

Oliver's Annual Newsletter

Issue #1 - 2019



Dear Family & Friends,

In arguably the most eventful year of my life, I managed to finish undergrad, lose my first full-time job, and move across the country (twice!). This year will make for a tough one to beat! Even though everything that's happened this year has been a complete shock, I'm thankful that they've been, for the most part, a blanket of pleasant surprises. Over the past year, I successfully:

1. Graduated from undergrad (woo woo!)
2. Got my first job out of college (but lost it!)
3. Biked over 1500+ miles over the summer
4. Moved to New York
5. Started my first job out of school as a Software Engineer

As this is my first newsletter, I'm hoping this newsletter will be an engaging medium for others to learn what I've been up to this past year. I hope to release a new edition annually in hopes to stay in touch and reconnect with old friends. I'd love to keep in touch with you, and you should do the same if you can! Feel free to reach out to me at (oliver.collins@colorado.edu); I'd love to reconnect and hear what you're doing.

If you're ever in the New York area and need a place to crash or want someone to cook with, please reach out, and I hope to see you soon!

Happy New Year!

Start of 2019 - New Year Less Fear

As a Senior, you'd expect that I'd be taking only a handful of classes, sleeping in past noon, and wasting time with friends.



Taking a picture with my professor,
Astronaut Jim Voss

Unfortunately, I did all those things during my first three years of undergrad, and now I had to catch up on all the missed schoolwork.

Thankfully, since I was a Senior, I was able to get into some of the courses I've wanted to take even before I enrolled in college.

One of those classes, Introduction to Human Spaceflight, taught by Astronaut Jim Voss, we learned everything about the history of humans going to space to developing a mock space mission to Mars. Professor Voss's lectures were captivating, and going to his office hours; we'd learn so much about his time up in space and

all the secrets he can't talk about during lectures. I would highly recommend this course to anyone if you can get in (plus his exams are really easy)!

I also took a course called History of Jazz, where we learned about the four different jazz periods and the most celebrated artists, songs, and events during those times. What made the course so enjoyable was that our lectures took place in a theatre where our instructor would perform Jazz music that he created. It was always a thrill attending lectures and hearing music 80 years before our time and watching films of what life would have been like during that era. What shocked me the most about the course, though, is that we learned about 50+ different jazz musicians, but we never once talked about the most renowned Jazz musician I know, Louis Armstrong (maybe we learn about him in History of Jazz II?).

Even though I took a bunch of courses I relished, I still had to satisfy many of the requirements that I kept for Senior year. Various of these core classes were introductory courses that taught fundamentals in math and arithmetic, such as Data & Models, while others were far more rigorous and involved. Yet, regardless of the course I took, whether that be a freshman introductory math class or a graduate-

level machine learning seminar, the majority of my professors were the most kind-hearted and knowledgeable people that have ever taught me. Looking back, I'm so thankful that I got to spend my final year of undergrad with this unbelievable set of people.

Between work, school, and everything in between, I didn't have too much time to spend time with friends, myself, or to sleep past noon. However, even though I had a busy Senior year, I enjoyed school the most out of all my years at undergrad. There were several aspects that made school more enjoyable this year, such as the exceptional professors, entertaining new roommates, and having a job (aka having money). Yet, the most significant aspect was how much more I perceived college to feel like a community. It seems that it took me four years to recognize that everyone struggles in their own way and college is just the collection of all these people coming together to dream and achieve similar goals. Though this semester wouldn't be described as a "traditional" college experience, I wouldn't have wished to spend this last semester with my peers in any other way.

