

Tevin M. Achong
NASA I² International Internship
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Mid-Internship Report

How do I describe what it's like to work at NASA? Is it a dream come true? Indeed, but that's far too cliché. Personally, NASA has been an amazing experience for me so far, albeit somewhat different from what I initially expected. Before arriving at Ames, I would communicate with my mentor via a series of extremely formal emails. I was completely prepared to begin a 10-week journey of intense, yet enjoyable and rewarding, work in a giant computer laboratory with no laughing allowed during work hours (I'm exaggerating). The day before I left Trinidad, however, I sent an email to my mentor asking whether or not I would have to adhere to a specific dress-code while working at the lab. He replied with,

“Feel free to wear whatever, my boss always comes in shorts so it's nothing too formal”.

At this moment, I had a strong feeling that this would be an immensely enjoyable summer. I have not been disappointed.

The other Trinidadian interns and I arrived at NASA Ames on June 2nd 2019, and attended orientation the following day. After orientation I finally got the chance to officially meet my mentor, Dr. Brian Coltin, as well as some of the other interns I'd be working with. We enjoyed lunch at NASA Ames' on-campus cafeteria, after which we were given a brief tour of the lab in which we would be working.

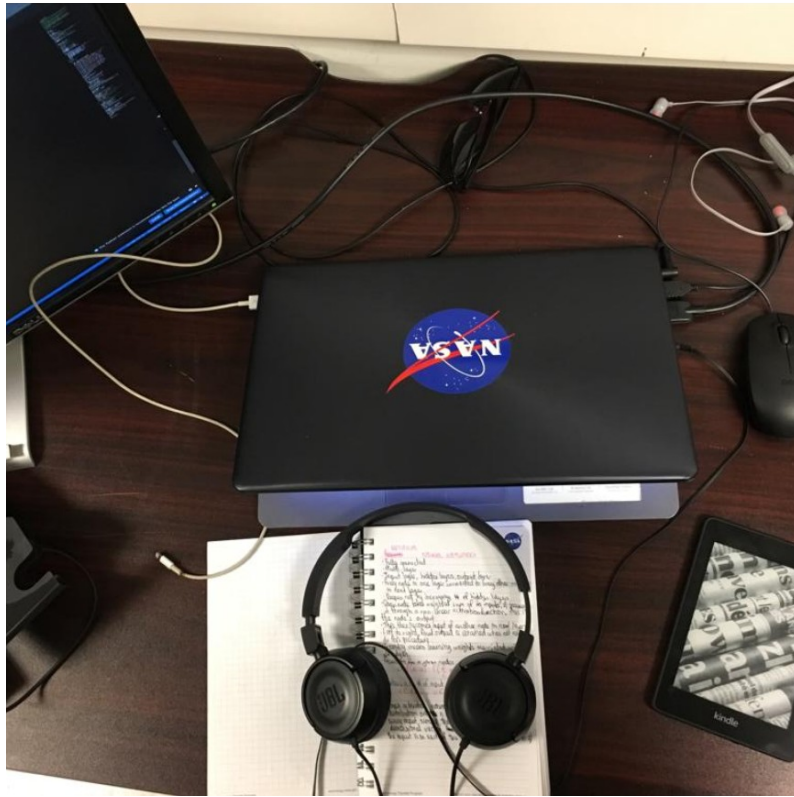


Illustration 1: My desk in the lab at NASA Ames

It was also on orientation day that I received an in-depth explanation of the project I would be working on for the next 10 weeks - combining satellite imagery with digital elevation model (DEMs) for flood mapping using machine learning. What an eye-opener it was; I was extremely excited that I would have the opportunity to learn so much this summer alongside experts in the field!

During my first two weeks, I primarily did a lot of reading to better understand how to go about doing what was required of me. Six weeks in and I can confidently say that I am now a computer science and machine learning expert (not really). I have, however, learned so much in the past few weeks that I liken my experience so far to having completed an undergraduate course in five weeks, with a surplus of practical application! I'm currently working to improve the accuracy of the neural network classifier being used for flood mapping.

I genuinely enjoy coming to work at NASA everyday. Being surrounded by highly intelligent, yet generally laid-back and relaxed people makes me feel right at home. I appreciate the emphasis my group, the Intelligent Robotics Group, places on work-life balance. Case in point, I've only been here for six weeks and we've already had two work BBQs, and one mini-volleyball competition (which we won)!



