

Drew Castalia
Tucson, AZ
520-222-6285
dcastalia@email.arizona.edu

December 1, 2019

Recommendation for: Yang Hu

Dear Viterbi School Selection Committee,

I've been looking forward to writing this graduate school recommendation for Yang Hu for over a year. Ever since he studied in my game design class – and the semester after that in my digital game development class – I've hoped he would choose game development as his field. The correspondence I received from him when I got my wish was typical of Yang: besides describing his interest in your program, he expressed concern that he would be graduating a semester early (this winter) and wanted some guidance about how to use the extra time to best grow as a game developer. I'd like to show you his decision, from one of his emails:

“The first thing I came up with was drawing. It is one of my most enjoyable things [...] Meanwhile, I am planning to fill my coding skill gaps that I've found during recent semesters. Those gaps include computer networking [...] multithreading (a headache to me) [...] some algorithms and so on. I am also researching according to my target schools' curriculums for a better preparation. [...] Another thing is playing and learning games that I didn't prefer before (like most MOBA games).”

I'm sure his personal statements reveal much of the ardor you see here, but I wanted to share this candid glimpse at what makes Yang such a valuable student. He knows how hard it is to make a game. He knows how much he has left to discover. Yet, he is eager to absorb it all. He embraces challenge. He fights for perfection but isn't paralyzed by it. This was clear every day in class.

I ask first semester students to develop tabletop games before dipping their toes in technology. Most aren't programmers and still need to learn theory and communication skills. Yang took off like a rocket. He led his team by creating professional materials, art, and design for a card game satirizing workplace conditions in the game industry. He was building input-parsed text adventures in Java while other groups were stringing together simple choose-your-own-adventure graphs in Twine.

I'll never forget walking up to Yang in the more advanced development class just to ask whether he had thought of a premise for a Unity-based game project I had assigned, only to have him turn on me a tablet full of beautiful design schematics and storyboards he'd been sketching for himself. Way ahead, of course – but what truly impressed me was his success turning many of those schematics into a playable third-person adventure game with an interesting spatial geography, scripted puzzles, and narrative. I had him submit his game for public playtesting with other locally developed games at the Tucson Comic Con, where it was a hit.

As a human being, Yang is thoughtful. He thinks before speaking (with characteristically bashful laugh). He communicates carefully with respect and sincerity, even with and about others with whom he disagrees. He was a great asset to our program when he was making games here, just as he will be a great asset on any team, with any partner, on any job, and in any graduate program, especially one at the Viterbi School. I recommend him wholeheartedly.

And sincerely,



Drew Castalia
Lecturer, Game Design and Programming
University of Arizona