

Daniel J. Jinguji, Statement of purpose
PhD Application, Computer Science, Washington State University

“Why is this not clicking for you? I can tell you’re intelligent and really working hard ... Where’s the disconnect?” Duane (a pseudonym) was a student in my Computer Programming II class at North Seattle College. Like many students, he was drawn to computer science as a lucrative, but competitive, field. He was one in a cadre of interested and engaged students. For some of them it seemed to click into place relatively readily; for others, not so much.

I have spent most of my professional career working as a computer science educator, first in industry at Boeing and Microsoft, and more recently at North Seattle College. Duane’s story is not unique. I want to find ways to foster greater student success in computer science and software engineering. It would be great to have a vehicle to disseminate that information, as well. However, there seems to be relatively little interest in the post-secondary level in many colleges of education. So, I was very pleased to learn about the work of Dr. Christopher Hundhausen at WSU and his research in effective methods and techniques in computer science education. It seems like a very good fit between my research interests and his. In fact, we spoke on the phone about a year ago.

As a state employee, I have taken advantage of the tuition exemption at UW and pursued areas of study of great personal interest, most notably applied linguistics. I see a synergy between second language acquisition (SLA) and this proposed research. A shared focus is the development of communicative competence: being able to use the expressive power of the language at hand, understanding and incorporating common idiomatic usage, entering into a community of practice. At a fundamental level, effective software engineering is more than just getting the computer to jump through the appropriate hoops; it’s communicating with the rest of the programming team, both past and future. (I pick software engineering here because I believe that’s the target for most undergraduate students.) Also, other topics from SLA could be leveraged into this research, areas like: the social development theory of Vygotsky, recent educational practices like the flipped-classroom model, and qualitative research methods. The possibilities for making significant advances in the field are vast.

In this light, the PhD program in computer science at WSU seems to be a natural next step in my personal and professional development. I am excited by the possibilities that it offers, and I believe I can contribute to the learning experience of the other students in the program, as well grow personally and professionally through my participation in this program.

Thank you for the attention to this application. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide any additional information that may help you in coming to a decision.

Respectfully yours,
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