

Throughout the 2022 academic year, my goal was to comprehensively explore natural language processing (NLP) and determine whether I want to build my career within this field. I engaged in activities spanning startup internships and hackathon projects, while exploring NLP research by presenting at graduate-level reading groups and talking with visiting lecturers. These experiences confirmed my enthusiasm for broadly working in NLP. However, I need more signal about what to specialize in and where to work; my efficiency work is interesting, but I want to experience more before committing.

I considered pursuing a PhD but advisors counseled me to gain more experience, discover my own research goals, and find a lab with compatible objectives before doing so. Industry scientists recommended a research MS, while entrepreneurs and investors suggested developing deep problem expertise. Their aggregated advice is to specialize and become an expert within a subfield.

The BS/MS is the best suited program for me to discover my niche, because my existing connections within UW CSE will let me quickly and thoroughly experience the NLP subfields of evaluation and human-centered interaction (HCI) design. Simultaneously, the BS/MS also supports my plan to discover where on the range from academia to industry to startups my career belongs. By the end of the 5th year master's, I will confidently pursue my career knowing I considered a representative set of alternatives.

I worked with the Noah's Ark lab this year, and it is the ideal environment to explore NLP subfields and find my passion. The lab's culture is collaborative and prioritizes meaningful work over paper quantity. As a new member, I proposed studying how scientists consume literature beyond their expertise, and the group's feedback inspired me to keep thinking about user-centered NLP. Attending an HCI and NLP student's thesis defense solidified my desire to conduct research at this intersection. The BS/MS program would grant me an additional year in the Ark lab to conduct research in user-centered NLP. I will complement this with human-centered design courses from Professor Reinecke, who co-advised the student's thesis defense that inspired me, and CSE 599 deep learning with Professor Krishna, who my research mentor recommended learning from. A specific project that interests me is aligning model evaluation to how people use contemporary NLP models. The UWNLP group is known for evaluation works including the SuperGLUE benchmark and Bidirectional Leaderboards, and the BS/MS would let me learn from their mentorship.

The Allen School provides ample opportunities to experience user-facing NLP beyond research due to its strong industry and entrepreneurial connections. At CSE events like FOCI and the Industry Affiliates Day, I connected with Microsoft and Meta researchers, learning about the problems they solve and their perspectives on machine learning. Through the Allen School's partnership with Madrona Venture Group, I attended their Intelligent Applications Summit, where I met founders of applied NLP companies and reaffirmed my interest in human-centered approaches. I interviewed faculty who started their own companies, learned from once-in-a-lifetime conversations with investors and operators as a CSE 599a1 venture scale entrepreneurship TA, and leveraged CSE connections to work at Yoodli, an Ai2 incubator startup creating AI speech coaching. I am curating my experiences to become an informed practitioner, capable of evaluating the motivations behind research papers and press releases, understanding NLP technology, and how to apply it to maximizing its positive user impact. The BS/MS program allows me to continue gaining insights from diverse professionals at CSE conferences, learning from influential leaders like Andy Jassy through TAing 599a1 once more, and applying NLP to meaningful problems at local startups founded by CSE alumni.

I am prepared to succeed as a BS/MS student, because I can manage ambiguity and comprehend graduate-level content. Managing ambiguity is a skill I developed by delivering within resource-constrained teams, validating startup ideas as a student and teaching assistant, and determining an effective style for coordinating lab meetings. Mentors have emphasized the importance of thriving in low-feedback environments as a graduate student, and I feel adequately prepared for this. Additionally, I am constantly reading and synthesizing complex topics. This year, I annotated papers for discussion in weekly meetings, presented at efficiency and pragmatics reading groups, and joined calls with other machine learning enthusiasts for Saturday paper talks. My peers highlighted the importance of coming to lectures prepared with questions about the material, and I am prepared for this style of learning.

The BS/MS program will help me discover whether an intersection of NLP and HCI is the field I want to pursue, and where on the spectrum of academia, industry, and entrepreneurship. I am prepared for graduate school, and am excited to continue working with the Noah's Ark lab to become a balanced NLP practitioner.