

Virtual Undergraduate Town Hall FAQ: September 28th, 2017

Inferring User Context from Smart Phone Data & Graduate School and Application Process

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Inferring User Context from Smart Phone Data

How do you ensure privacy when analyzing such personal data? In other words, why would I want to be stalked?


- With so many of these apps the important thing to remember is that sharing our location can actually be to our benefit. For example, there are apps that can use location data to track an elderly patient in a hospital or nursing facility, or to locate someone in need of emergency care. In these instances, sharing location is actually beneficial to the person using the app. And with most of these apps the user is actually aware that they are sharing their location. For example, we share our location with Google Maps everyday so that the program can help us to navigate our way. Generally, sharing our location is to our advantage.
- I understand why data sharing is concerning to people. You would not want to share your location with a friend on social media. I believe this is why most people instinctively answer no when asked if they are willing to share their location. They think their location with strangers. However, in reality, mobile companies, such as Google Maps, will not share or give away your location without your consent.
- When it comes to on device systems, no data is being shared, everything is on your device, on your phone. However, a lot of apps do send data to an external server so privacy in data sharing is still widely debated.

What background do you need to do this type of work?

- Basic computer science and coding are pre-requisite for this kind of work. I also recommend having a strong background in algorithms and statistics. You can also learn a lot of these skills along the way as you move through your graduate courses. I also took many machine learning, HCI, and systems courses, as well.

Graduate School Applications and Admission Process

What made going to Grad School the right choice for you?

- I believe participating in undergraduate research is the best way to identify if you like conducting research. I realized through an undergraduate internship that I wanted to continue doing research and I eventually went on to do my PhD in that area of research. That is why I decided to continue with a PhD after graduation.
 - Due to personal constraints, I decided not to enter a PhD program immediately after graduating. I chose to work for three years before applying for a graduate program in the United States. The decision to enter graduate school ultimately depends on whether you find a research area you are deeply invested in, want to learn more about, and want to contribute to.
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What about the Graduate School admissions process did you find most stressful?

- I wouldn't call it stressful, but the part that I felt required the most effort was the statement of purpose. It is a challenge to synthesize your work experiences, what has shaped you, your interests and qualities, and what you hope to contribute to the field. The statement of purpose needs to be strong and include both an outline of your body of work as well as your future aspirations. The statement of purpose, I would say is the key piece when applying to graduate school.
- There is a lot of helpful material that you can access online which will help and guide you in writing a good statement. Including:
 - [Tips on Writing a Statement of Purpose, \(University of Maryland\)](#)
 - [Guidelines for the Statement of Purpose \(University of Wisconsin\)](#)

Research involves a lot of unknowns. How do you deal with the anxiety of not knowing how to solve something?

- Research can be quite stressful at times. Strategies that help me deal with the unknowns include having a good support system (friends, coworkers), cultivating an interest outside of work, meditation, and exercise.
- Try thinking about research as a set of smaller sub-problems that put together solve a bigger problem. Work towards that larger goal of solving the full research over time.