

My Googley Adventure

A co-op experience by Kurt Alfred Kluever

I recently finished my 4th and final co-op that I needed to fulfill my Computer Science degree. I was fortunate enough to land a summer co-op at the "number one place to work" on the planet, Google. In November of last year, I applied on Google's student job website for the internship (co-op). A few weeks later, I was setup to have two technical phone interviews. The interview consisted of challenging, concrete programming questions. The rumor that Google will ask questions such as "How many planes are in the sky over the United States right now?" is simply not true. They want to know how well you can understand a problem, design a solution, program your solution, and analyze your code. I received a call soon after my interviews and was offered a position as a Software Engineer for the summer of 2007 at their headquarters in Mountain View, CA. I had never lived, or even visited, the west coast so I was very excited to go out there. One of the challenges I faced was finding a place to live during my co-op but Google gave a list of suggestions on where to look for places. I ended up renting a house with two other Google co-op students in nearby Palo Alto (5 miles from Google). Since we were car-less for the summer, we rented bikes and rode to/from work everyday.

When Paul Tymann, the head of the RIT Computer Science Department, visited Google this summer, he described it as a "Disneyland for geeks". The environment does indeed feel a bit like Disneyland, but it's a company for more than just geeks. Although Google is an engineering organization, it employs tons of non-technical people as well (mechanical engineers, business people, etc). All of Google's employees, including co-ops and contractors (even the cleaning staff) can enjoy all of the following job perks at its Mountain View location.

- Tons of snacks (cereal, chips, nuts, granola bars, cheese sticks, etc), drinks (soda, coffee, tea, Smart Water, Naked Juice, Starbuck's Frappuccinos, Godivas, Rock Stars, Red Bull, etc). The founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, mandated that no programmer should ever go hungry and had these fully stocked "mini kitchens" put within 100ft of every programmer.
- Hot breakfast, lunch and dinner every weekday with 17 restaurants on campus to choose from. All of the food is gourmet and prepared by extraordinary chefs. Tons of amazing food (top sirloin steaks, kobe beef, trout, snapper, tuna, venison, duck, chicken, etc) to choose from. Dessert includes Ben and Jerry's ice cream, soft serve frozen yogurt, and whatever else the chef has prepared for the day.
- If you need to burn off all of the calories from the great food, just visit any of the three gyms that are open 24/7 which have dozens of cardio machines, weight machines, and free weights. A bunch of personal trainers are available to help you with your routine. Energy/protein bars and shakes for the taking. Outside the gym, there is an "endless" stationary lap pool. There is a beach volleyball court on the main patio.
- Showers (with shampoo and body wash), heated toilet seats (with a wireless remote control), and soft toilet paper in every bathroom.

- Hundreds of “roaming” bikes to get around campus. If you need to get across campus, just pick one up and go. When you get there, leave it for someone else. Same rules apply to the dozens of electric scooters you’ll find all over campus. Google recently added a fleet of over 50 plugin hybrid electric Toyota Prius’s (called the GFleet) which are for Googlers to borrow to run errands whenever they want (you don’t even pay for the gas).

- There are executive shuttles with wireless Internet, leather seats, and tables that have pickup/drop off locations all around the San Francisco bay area for commuting to and from Google. If you don’t take the shuttles but you bike, walk, or jog to work (known as Self-Powered Commuting), Google will donate \$5/day that you SPC to a charity of your choice. Want to buy a hybrid car? Google will give you \$5k towards the purchase of it.

- Need to take a break from programming? Go check out one of the many pool tables, foosball tables, ping pong tables, ball pits, climbing walls, massage chairs, bouncy balls, nerf guns, Wii, PS3 (w/ Guitar Hero), Xbox 360, old school arcade games, DDR, etc.

- Also available to break up the workday are tons of exciting events. There are usually about 3 or 4 different talks on an interesting computing subject every day. In addition to the tech talks, many great authors come and speak about their recent books (free books to those who attend). In my 3 months, I’ve even seen a few celebrities visit (Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Congressman Ron Paul, musician Wyclef Jean, Ben Cohen of Ben & Jerrys, etc). That’s in addition to the “computer celebrities” that I see on a daily basis (Larry Page, Sergey Brin, Eric Schmidt, Joshua Bloch, etc). I actually had lunch with one of the founders of Google, Larry Page (net worth \$14B) at a company offsite meeting.

- To keep the employees entertained, Google frequently rents out entire theaters for the openings or previews of movies. I saw Hairspray, Transformers, and The King of Kong that way this summer. They also host a Google Dance every summer with around 7000 attendees. The co-ops went to a baseball game, participated in a scavenger hunt in San Francisco, went dancing on a dinner cruise in the SF bay, attended ice cream socials, and had fun at lots of other events.

- It’s probably even possible to live at Google due to the availability of onsite laundry, dry cleaning, showers, hair cuts, oil changes, car detailing, bike repair, credit union, dentist, doctor, etc.

- When you’re not busy taking advantage of any of the above amenities and want to work, you get to develop on amazing workstation (30" LCD, Core 2 Duo, 4GB RAM, etc).

Google offers a full time conversion process for it’s soon to be graduating co-ops. Feedback from your team, in addition to two more technical interviews (at the end of your co-op), is used in the decision making process. I recently had my two technical interviews and I should hear back from HR in mid-September. The two interviews were similar in nature to the original two phone interviews but slightly more difficult.

I expressed an interest in possibly working out of the Google Boston office upon graduation. Therefore, Google had me fly to Boston and spend the last week of my co-op working out of the Boston office. Although it doesn’t have all of the amenities of the Mountain View office yet, Google is hoping to spread the “Mountain View” culture to all offices soon.

If you can't tell by my attitude, I had an excellent summer at Google. The atmosphere at Google is completely different than any other corporate environment that I've ever heard of. I typically put in 12+ hour days (including time for lunch, dinner, tech talks, the gym, etc) because I enjoyed being at work so much! It very much has the feel of a college campus, only you're getting paid a salary instead of paying tuition! People are always cheerful and willing to help out one another. Maybe it's because instead of dreading coming to work every day, Googlers actually look forward to coming in --- I know I did!

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