

As an undergraduate senior, I embarked on a transformative journey into Machine Learning for Systems, a path largely uncharted in my lab. While peers and advisors were deeply rooted in traditional storage systems, I chose to explore this emerging field proactively, driven by my genuine passion for the subject. This journey was far more challenging than I had anticipated, but it ultimately allowed me to truly embrace the path of a researcher.

Since I could not rely on domain-specific knowledge or technical advice from my colleagues and advisors, I studied papers and open-source materials by myself, often reaching out directly to the authors for clarification. Despite facing numerous frustrating challenges, I adhered to the belief that “if I don’t save myself, no one else will.” One significant hurdle was mathematically proving the rigor of my sample training algorithm. After a month of revisiting undergraduate math textbooks and related research, a sudden idea struck me during a shower, providing the breakthrough I needed.

While taking the initiative to address domain-specific challenges, I actively sought guidance from advisors and peers to refine my overall research direction and methodology. I put my utmost effort into preparing thorough and clear presentation to ensure they could fully understand my research and provide meaningful feedback. When receiving feedback, I went beyond merely assessing its validity, striving to consider the underlying intentions and context. To maintain a continuous and constructive feedback loop, I made it a priority to either addressing feedback before the next seminar.

However, the most difficult moment in this journey was not the research but losing my beloved cat of 15 years, followed by parting ways with my fiancée of three years due to my plans to study abroad. That period was emotionally overwhelming, but I strictly focused on research and exercise, making a conscious effort to regain stability. In hindsight, it was a desperate resolve to honor the time I couldn’t fully spend with cat and fiancée before our farewells by achieving meaningful results.

The SIGMOD conference was first experience with academic exchange abroad, offering a valuable opportunity to network with students and professors from diverse backgrounds. One of the most memorable moments was moving to a bar with about ten international students after the reception, sharing stories and discussing research until early morning. To this day, we maintain a close connection, frequently discussing research. Moreover, during a chance lunch with Professor Matthias Boehm, we discussed the future of ML and systems, which resulted in an invitation to pursue a PhD and internship under his guidance. Currently, although uncompensated, I am collaborating remotely with him and his students, further advancing my academic and professional growth.

This journey has helped me trust in my passion and abilities as a researcher, and it has made me realize that I feel most authentic and fulfilled when conducting research. While I cannot predict the challenges that await me during PhD, I firmly believe without a doubt that life as a researcher will bring me the greatest happiness.