Some Options for Summer Work in Computer Science

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This document summarizes selected summer opportunities for students interested in doing projects related to computer science and computing. It is not intended to be comprehensive; rather, it is intended to serve as a starting point to help you think about opportunities. In addition, although I strive for accuracy, I do not guarantee that any information in this document is accurate.

This document may be found on the Web at
http://www.cs.grinnell.edu/~rebelsky/Department/cs-summer.html and
http://www.cs.grinnell.edu/~rebelsky/Department/cs-summer.pdf

This document is certainly not the only resource available to you. Here are some other useful sites:

- The Science Division’s summer opportunities site at:
- The Science Division’s old summer opportunities site at:
  http://retro.grinnell.edu/academic/divisions/science/summer/scisumres-offcampus
- Conquer seems to have some opportunities: http://conquer.cra.org/ and http://cra-ccc.org/ugresearchopps/
- CRA Distributed Research Experiences for Undergraduates (Women only):
  http://cra.org/cra-w/distributed-research-experiences-for-undergraduates-dreu/ and https://parasol.tamu.edu/dreu/ (It looks like they are posting things in February.)
- There’s a nice list of opportunities at
  http://cerebro.xu.edu/summerinternships.html
  You should focus on the CISE category, but you may want to look at other things too.
- We send many opportunities to the csstudents email list. If you’re not on it, you should be. (Send me email!)

I would also recommend that you talk to the Center for Careers, Life, and Services. You should also explore their online information about internships. I recommend that even if you don’t get an internship (or don’t get an internship through CLS), you take advantage of the tools they provide for reflecting on internships, since they can help you reflect on any summer opportunity.

You may also find it useful to fill out my simple form for analyzing summer opportunities, available at
http://www.cs.grinnell.edu/~rebelsky/Department/cs-summer-analysis.html

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A Few Preliminaries

I hear from alums who have gone to industry and academe and from potential employers that it is increasingly difficult to get good CS-related jobs (after your graduate) without significant extracurricular experiences. Summer provides one such opportunity, but you should also consider working on an open-source project or other significant project, such as what the AppDev team does. I hear from some alums that it’s important to have at least one off-campus experience.

Getting a good opportunity requires work. You’ll need to spend time identifying potential opportunities (talking to people, calling, emailing, searching on Google, etc.). You’ll need to spend time developing a strong application.

**Warning!** Deadlines for many programs are typically in early February, if not before. An increasing number of internships now fill by the end of November, if not before. But you’re okay, lots still have deadlines in February. You should plan to apply to research programs and start building your application portfolio during Winter break, if not before.

**Warning!** While many deadlines are in early February, some places don’t post opportunities until early January. You will need to check sites a few times and may have to follow up with electronic mail.

**International students:** Some choices for summer work have visa implications. You should talk to Karen Edwards asap about your plans so that she can help you navigate the paperwork and meet deadlines.

Set Your Goals

As you investigate summer opportunities, you should consider your goals (both short term and long term). In particular, you should consider what you hope to get from the summer. Do you want to learn more about the discipline? Do you want to exercise your skills? Do you want to investigate a possible career? Do you just want to make money? Do you want to escape from Grinnell? Do you want to experience how...
Grinnell is different in the summer? Do you want to program or do you want to explore a different side of computing? Do you want to build up your resume to get a particular opportunity the following summer?

To help you meet your goals, I’ve tried to note some particular advantages and disadvantages of each kind of program.

**Use Winter Break Well!**

Many of the best opportunities have deadlines very early in spring semester. You should try to get your applications done, or at least started, over winter break. You might also use winter break to help make yourself a more attractive candidate.

- Identify your goals for your summer.
- Identify possible locations and deadlines. At times, this may involve emailing people who have offered opportunities in the past or who might recommend opportunities.
- Figure out what makes you stand out from other people who may be applying. What are your strengths and skills? (You may have to ask a friend to tell you.) What strengths and skills can you further develop (either before you apply or in the summer activity)? Alums tell me that you also have to remember that you aren’t competing against other Grinnellians, so you should make sure to think about the strengths you and other Grinnellians have that much of the world does not (e.g., you are likely to be a better communicator than most people).
- Draft a common application letter. Two questions to address in most letters are why you are interested in the position and what you’ll bring to the position. You will certainly need to customize both halves for each position, but having a starting point is really useful.
- Maybe: Do some things to build your résumé your skillset, or your network. For example,
  - Work on an open-source project
  - Learn a new programming language.
  - Write a piece of software for something you’re passionate about.
  - Start a tech ’blog.
  - Extend a project you’ve worked on in class.
  - Play on HackerRank.
- Network! Contact alums and friends to get suggestions. Most alums would be happy to comment on your application materials or to give you tips. (However, don’t ask alums directly for jobs.)

