CAFCE International Committee
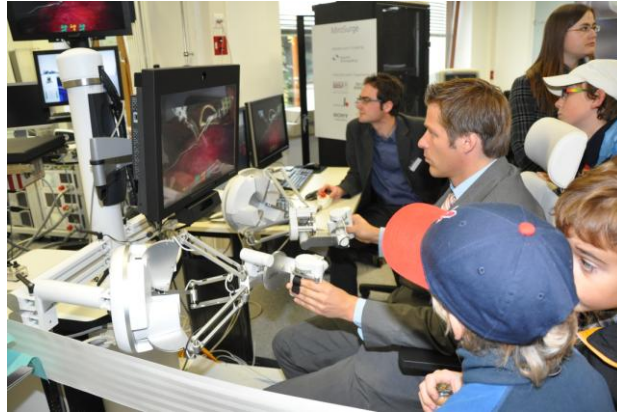Student Engagement Sub-Group

First Name: **Stephen**
Institution: **University of Waterloo**
Where did you work abroad (city, country): **Munich, Germany**
When did you go abroad: **Sept – Dec 2010**
Which work term (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc..): **5th**

1. What motivated you to seek out an international work term?

   My goal when entering the co-op program at The University of Waterloo was to gain the widest breadth of experience I could. Previous to working internationally, I had worked in three major cities in Canada, and I was looking for something more challenging; I wanted to learn a new language, and experience a difference culture. It also happened that one of the world's best research facilities in a field I'm interested in (medical robotics) was located near Munich.

2. How did you fund the travel and other costs associated with this opportunity?

   I had some funding from a scholarship (Canadian Merit), and the rest was out of pocket. I was able to negotiate a salary from my employer in Germany that was higher than what students would normally be paid in that region (however still not comparable with positions in North America), which also helped to finance the opportunity.

3. Can you tell me what steps you took to secure your co-op position? Did you feel it was hard to secure your co-op position and how would you advise other students to make the same effort?

   I knew of the organization and group I was interested in working for in advance, as I had come across their research while in a previous position. I

contacted the head of their department via email with a brief bio and CV, and asked if they'd consider creating a position for me. They agreed, and after a few emails, I was transferred off to a HR contact to finalize the paperwork, visa, etc.

4. When conducting your job search did you find that many of the jobs available were in specific sectors? (ie: corporate, non-profit, government, etc.) Where, or how, would you suggest other students focus their search?

There are many jobs in engineering and research available, due to the strong focus on technology in the control, combined with the automotive industry. Research groups such as DLR (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt) hire many science and engineering students across many projects.

5. Tell me about the cost of living in (city or country). How did your expenses compare to your income based on the salary you were earning? Were you able to save any money and where did you find savings or discounts which reduced your expenses?

The cost of living in Munich was higher than in Waterloo or Toronto. In addition, the salary was several times lower than what comparable jobs here pay, due to differences in the way internships and co-ops in Europe are paid. The salary I was earning in Munich was comparable to that of a master's student there, approx EUR 1000 / month.

I also travelled a lot while in Europe, and there were associated expenses. For me, it was more about the experience than it was about saving money.

6. How did you find accommodations and what rent can you expect to pay in (city or country)?

I found accommodations online through http://www.studenten-wg.de/. Another great resource for Germany was www.toytowngermany.com/. It took countless emails in English and broken German to find a place, but in the end I was able to sublet off a German student who was working in Dubai. Rent for a decent room within an apartment is about EUR 750+ per month for the area I lived in (Maxvorstadt)

7. What, if any, cultural barriers did you have to overcome and what were some of these challenges?

The culture wasn't too different from here. Language was an obvious barrier, but I was taking German lessons, and almost all professionals (engineers, business people, etc) speak perfect English is Munich.

8. Did you find it difficult to meet new people? What steps did you take to integrate yourself into your new surroundings and make yourself more comfortable in a new setting?
Not at all – I met many other students through my roommate, coworkers, and classmates in my German course. The website I mentioned above (toytowngermany) also organizes all kind of events and meet-ups for various interests.

9. Overall, what advice would you give co-op students who are seeking international opportunities?

Just do it – it's well worth any work to organize it. The experience is on another level versus what you can experience working within North America – you'll have a much deeper understanding of other cultures as a result, which is very valuable as you progress into your career.

10. Is there anything else you want us to know about your experience?