UCLA Samueli Computer Science

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Dear Members of the NVIDIA Fellowship Selection Committee:

I write with enthusiasm to recommend Wenhan Yang for an NVIDIA PhD Fellowship. I have had the privilege of working closely with Wenhan in my capacity as the instructor for CS 239: Introduction to Human-Computer Interaction, a highly interactive, group project-based course for graduate students. His commitment to (i) **creative problem solving** and (ii) **active collaboration** sets him apart.

In his research, Wenhan brings a **creativity to tackling complex real-world problems for improving the robustness of vision-language foundation models, such as CLIP and LLaVA**. His research on RoCLIP mitigates safety and reliability issues at training by relying on semantic similarities between captions and images to captions. Wenhan's approach protects against a threat model where incorrect captions are intentionally introduced. Since publishing RoCLIP at NeurIPS 2023, Wenhan has expanded his semantic approach in follow-up work on SafeCLIP (ICML 2024) and ongoing work.

In the classroom, I have seen how Wenhan **brings this creativity to address the real-world need for learning a new language**. With his team, Wenhan conducted user research by interviewing 10 and surveying an additional 35 adults about their experiences learning new languages. They found that a key barrier to learning languages is self-consciousness about practicing a new language, which means people do not practice, only to become more self-conscious, leading to a feedback loop. Based on this insight, Wenhan and his team have been developing a chat-bot for practicing scenarios and role playing in English, Chinese, and Japanese. Wenhan has been leading the features interfacing with LLMs using text and speech modalities. Through the process, Wenhan has demonstrated his **ability to connect and ground ML problems with experiences that users face**. In other words, **Wenhan can not only motivate and explain ML problems with theory but also with real-world applications with users**.

Wenhan regularly attended Design Studio, open collaborative sessions for the course, where his team has become a fixture every Friday afternoon. In this setting, I have observed how Wenhan can inject a sense of fun and humor even under tight deadlines. One thing that stands out to me is Wenhan's demonstrated capacity to **engage productively with students in his group who have different technical backgrounds**, including those who are less interested in ML and new to HCI. **I asked Wenhan to serve as a teaching assistant for my undergraduate human-computer interaction course last quarter**. **His leadership, creative problem solving, and collaborative mindset contributed to his becoming a role model for how students can incorporate a human-centered perspective with forward-looking AI research.**

I enthusiastically support Wenhan's application for the NVIDIA Fellowship. Please do not hesitate to contact me at emjun@cs.ucla.edu if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Eunice M. Jun
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