I enjoyed my summer term at Stantec because I was coming back to a familiar environment working with people that I got to know in the fall. This is probably the greatest advantage to the second co-op term. You already know what to expect and what you will be doing since you have already been through the learning curve. This time I worked on a very broad range of projects, which I liked much more than working on a single big project. In the fall I spent a lot of my time working on Madison Square Garden, and I got to know all the small details of the area, which gave me a better understanding of how everything fit together. However, I realized that I prefer working on multiple things at once spending a small amount of time on a variety of projects. This is exactly what I did this summer as I did a small amount of work for everything ranging from the New York State Thruway to toll roads in Orange County, CA and even a highway in Puerto Rico. It was fun being exposed to such a variety of projects because I got to see what everyone in the department was doing. It also gave me a fairly good general understanding of transportation as a whole. In the fall I worked with some traffic optimization software and I continued to do so during the summer, but I also got some experience with GPS software and learned much more about Excel. I thought I was pretty good with Excel before, but it turned out that there was a lot more that we never learned in class at Cornell. Now I can fully appreciate its power and versatility.

I also enjoyed coming back to the city in general. It is a very fun place to be especially for college students since the possibilities for entertainment are pretty much endless. NYC is a big place and chances are that you will know a whole bunch of other coops working here as well. It was always fun to meet up with other people either after work or on weekends and then go out and do something fun. Basically, it is impossible to get bored. In terms of housing, I continued to live with family friends in Jersey City, so I suppose that I got lucky because I did not have to find housing, but from what I heard it really isn’t a problem, especially during the summer. The one piece of advice that I can give is that it is important to plan the number of weeks that you intend to work ahead of
time. That way you can spend more time working in the fall in exchange for having a few weeks left over during the summer in order to go on vacation or to simply relax at home before school starts.
For this Co-op term I requested a move from the Transportation Department to the Structures Department. This new department was very small (three employees) and mainly focused on the structures designed on the major highway projects. Most of the summer, I worked on the preliminary design submission for a major highway interchange. This included placing and drafting retaining walls and overpass bridges. The work I did was very important, because this project deadline was moved from six months away to six weeks, so the department was under a lot of pressure to finish on time and to present their work neatly and professionally.

Working on such a time crunched project with a small group of people was a great experience. Abdel Denho, the head of the structures department was very hands-on in making sure that I truly understood what was going on and made me an integral part of the team. The whole department was very open to my questions, but they also respected my opinion. They would ask for my ideas and sometimes they would implement them. We would have weekly meetings and discuss the work we had accomplished and ask any team questions that needed to be addressed.

My mentor’s name was Laura Lambrinos. She was the one who assigned me my work and who I approached for my general questions. Along with Abdel, she wanted me to see the full spectrum of any project I was working on, even if I was just doing some AutoCAD mark-ups. Before she delegated new work to me, we would sit down and she would explain the project and my job in its completion. I never felt uncomfortable asking her questions, because she was always very receptive. She would also try as hard as possible to ensure the work I was doing was interesting. If things were slow, I would be assigned to make copies or change mark-ups. This was a major change from my last term, where I was doing
grunt work most of the time, and didn’t really understand what my work meant in terms of the whole project.

Since I was moved to the structures department, I was finally able to juxtapose the work I was doing in school with my job. I was able to see how what I was learning related to the real world. However, I was never assigned to do any calculations. I would see something I recognized while working, but would never actually do it myself.

One of the positive aspects of this work term was that I was an integral part of the team. I liked and felt comfortable with my supervisor and mentor, and they made it obvious that they felt the same about me. Unfortunately, I did not like the work I was doing. I want to specialize in buildings, not highway structures. The work was seemed boring and redundant. It wasn’t typical “intern work” since I was helping Laura with her overflow most of the summer, which meant this was her everyday work. In general, this experience was very beneficial, because I was able to see what one structural engineer does daily and realized that this is not the structural engineering I want to be doing. Throughout my whole co-op experience I was exposed to a very large sampling of what different types of civil engineers do. As a result, I now have a very good idea of what I want to do when I enter the working world.