



## **RISE Supervisor in 2009**

### **Technical University of Braunschweig**

In June 2004, Sean Whitty earned his B.S. in Computer Science and Engineering at the University of California, Davis. In August 2005, he received his M.S. in Computer Science at the same university. Currently, Sean is pursuing his Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering at the Technical University of Braunschweig, Germany.

## **From California to Niedersachsen: Coming to Germany for Graduate Study**

During my final oral examination for my Master of Science degree in Computer Science at the University of California, Davis in the summer of 2005, I had to struggle to stay focused. With my degree unofficially just minutes away, I could not help but allow my mind to wander to the adventure on which I was about to embark: spending a year at a German university as a visiting researcher.

During my five years at UC Davis, I completed a B.S. in Computer Science and Engineering and an M.S. in Computer Science with an emphasis in Computer Architecture. Unfortunately, the heavy workload required to complete both degrees in five years left no time for semesters abroad or other extended international experiences. At no point was I more aware of this fact than during the final weeks of my studies at UC Davis, when I wondered in dismay if I had hurried through one of the best experiences of my life without stopping to enjoy many of its benefits, such as academic and cultural exchange in another country offered by study abroad and internship programs. Vowing not to make that mistake twice, I set out to plan a year at a foreign university after completing my M.S. Relying on my two degrees, solid recommendations, and strong GPA, as well as a few years of high school German and a language refresher at UC Davis, I selected Germany as my top destination and began contacting universities. My choice was based on Germany's important role in state-of-the-art science and technology research and development, the good quality of its many universities, and my very positive experiences with the country and its people during short summer trips to Europe. After searching for some weeks, I found a paid position as a member of the research group at the Institute of Computer and Communication Engineering at the Technical University of Braunschweig.

Despite its many differences with the American university system, I thoroughly enjoyed my year as a guest researcher. It involved numerous challenging technical tasks, access to cutting edge research and equipment, and interactions with highly knowledgeable Ph.D. students, professors, and other academic as well as industrial partners. And while these characteristics can be found at most universities around the world, my twelve months in Germany also offered a fascinating cultural

experience to a young American student who had only lived in one place, California, for his 23 years. After completing my original project and faced with the opportunity to return to the USA, I realized I was not quite ready to end my experience abroad. When I was offered the opportunity to remain and join the Ph.D. program, as well as an ambitious EU-wide project to develop a high-performance reconfigurable computing architecture, I happily accepted.

Three years into my Ph.D. studies, I still enjoy every day of my experience abroad. I ride my bike to work and rely on public transportation and trains for longer trips. I have traveled extensively throughout the EU for both work and pleasure. I speak fluent German, but have also adapted my English to be more “international” and speak more slowly and clearly.

I have also had the opportunity to supervise numerous students from countries all over the world, including the USA, through programs such as the RISE program, and to witness them undergoing similar changes and learning to appreciate similar aspects of life in Germany as myself. Young students, much like me in my first year in here, join us for short- and long-term DAAD sponsored internships, to write Bachelor theses, or to pursue a Master of Science. Some remain for the Ph.D. program. All leave with a better understanding of the cultural diversities in our world and a newfound desire to expose themselves to more of them. Extended stays in foreign countries are most certainly not for everyone. But for the open-minded students willing to immerse themselves in another culture, an internship through RISE offers an excellent opportunity for both academic and personal development, and opens the door not only to further study in Germany, but to a world of new possibilities.