

Clement Fung - Personal History Statement for UC Berkeley Computer Science PhD Application

My path to applying to graduate school at UC Berkeley was an unconventional one, with many changes and steps along the way. I first started my undergraduate degree in Systems Design Engineering at the University of Waterloo, a program that emphasizes simulation, product design and human factors engineering. It was not until the summer of my sophomore year in 2013 when I was first exposed to research: at Dr. Paul Boutros' bioinformatics lab at the University of Toronto. It particularly intrigued me to see students working in such a collaborative and supportive academic environment, on problems with unknown solutions.

From this point onwards, an academic career has always been at the back of my mind. After finishing my undergraduate degree, including 3 internship experiences in the Greater Seattle Area and the Bay Area, I decided to test the waters of graduate school and expand my training in computer science by doing my masters degree in computer science at the University of British Columbia (UBC). My time at UBC was pivotal in shaping my opinions of graduate school, and choosing my subfield of research in computer science. This was where I was first introduced to distributed systems and security research: I would eventually combine my experience in machine learning to work on three major research projects over my two year program.

I am especially drawn to pursuing a PhD in computer science after enjoying the benefits of the academic community; I love collaborating with great people on engaging challenges. I was fortunate enough to meet and learn from some superb researchers while at UBC, and working on these unique and varied projects has really reinforced one of my reasons for doing a PhD. I cannot think of a better environment than UC Berkeley for a PhD, which brings together such students and allows them to challenge the frontier of research. PhDs are great networking tools for meeting interesting, motivated people, in which one creates a lifelong network of friendship and collaboration.

When I started my graduate studies at UBC, I took it upon myself to become a champion of community, diversity and inclusiveness. I was elected as the president of the Computer Science Graduate Student's Association (CSGSA) at UBC, this involved overseeing and organizing events for incoming students and serving as a liaison between students and faculty within the department. At UBC, many masters students are admitted without being matched with a research supervisor; they are given 8 months to find a research topic and a supervisor. One of my proudest achievements as president involved establishing a networking lunch for new incoming masters students and computer science faculty to meet and discuss potential research topics. This event was attended by approximately 30 students and 12 faculty members, and several supervisory relationships formed from this event.

In addition to serving as the president while at UBC, I also served on the strategic planning committee and helped form a strategic vision document for the department over the next decade. I also take great enjoyment and pride in teaching, and was awarded a graduate teaching assistant award in 2017. All in all, I have loved being involved in the academic community, and I would love to continue the experience.