For my first co-op term during the fall of 2008, I worked at a company called RiskMetrics Group. RiskMetrics Group is a three-pronged company, providing risk analytics software to the financial community, governance services to shareholders, and financial research. I worked in the New York office, located on the 44th floor of the One Chase Manhattan Plaza building, in the Platform Development group. This is part of Research and Development for the risk business, and it is the largest group of software developers in the company, responsible for the core products. My managers were Mark Kunichika, who worked alongside me in the New York office, and Marcel Neuhausler, who was based in the Ann Arbor office but visited New York frequently. Both of them were very helpful and interested in what would be my main project for the term.

My main project during this term was research and implementations for the Web Service Community, a community site for Web Service clients, and hopefully, in the future, a broad range of RMG’s client base. It is undeniable that communities are becoming mainstream, even universal, not only in social networking like Myspace and Facebook, but in the enterprise.

Our vision for the site was a place for clients to come to get API documentation, receive updates and news, and have forum-style discussions. With this vision in mind, I did a lot of research on possible frameworks for such a system and found candidates worthy of further exploration and implementations. After doing these implementations, and finding the weaknesses and missing functionality in some of the lesser candidates, we concluded that Clearspace Community, a tool sold by Jive Software, was the best option, despite its price. The deciding factor was its robust user permissioning system, leaving essentially nothing to be desired.

(If you are curious about open source solutions for your own website building, I recommend Drupal as it is an extremely flexible and configurable content management system (CMS). In fact, it is the platform for the current riskmetrics.com website. If you are not as technically-oriented, Joomla! is a great, easy-to-use, yet less capable CMS. These two options are tremendous PHP-based frameworks for making personal homepages easily and for free, and allow for easy extension development. I also recommend phpBB if you would like to set up forums specifically.)

After presenting my results to people from across the company, the community project left my hands and entered the procurement stage. At this point, my efforts focused on adding some new functionality to the project of another intern from Tsinghua University in China, Wei Jiang. Wei’s project was an auto-complete ticker search engine, based on the Apache Lucene search engine library. This prototype is something that would be integrated into the core risk product, known as RiskManager, which allows clients to run tests on portfolios of financial securities in order to determine their exposure to risk. When I adopted the project, I focused on a number
of enhancements to the existing prototype, namely refinement and filtering of the search results. Additionally, I integrated market-data mapping, so that results could be limited to specific data groups, as well as added a latency simulation configuration, so that we could get a feel for the effect of network latency on the usability of the auto-complete feature – something that would come into effect greatly in a production environment with clients all over the globe. This was a very exciting project, and I see how it can be extremely useful to clients.

As for my time outside of the office, I lived at home in North Jersey, and commuted one and one half hours each way to downtown Manhattan. I came up to Cornell quite a few times as well. Next summer, I will definitely be living in the city, as this was really the only thing I wasn’t pleased with during my co-op term. Otherwise, the term was very much fun.

The RMG culture is very unique in that it is both relaxed and professional. It is a very flat organization, lacking any stuffy bureaucracy (in fact the CEO, Ethan, likes to joke that is could even be considered an adhocracy). Working in development, there is no dress code, so we are free to wear what we please to work, and I work a t-shirt and jeans most days. Additionally, outside the office there were a number of events that I enjoyed. These included the weeklong Platform Development offsite in Norman, Oklahoma, the RMG Turkey Bowl, a flag football tournament near Thanksgiving at a park on the east side of Manhattan, and a carnival-themed holiday party at a very interesting venue near the holidays.

I give thanks to everyone that I’ve worked with during my time at RiskMetrics. The RiskMetrics intern program is really great, in that you work with friendly people willing to help you out, and you are assigned interesting and challenging projects. If any of you have questions, or would like to ask me about RiskMetrics, my e-mail is wac26 (at) cornell.edu.
For my second co-op term during the fall of 2008, I returned to RiskMetrics Group, where I worked the previous fall. More background information about the company and my experience there during the fall term can be found in my previous summary. I once again worked in the New York office, located on the 44th floor of the One Chase Manhattan Plaza building, but this time I was in the Corporate Technology group, rather than Platform Development. Corporate Technology is essentially the IT infrastructure and support group at RMG. While most Cornell co-ops at RMG would not split their time between Platform Dev and CT like this, I asked for some time in CT in addition to Platform Dev at the start of my co-op because I was interested in both. Luckily RMG, being the accommodating environment that it is, was able to work this out for me.

I worked in the Corporate Technology group at RMG at a very interesting time – one of never-before-seen expansion in one sense and consolidation in another. During my time in CT, I split my time roughly three days per week in the office, and two days per week at the data center uptown. In the office is where the expansion was happening. During 2008 and 2009, RMG had two major acquisitions that increased its headcount from approximately three hundred to approximately fifteen hundred. That left me and the other intern that I worked with to provide desktop support to an office of around 200 employees, not including remote employees that were working from home. This included troubleshooting Windows and application issues, imaging new and old machines, and finding ways to get all of the new desks and computers networked in the already crowded office, which saw much of the influx of new employees from the acquisitions. This theme of constantly solving different and challenging problems everyday was something I liked a lot about the job. I also liked the fact that many of my days were spent preparing for the largest data center move in company history. This is where the consolidation was happening. RMG was looking to close out the New York data center, and consolidate all of the servers, including those running the production applications, to the Connecticut data center. Given that this move would cause a weekend outage window during which clients would be unable to generate their risk reports, it is needless to say that plenty of preparation had to go into this move to make sure it went smoothly. I helped with this effort by decommissioning old servers, taking inventory of the ones we would be moving, and helping with the actual moving of the servers on the day of the move. I also coordinated the migration of a very large number of e-mail boxes off of the server in the old data center to the new one, so as to make sure nobody’s work or applications were disturbed or erased. Fortunately, all went according to plan and the production apps were back up and running by the end of the outage window. Being in CT during this time of change was very exciting.

As for my time outside of the office, I lived in the NYU dorms in Union Square, and took the subway to and from work downtown every day. They are decently priced and I lived with my roommate from Cornell, so it worked really well and we had a great summer. Besides taking two distance-learning classes, which were annoying for the first month we were there, there
was always something to do, either with the other interns from RMG or friends from school and home that were also staying in the city. If you have never been, much of the Cornell student body goes to NYC for internships over the summer, so you see a lot of familiar faces, but you will also meet plenty of new people, especially the other interns at RMG, who go out for lunch together and for drinks after work very often.

I would just like to reiterate that RMG is a great place to do a co-op, because you are challenged but supported at the same time in a very exciting environment. If any of you have questions, or would like to ask me about RiskMetrics, my e-mail is wac26 (at) cornell.edu.