“Graduation”

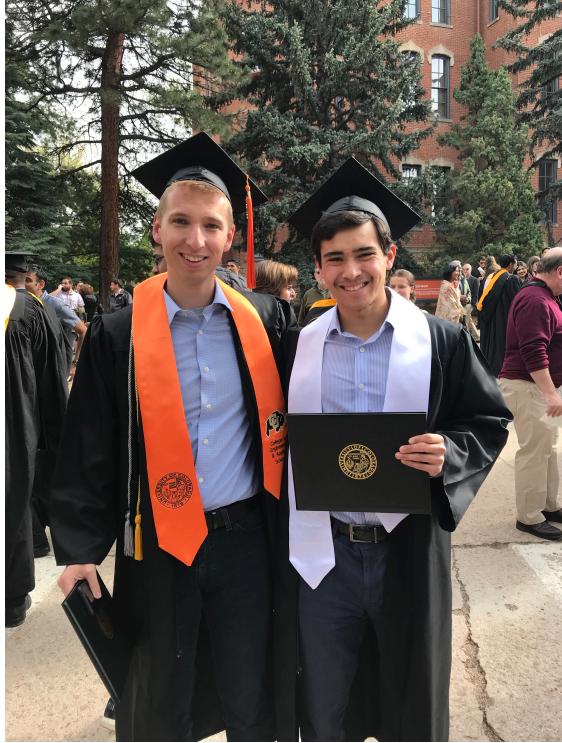
After four years (mostly just one) of pulling all-nighters, endless job-hunting, late-night taco runs, and hurting myself skateboarding through campus, I could finally call myself a college graduate (sort of). I fulfilled enough credits to walk and participate in many of the festivities real graduates get to celebrate in May, but I still had two more courses to complete by the end of summer. Nonetheless, graduation was a thrill, and it was great to commemorate all we had accomplished.

Our commencement, or shall we call it, a “snow-mencement,” was one of the most unexpected turn of events for graduation, especially in May. Tens of thousands of guests gathered on May 9th to celebrate the graduation of more than eight



My freshman roommate John and my other friend Joey!

thousand of my peers and were welcomed with a blanket of snow. For the past several days, it poured snow, so by the time of graduation, our outdoor venue was coated. As you can imagine, all the students got into a snowball fight with another, and we even made the news! It was so cold and miserable that my dad and brother ended up sheltering in a nearby building and missing the entire ceremony. It's a good thing my parents have two other graduations to look forward to.



One of my closest classmates, Carl

say goodbye to college. Even after all the all-nighters studying for exams, beginning of semester checks sent to the school, and drunk college students breaking into my apartment, I will genuinely miss undergrad.

Summer '19

Soon after graduation, everyone packed their bags and said their final goodbyes to Boulder (some in different ways than others). Unfortunately, I still had two classes to complete by summer's end, so I was stuck in Boulder until the beginning of August. Luckily, I had my internship extended at SAP, and I could continue working until I officially graduated.

Of the two classes I took, the first, Behavioral Genetics, was an accelerated course where we met every day for 3 hours and learned all about Mendelian traits,

chromosomal anomalies, polymorphisms, and psychopathology. Essentially, we learned about why it's so challenging to cure Alzheimer's, why GMO Salmon isn't so bad, and why some people are more anti-social than others (it's in their genes!). Dr. Carey was a phenomenal teacher, and his insight and humor made the class worth the 3-hour lectures!

The second class I took, Principles of Programming Languages, (otherwise known as PPL), I had been avoiding all my undergraduate career since students recognize it as one of the most challenging courses in the department. For some reason, I didn't design my schedule correctly, and taking the course was the only way I could graduate in the summer, so I enrolled. Looking back, the entire

class was

all a blur. All I remember from PPL is that we spent the first two weeks learning how to count. Then we jumped right into complex computer science theory: what my professor was currently researching. Long story short, I learned effectively nothing from the course, but came out the other side!

