This quarter I was fortunate to be able to accompany team ETC to the 2014 Cornell Cup. This is a fairly prestigious event where 40 teams are carefully selected from a national pool of entrants. ETC and their project was selected to represent not only SPU but also Washington. My role on the team was to provide assistance with any software or electrical issues that arose. I would also help with putting together and taking apart the project because of the complexity and overall size that is involved.

Our trip started Wednesday afternoon when we left from SeaTac at around 12. Because of the time difference we didn’t land in Melbourne until midnight. That morning we woke up quite early to eat and to also rent a box truck to pick up our project from near Orlando International Airport. The remainder of the day was spent gathering supplies and also figuring out logistics concerning storage of our project as well as tying up some loose ends. There was also a very small welcoming event in which teams were allowed to talk amongst themselves and served as a chance to get to know the competition.

The following day at 5 am the teams were allowed to assemble their projects and also perform last minute troubleshooting and testing. We took full advantage of this and used the time to completely assemble our project and gather data. Unfortunately, we did run into some electrical and software issues. Although the software issues were easily taken care of for the most part, the hardware issues were not. One of the lasers stopped working and for that we had to think quickly on our feet for a workaround. The day continued with scheduled presentations and demos for the judges. This was fairly consistent the next day as well with time available for teams to check out what other entries had done. It was extremely exciting to see what other teams were able to accomplish in the times they had. Some of my favorite projects were related to virtual reality. This interested me because these were projects that were relevant to my area of study. Although I did read about the projects in the handbooks that was provided for us, it was completely different to see the projects in action and be able to talk to the people who coded and created the projects.

In addition to the teams, there were also speakers from the industry who spoke about their experiences and provided valuable insight about how to work in a team and foster innovation. One of my favorite speakers was Gimel Keaton, also known by his stage name as Young Guru. Mr. Keaton spoke about his childhood and his inspiration for pursuing audio engineering. Mr. Keaton had incredible insight to what it meant to be an engineer and where he thinks the next areas of interest will be.
Overall I had a fantastic time seeing what other teams had produced as well as helping my own classmates and friends. The Cornell Cup is an experience that I will not soon forget. I am very thankful I am able to attend a university who sees the value in activities outside of the class. All of this would not have been possible without the SERVE scholarship and for that I am grateful.