Huge shoutout to Google Waterloo for hosting this competition, as it was one of the most unique sets of challenges I’ve faced to this day. Also, another huge shoutout to fellow East Oners (East One is the building name of Village One, the residence for first years) to a razor thin third place finish. I must say the YouTube pillows are pretty darn soft.

In the middle of finals week on an early Saturday, as an act of ultimate procrastination, the five team members, from left to right Ryan (CS), Fengyang (Math), Matthew (Tron), Kevin (SE), and I headed out to the local Google office expecting absolutely nothing. Arriving at the office, we had the “OMG its google” geek out and the “pretend I work here” photo shoot. This year the Google Games theme was time travel, so we buckled up and accelerated to 88 mph (Back to the Future).

The first two challenges were a set of unique trivia and puzzles, both which gave me a bit of a laugh. I felt that they wanted to start the day with a lighter mood. The trivia was pretty straight forward with questions such as “Dis or Dat” where you had to pick what category a word belonged to, and a “name as many as you can” game. Let’s just say that none of us watch American Idol but we did pretty well naming all the reindeers. We did ok at trivia, each of us had our own niches and it was entertaining. The puzzles on the other hand was when Google started being serious. With five people working, we managed to only solve one question! The team that solved the most questions only had a mere three members. My team was so close to answering the hardest question worth 50 points. The team of three were so close to solving a question as well, they had a matrix drawn out and even had all the words figured out. The answer had a bit of a trick to it and it was found within seconds of the timer ending.

The third challenge was the most enjoyable and unique out of all of the challenges that day. Google had created a word association map where the it was up to the team to explore and find new words. Basically as you add words that are associated with a previous word on the map, the map will keep on expanding, developing more interconnections and new nodes. Let your creativity run high and just “feel it,” making a connection or having an idea bounce off a teammate was a fulfilling experience. It is hard to explain but please take a look at the screenshot above. I believed we finished second for this challenge. I would love to play this game for a lot longer than the 30 mins that was allowed.

The coding challenge was pretty standard; we did pretty darn well and finished second place here. Everyone managed to pull their weight, but nevertheless an outstanding effort to Fengyang who put the team on his back to say the least. For the last challenge, it was a bit different as we needed to build a physical contraption out of straws. The goal was to keep the marble moving for the longest time possible. I have actually competed in a similar event during the Physics Olympics at UBC. The Brachistochrone Curve (wiki link here) is the curve of fastest descent so this was basically an Anti-Brachistochrone machine. Matt and I were able to direct the team to create a half-pipe like structure that allowed us to earn a spot at, you guessed it, second place.

I will say this Google, we will be back!