Illustration 2: Intelligent Robotics Group Mini Volleyball Competition (GO DELTA)

Equally enjoyable, has been getting to know the other interns, learning of their stories, cultures and all their different backgrounds. In my lab alone, there are students and graduates from some of the best universities in the world, including Carnegie Mellon University and EPFL in Switzerland. I've had lunch with a few of them a couple times, and even went to a house-warming hosted by an EPFL student; I'm certain that by the end of my internship, the Swiss guys would have thoroughly convinced me that I should study in Switzerland. During my short time here, I've also been able to meet students from universities like Stanford, UC Berkeley, and MIT, and employees at companies like Google and Microsoft. Being able to network on this level is absolutely amazing, and something that I cannot possibly overlook!

I fully intend to continue balancing the fun times with the hard-work during my remaining weeks here.



Illustration 3: Fellow Trinidadian intern, Keanu Nichols, and I at Santa Cruz Beach



Illustration 4: Standing in an Astrobee Testing Room

And, of course, my report would not be complete without a picture of me in front of the largest wind tunnel in the world!

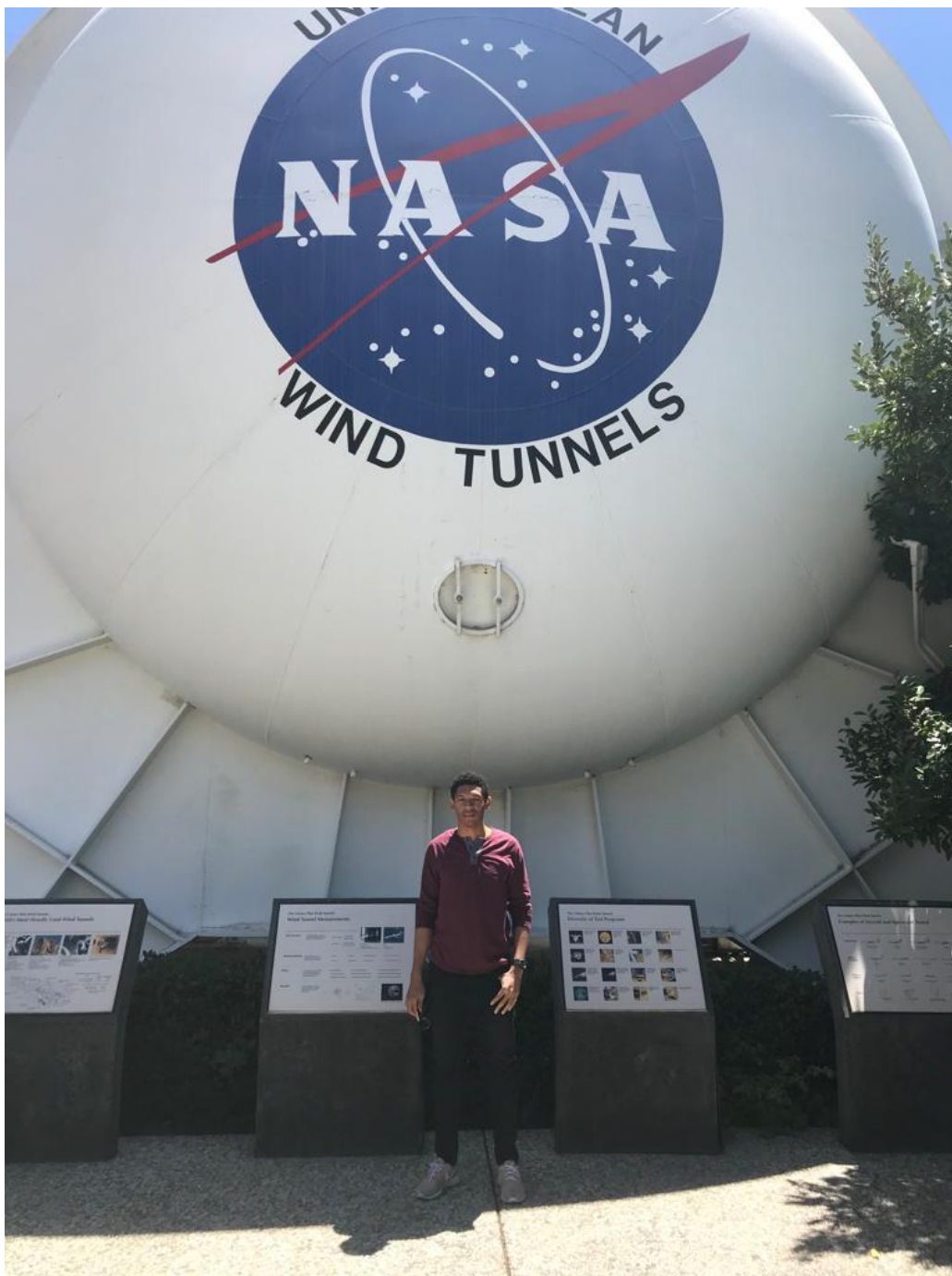


Illustration 5: Tevin Achong, in front of the largest wind tunnel in the world