Besides working and attending lectures, I had a lot of spare time to

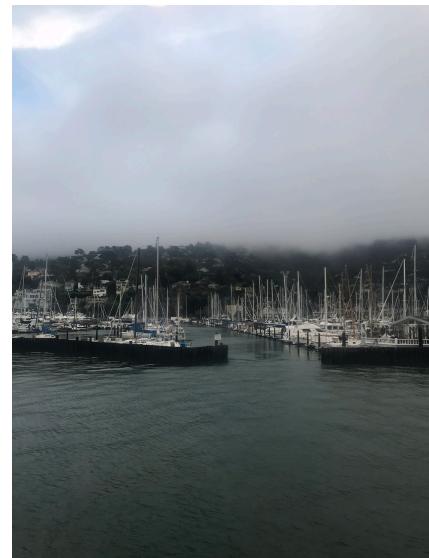


Sightseeing in SF

myself, especially since most other students left Boulder. I ended up traveling pretty frequently to San Francisco to visit Shubha, flying home to



Boat tour of SF w/ Shubha



Sausalito w/ Shubha

Seattle, and playing a lot of Super Smash Bros with my roommate, Huli.

I also did a lot of biking since I was biking to work and school, almost 15 miles every day! I even biked the STP one weekend but only got to mile 112 before being passed by a unicycle. The summer dawdled on, and I was eager for the summer to end, something you probably don't hear a lot from a college student!

Leaving Boulder

After a week of sleepless nights writing my research paper (check it out [here](#)), I successfully presented my topic, took my final exam, and turned in my final undergraduate assignment for the last time in my life. Within 24 hours, my brother flew into Boulder, packed all my stuff into a train, and we flew back home to Seattle.



My last day at SAP 😢

I also said goodbye to my SAP family, who I had the pleasure of working with for nine months. I had never worked on such complicated and challenging work, but I'm glad I had such a supporting team, mentor, and environment to learn all I did in those nine months. SAP is one of those companies where even though I am leaving; I will stay apart of the larger SAP family for years to come.

It was sad saying goodbye to Boulder, but I was ready for the next chapter of my life: New York!

Post Graduation & New York

To give a little backstory, during the summer, American Express, the company I signed an offer for back in November, sent me a background test to complete before I could start working in late-August. It was a rather in-depth inspection: a criminal background screen for every city I've lived in, a call to every company I

ever worked for to verify my position and role, as well as an extensive drug test. For every category, I passed with flying colors, except for the drug test. The issue was that American Express had sent me a drug test in mid-May, but I was never notified of the delivery or request for the drug test. After a month, I got a call from my recruiter from American Express, letting me know I had a drug test to take by EOD. Since I had been in Seattle, I could not take the exam. A week later, the hiring manager from American Express called me to inform me that this issue escalated to the legal team and that they have to rescind my offer. I was devastated and somehow got another chance to take the drug test a day after, which I passed, but to no avail, American Express refused to give me back my offer.

I had to cancel all my housing, transportation, and relocation for the job in New York. Luckily, within a month, I applied to 150+ companies, I interviewed with numerous companies, flew across the country, and, eventually, got an offer from the incubator company of Walmart, [Store No. 8](#). Ironically, during the onsite interview at Store No. 8, I received a phone call from my hiring manager at American Express, letting me know that they gave me back my offer and were expecting me to start work the following Monday. Thankfully, I did well enough at the onsite; I got an offer and accepted almost immediately.

The other ironic piece to this story is that after applying to over 150+ jobs all on the west coast, this job was the only company where the recruiter reached out to me first, and they were also from New York. I guess it's my destiny to move to New York.

After accepting my offer, I took an uninterrupted three weeks to spend with my family and friends back home. I then packed my bags and moved to a little cradle in the corner of Brooklyn called Greenpoint, which I now call home. It's a historically Polish neighborhood with a majority of settled families in a surprisingly refreshing and relaxed community. But if I ever want to go



🧀 'n on the Brooklyn Bridge

into the City, it's only a 15-minute train ride.

Since moving to New York and starting my new job at Walmart, I've made tons of new friends, got to visit and explore New York in the most non-New York ways possible, and spend a lot of time working my butt off! Working at Walmart has been such a blast. Within the second week of starting my new job, I pulled an all-nighter with my team to release our product, [InHome delivery](#)! The team has been working on the product for quite some time now, so it was an extremely exciting — yet stressful — time for us.