**Additional Notes**

- **Use the CLS!** These folks specialize in helping students think about opportunities and prepare themselves for those opportunities.
- **Consider multi-year planning.** Many students who get the best internships often start with a less-competitive internship the previous summer and leverage successes in that internship.
- **Know your strengths.** You can’t convince someone else that you’re worth hiring unless you know why you’re worth hiring. So figure out what makes you special. (Note that friends are a good resource for helping you figure out what makes you special.)
- **Use alumni resources.** Many of our alums are happy to help students think about internships and other opportunities. While you can’t necessarily ask them to hire you for internships, you’ll find that many can help you think about what you might want to do or how to develop the background that
will allow you to achieve your goals. Alums can also suggest ways in which Grinnellians are generically special (as strange as that may sound).

- **Demonstrate your passion for CS.** Almost every alum I’ve heard from has talked about the importance of a passion for CS, which is often demonstrated through side projects and a knowledge of interesting things that are happening. Take the time to work on a side project and to learn about some technologies (e.g., by attending CS table). Work in public (e.g., through a GitHub account).
On Campus Opportunities

Research With Grinnell CS Faculty

Advantages

- Convenient/familiar
- For students entering their third or fourth year, can serve as a mentored advanced project (MAP)
- For students entering their second year, can serve as a mentored introductory project (299/MIP)
- Reasonable compensation ($3400 or so, but you may be taxed on it)
- Interesting projects
- 4 credits
- Potential for continuing work (sometimes with compensation)
- Often collaborative
- Stay in Grinnell
- May not count against international students’ CPT/OPT.

Disadvantages

- Limited availability
- High expectations: The College wants publishable work (for MAPs)
- Continuing work (often w/o compensation)
- May require travel in the fall or the spring

Potential Contacts: Charlie Curtsinger, curtsinger@cs.grinnell.edu; Peter-Michael Osera, osera@cs.grinnell.edu; and Samuel A. Rebelsky, rebelsky@grinnell.edu.

There will be a talk in early spring about these opportunities. Note that not all faculty will be offering summer opportunities, and some of those who do may have already selected their students.

Student Assistant MathLAN Administrator

Advantages

- Convenient/familiar
- Explore a different aspect of computing
- Likelihood for continuing work (sometimes with compensation)
- Stay in Grinnell

Disadvantages

- Very limited availability (typically one or two each summer, maybe none this summer, depending on funding)
- High expectations
- Normal student work wages
Contacts: John David Stone, stone@cs.grinnell.edu

Work With Grinnell Mathematics/Statistics Faculty

Advantages

- Convenient/familiar
- Can serve as a mentored advanced project (MAP)
- Reasonable compensation ($3400, but you may be taxed on it)
- Interesting projects
- 4 credits
- Potential for continuing work
- Stay in Grinnell

Disadvantages

- Limited availability
- High expectations
- Not always relevant to CS

Contact: Karen Shuman, shumank@grinnell.edu, Chair of Mathematics and Statistics, should have a list of Math faculty who will be supervising summer MAPs; Jeff Blanchard, blanchj@grinnell.edu, may be supervising a programming-oriented MAP. Shonda Kuiper, kuipers@grinnell.edu, sometimes hires CS students. Again, more details will be available in early spring.

Work With Other Grinnell Faculty

Increasingly, disciplines outside of computer science make such use of computing and algorithmic approaches that it behooves faculty to hire research assistants who are competent programmers. There have been some interesting projects in digital humanities that might involve a computer science student who also has strong interest in the humanities, and some projects related to the Data Analysis and Social Inquiry Lab (DASIL) might be able to involve students. In some years, there is funding through the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (CTLA) for students to contribute to projects relating to technology in education.

Advantages

- Convenient/familiar
- Can serve as a mentored advanced project (MAP)
- Reasonable compensation ($3400, but you may be taxed on it)
- Interesting projects
- Learn about new and different applications of CS
- 4 credits
- Potential for continuing work
- Stay in Grinnell
Disadvantages

- Limited availability
- High expectations
- You will probably need to seek these out; you may even have to be the primary author of the original proposal

Contact: Ask around.

**Instructional Technology Services**

ITS typically hires a few students to work on a variety of projects over the summer, including help desk. We don’t know how many students they plan to hire this summer.

Advantages

- Somewhat low-key
- Stay on campus
- A different approach to technology

Disadvantages

- Likely to be normal student wages
- Typically limited to students already working for ITS

Contact: John Hammond, hammondj@grinnell.edu, and Ralph Helt heltr@grinnell.edu.

**Communications**

In recent summers, Communications has hired students to work on the Web site. I’ve not heard back as to whether they plan to hire students in summer 2016.

