We all have these special moments in our lives. Moments that carefully tread the edge of reality. Moments full of intensity, wrought with almost a constant sense of disbelief, a “wow, is this actually happening?” at every corner. Moments that eventually become all we ever want to think about or talk about or eventually ever want to define us.

Now imagine a moment like this, retaining its beauty and wonder, lasting over an entire summer. That, in essence, was my summer experience.

As soon as I stepped out of the black gates on Broadway and 116th this May, I knew this summer had a lot riding on it. From a professional perspective, it was the first real-world application I had for my degree in financial engineering. It was also my way of deciding whether finance was really the line of work I wanted to pursue, or if instead I wanted to jump ship and switch to something else. Was the work going to be something I would like? Was there prospect for me to advance and do well? Would I even survive Wall Street (or, more specifically, Canary Wharf)? From a personal perspective, this was also an important summer in that it is very likely the last one in my undergraduate career, a summer that I wanted to invest wisely. Yes, this summer was important to advance my career but it was also a summer in the prime of my youth when I still have flexibility and a desire to travel all over the world and do anything and everything I could ever dream of doing. Clearly, a lot was vested in this summer, and it did not disappoint.
Working at Morgan Stanley in Canary Wharf could be best described as eye opening. The internship program itself was divided into two formal rotations, and with a middle “project break” to a) allow us to work on intern projects, b) meet and work with desks that we could choose ourselves, and c) give flexibility during the havoc in London that was the Olympics. My first rotation was in fixed income research, specifically on the global economics desk. That was an interesting experience in that while I come from an engineering and computational based education, I came into a research environment that thrived on qualitative understanding and being able to talk about the big picture while staying ahead of the news cycle. Through a comprehensive process of research, analysis, writing, and feedback, I was able to contribute to the content of the desk in both helping existing projects and developing my own. My second rotation was the more traditional, “trading culture” experience in SPG (Securitized Products Group) trading, where I shadowed traders, learning more about the product, trading strategies, and helping develop interfaces for the traders in Excel to access information from Bloomberg. Outside these formal rotations, I was also able to help out in various ways on the SPG strategy desk, FX strategy desk, QSI (Quantitative Solutions and Innovations in Fixed Income Division) desk, and the FE desk in the equities division. The group project week was also fantastic in that it allowed me to work and create content alongside interns from all over the world, bringing a whole new dynamic to team work and project execution that I hadn’t really encountered before.

From a content standpoint, while I definitely developed the depth in knowledge I was hoping for this summer (it could be argued, quite strongly, that I
learned more in those 10 weeks than in any 10 weeks before), I was surprised more so by the breadth of information I received. Over all my networking, rotation work, and training, I not only learned from work on the desk but also from other people’s experiences and a constant influx of information around me. This increase in information extended even beyond the department, with help from people like my CEO mentor and connections at the firm to even further broaden my exposure. It also gave me perspective on how I view my own professional future in many ways. The first and most profound is that instead of worrying about specific placement and thorough planning of a narrow career track, I am more interested in just garnering information, understanding the markets better and taking in as much as I can. While this may sound idealistic, the practical ramifications of this type of strategy are quite strong. By aiming to be open minded and working hard to understand a broad array of topics, you not only open yourself up to various professional opportunities to enhance your career but also become a well-rounded individual. Indeed, the more you learn about finance and the markets, the better you understand not only these specific numbers but also different companies, different nations, and all the different types of data and knowledge available on anything and everything relevant to the international free-trade market. That expansive arena in and of itself is an interesting pursuit that I could see myself devoting much of my life to. In a more specific context, I’ve also learned through the advice of others that regardless of what I wind up doing later in my career, I want to leverage my quantitative background to truly capture the granular details of the products that I will be working with, so that I can become a better trader, salesperson, or manager,
should that be the path I take. While I would be hard pressed to find any shortcomings of this summer professionally, my only complaint would be that I wish I had more time to learn even more from the experience. It was truly phenomenal to see how much useful information is out there, and how exciting the possibility was to be able to understand and effectively use it to express your own views in interesting and creative ways through finance.

What was even better than the professional experience I had over the summer was the personal one. My summer truly hit on the main goal I had; to travel as much as possible. Over my summer, I was fortunate enough to have gone to Hawaii, London, Manchester, Barcelona, and even Romania! Furthermore, I was also able to do various things that could make for an interesting bucket list over much more than one summer; from windsurfing to scuba diving to jet-packing to watching an FC Barcelona game to going to the Olympics. It was absolutely amazing. Yet it was also a time for personal growth. The people I met, the experiences I had, and the overall diversity of thought I encountered really helped my grow and shape my ideals on a variety of topics. To that end I owe much to all the people I interacted with, whether it be my coworkers at my desk to people I visited in my travel to the other interns (both at MS and in CEO London).

Overall, the question I have to ask myself when all is said and done was whether it was worth it. Was taking the risk of going to London, foregoing the security of an internship in NYC that could be a full-time offer domestically, worth it? Would I actually enjoy the time away from the friends, family, and people I knew
and was comfortable with and be open to learning from new experiences? Would it be exciting, fun, and meaningful?

The answer is a resounding yes. A yes to discovery, a yes to opportunity, a yes to adventure. A yes to that long “moment” of better understanding what I want to do, where I want to go, and who I want to be when I grow up (or probably more accurately now, when I graduate this May!).