also went to Water Country USA, the water park by Busch Gardens. There was also a Northern Virginia Brew fest that I attended. Also Georgetown has a lot of restaurants and bars to go to.

D. Evaluation

It was a great second rotation as I got to finish a project that I started on and I got to work on a few new projects. I got to meet some more project leaders and LMI’s culture just fosters learning. Everyone is incredibly friendly and is willing to let you know what they are working on. They will also teach what you need to know to excel in government consulting.

It was also nice to have a lot of young people to hang out with. As nice as most of the company is, most employees are retired military personnel and I cannot hang out with them outside of the company.