

Cover Letter

Vagrant Gautam

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to apply to the tenure-track Assistant Professor of Computational Linguistics position at REDACTED University. Currently, I am a PhD candidate at Saarland University in Germany, where I am on track to submit my dissertation by Summer 2025.

I am thrilled to have this opportunity to apply to REDACTED University Linguistics because, put simply, this is my dream job. [REDACTED paragraph of high-level background in computational linguistics, and my academic and industrial experience]

My research bridges NLP and linguistics, with the goal of building trustworthy NLP systems. Under this umbrella, I have evaluated the gender fairness of NLP systems by drawing from theories of sociolinguistics, I have built more efficient and reliable systems that answer questions by using the classic computational linguistic task of named entity recognition, I have evaluated system reasoning about referential expressions using principles of coherent discourse, and my ongoing work is a meta-evaluation of methods to measure syntactic knowledge in NLP systems. So far I have published 11 papers (7 as first author), several of which appear at top-tier venues such as EMNLP, ACL and TACL, and which I have been invited to present at universities in Germany, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, and the USA. In my research statement, I lay out examples of my work and outline my vision to lead a research group that does theoretical and applied work on trustworthy NLP, by bridging it with knowledge and methods from linguistics.

Beyond linguistics, I have also undertaken highly interdisciplinary, multimethod research to explore the ethical and societal aspects of trustworthy NLP, drawing on literature from philosophy, gender studies, anthropology, political science, and sociology. All of these areas are well-represented at REDACTED University, and several even contribute required courses for the interdisciplinary Social Data Analytics program. You will see from my teaching portfolio that I am experienced in training people from diverse backgrounds in programming, computational linguistics, interdisciplinary topics in NLP, and research skills. I have also created my own course on defining and measuring abstract concepts in NLP, which I will teach at Saarland University in Summer 2025. I am prepared to teach this course at REDACTED University, along with classes in linguistics, NLP, and the REDACTED program, as I describe in my statement. As such, my teaching and research experience are a very good fit for the Department of Linguistics as well as the REDACTED program.

I believe REDACTED University students would benefit particularly from my insights on working in industry, thanks to my experience as a computational linguist on Dialpad's Automatic Speech Recognition team. I used my training in linguistics on a regular basis at my job, where I created a technical strategy to expand our NLP products beyond English, and applied my phonological knowledge of English syllabification to improve our accuracy at automatic speech recognition. In fact, this experience led to my being invited as a speaker for the REDACTED program's launch event several years ago, and I am delighted to see how much it has grown.

As for students who are more interested in pursuing academic careers, I am excited to shepherd them into the world of research, drawing on my experience formally supervising Bachelors and Masters students in Germany, as well as my mentoring of more junior PhD students in my group. REDACTED University students would benefit from my international collaborative network which includes colleagues at McGill University, the University of Edinburgh, UCLA, the University of Washington, and the University of Hamburg, in addition to several groups at Saarland University.

Finally, I have strongly prioritized diversity and inclusion efforts in the last 10 years, through one-on-one mentoring of over 30 people from under-represented groups in research and tech, group-level initiatives such as workshops teaching girls to code and panels about queer and disabled inclusion in academia, as well as larger organizational efforts—as a Queer in AI organizer, and co-founder of a group for BIPOC employees at Dialpad. As someone who is brown, queer, trans and disabled, I hope to be a role model to minoritized students via teaching, advising and mentoring, and to increase institutional awareness and support of the issues facing different groups of REDACTED University students.

In summary, I believe my experience and qualifications would complement the existing research areas and teaching strengths of the REDACTED University Linguistics department and REDACTED program, and I am enthusiastic about the prospect of returning to Vancouver for the rest of my academic career. Thank you for considering me.

Sincerely,

Vagrant Gautam