Advantages

- Somewhat low-key
- Stay on campus
- Make a positive difference to your campus
- A different kind of computing

Disadvantages

- Not likely to require or use deep technical knowledge
- Political issues
- You may know others
Other Campus Jobs

There are, of course, a variety of other jobs available on campus students who are really interested in staying at Grinnell. Some of these jobs may have a computing component. You will need to spend some effort finding these jobs and convincing appropriate folks to hire you. I have been told that the library, admissions, and the security department often have the most opportunities.

If you do stay on campus, you may also want to try to volunteer in one of the faculty research groups, or to gather a group of students to work on a side project, or ....

Off Campus Opportunities

Research Experiences for Undergraduates

The National Science Foundation sponsors a number of REU (Research Experience for Undergraduates) projects nationwide. The NSF site can provide you with some pointers, including some that are nearby. The CS faculty know folks at DePauw, Harvey Mudd, and Hope, among others. Students have also had good luck with Iowa State and Washington University, St. Louis.

Advantages

- Looks great on resume/CV
- Work with other computer scientists
- Often pays better than Grinnell
- Escape from Grinnell

Disadvantages

- Limited to U.S. Citizens
- Highly competitive, with late decisions (but Grinnell students have done well, at least as of late)
- Some applications due asap
- Some students have had mixed experiences


Corporate Internships

You should talk to career services about potential internships. You should also search on the Web and using other resources. Grinnell students have done internships with a wide variety of companies.

Some students have also had good luck contacting alumni for ideas. The CLS is likely to be able to provide some leads.
Advantages

- Get a taste of the real world
- Escape from Grinnell
- Get your foot in the door
- Likely to have good compensation

Disadvantages

- May use up “work time” on international student visas
- Many of the best ones have already done their hiring

International Students: The Center for Careers, Life, and Service has a special form for obtaining curricular practical training (whatever that is) for the summer.

For more information and ideas, visit [Grinnell’s Center for Career, Life, and Service](#)

In addition, Atul Gupta, a Grinnell Trustee and President of ATG in Des Moines, says there are hundreds of internships available in Des Moines. You might contact him for suggestions and directions.

Other Research Internships

You might also consider applying for internships at research laboratories.

Advantages

- Looks good on resume
- Likely to be interesting work
- Potentially good compensation

Disadvantages

- You’ll need to identify potential research sites
- Likely to be highly competitive
- Status for international students unclear

Contact: Individual researchers.

Noyce-Intel Summer Internships

These are competitive internships available to Grinnell students to undertake interesting and socially responsible applications of computing and technology. The internship must be at a nonprofit or governmental institution. Certainly, not all of these internships are in computing related fields, but many are. In the past, some of these fellowships have been used to support students working for Freenets, students developing computer applications for other disciplines at other Universities, and students doing computer work for nonprofits. Two are typically awarded each year, depending on cost.
Advantages

- Self-directed
- Interesting projects
- Usually off-campus
- Looks good on resume/CV
- Available to foreign students, even for off-campus study
- Can explore an aspect of computing other than research/programming

Disadvantages

- Competitive
- Self-designed
- Lower compensation, intended to cover only expenses
- Requires fall presentation

Contacts: Michael B. Guenther, guenthmb@grinnell.edu and the CLS

Wilson Internships

The Wilson program is currently under revision. Currently, it looks like Wilson will be targeting internships that relate to innovation and leadership. Interestingly, many tech internships, particularly internships at startups, give you opportunities to explore both of these areas.

Advantages

- Self-directed
- Interesting projects
- Usually off-campus
- Looks good on resume/CV
- Available to foreign students, even for off-campus study
- Focus on innovation and leadership

Disadvantages

- Competitive
- Self-designed
- Lower compensation, intended to cover only expenses

Contacts: J. Montgomery Roper, roperjm@grinnell.edu and the CLS

Other Internship Funds

Grinnell has other internship funds, too. Check out the Web page at http://www.grinnell.edu/about/offices-services/cls/internships/funding and talk to the CLS
Google Summer of Code

In many years, Google sponsors opportunities for students to volunteer on open source projects (and receive compensation for volunteering) through a program that they call Google Summer of Code (GSoC). It’s not yet clear if GSoC will be offered in Summer 2016, but I expect that it will.

In summer 2007, three Grinnell students were supported for Google Summer of Code projects. In summer 2009, at least one Grinnell student worked on summer of code. We’ve had a few work on GSoC since then, but not many.

- Main site: [http://code.google.com/soc/](http://code.google.com/soc/)
- Advice for students: [http://code.google.com/p/google-summer-of-code/wiki/AdviceforStudents](http://code.google.com/p/google-summer-of-code/wiki/AdviceforStudents)
- If you want to do summer of code, get involved with an open source project now!

Advantages

- Interesting projects
- Benefits society
- Looks good on CV
- Possibility for telecommuting
- Dedicated mentors
- Relatively late notifications

Disadvantages

- Competitive
- May not provide a physical community
- Often a much later deadline and decision date