Game night with my coworkers & friends

My official role is Infrastructure Engineer, but I'm just a software engineer who works on the core technologies of the InHome team (APIs, cloud computing, application integration, security compliance, etc.). It's a challenging role, but I'm learning a lot and have two great teammates who help me tremendously and foster my growth.

While I do work for the largest private employer in the world, and the third-largest employer in the world (only behind the U.S. Department of Defense and the Chinese Red Army), I work in a small office for a small team on a product where we have a lot of autonomy.

When I'm not working, I'm taking a few online courses in Machine Learning, and I'm also studying for the GRE. I also try to find time to meet new people in New York, hang out with coworkers, visit friends in the area, and travel whenever possible. It's hard finding the time since there are so many things to do in New York, but so limited time.



Shubha visiting me in NY

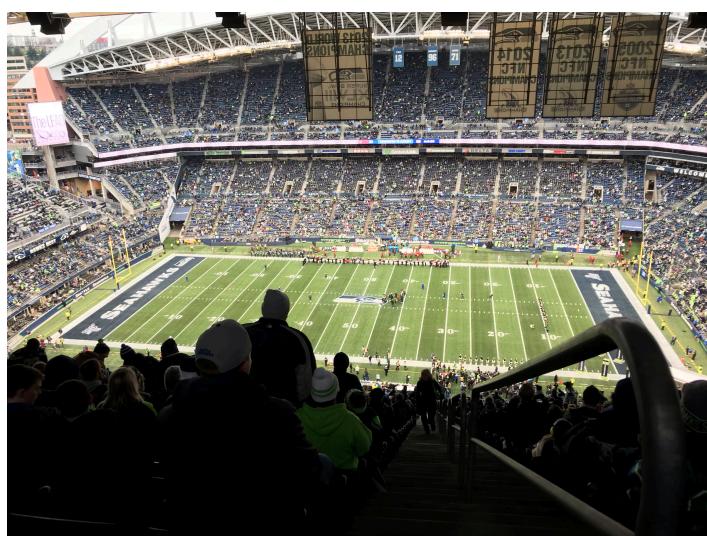
Eventually, I want to move back to the West Coast to be closer to my family and Shubha. Hopefully, I will be able to work remote, and I can keep my job at Walmart and move to the West Coast. Regardless, I'm excited for the next chapter in my life and hope to make the most this city has to offer!

Home for the Holidays

After spending several months in New York, I've begun to appreciate all the Pacific Northwest has to offer. I don't get to spend much time outdoors playing sports, taking a nice calming walk, or listening to silence, much of which I had in Boulder or in Seattle. I'm also much further away from home compared to when I was in college (1000 miles vs. the 2500 miles I have now). So I'm always excited to go home and spend time with family and friends whenever I have the chance.



Hanging out with Lola & Joe



Sitting in the last row for my first Seahawks game!

Over Thanksgiving and Christmas, I was able to watch my first Seahawks game, cook my last non-vegetarian meal, and meet up with all my friends after they graduated college. The majority of my friends have either moved back to Seattle for school, work, or family, and so it's nice to be able to go back home and see everyone in one place.

2020 and Onward!

Every year, I like to set myself a list of goals that I'd like to accomplish for the upcoming year. As this year marks the start of a new decade, I'd also like to set some goals for the next decade. I always try to keep my goals as ambitious, yet attainable, as possible. So in 2020, I'm hoping to:

1. Become a vegetarian
2. Read 5 books and give a detailed analysis of the top 5 things I learned and the one point I didn't quite agree with
3. Organize an event (can be anything!)

And for my goals to hit by 2030, I've set myself goals to:

1. Become carbon neutral by 2023
2. Donate 10% of my disposable income annually (1% increase every year)
3. Travel to 50 countries I've never been to

With that, this is the end of my first newsletter. Thank you for reading, and I really hope you enjoyed it. Please email me back if you found this interesting; I love reconnecting with old friends and would love to hear how you're doing. Nevertheless, I hope you're doing well and that you have a great start to the new year!

As with every year, I'm looking forward to the next, and I hope next year will be just a little bit better than this year!

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oliver".