

Statement of Purpose

“This data is key in detecting down-syndrome early enough to terminate pregnancy” my manager explained on the first day at my recent internship. As someone who was misdiagnosed with down-syndrome, issues like these drove my desire to improve technological shortcomings through data. I chose data science because my strengths lie in the harmonious intersection of computer science, creativity, and their applications to real world problems like preventing a misdiagnosis. Ultimately, I am applying to Columbia’s MS Data Science because the curriculum, research opportunities, and emphasis on innovation and leadership align with my work and research experiences, leadership, and career goal to become an industry leader in applying data science towards improving healthcare, biotechnology, and other domains.

Engineering Efforts. Beyond my coursework, I aimed to apply my knowledge to real world problems. During my first internship at Chan Zuckerberg Biohub, I developed a database [querying and visualization tool](#) to help researchers identify significant genes which contribute to virus (Ebola, COVID variants, Dengue, etc) transmission. Consequently, my contributions helped researchers better understand how dangerous viruses infect humans. Through this I learned about contributing directly to ongoing research with individuals from innovative institutions like Berkeley, Stanford, and UCSF and how I can positively impact society through data science. Understanding viral transmission is invaluable, and using data to investigate important problems like these inspired me to pursue a masters.

Building upon this, in my most recent internship at Bio-Rad, I protected the integrity of a limited amount of maternal data, ensuring that False Positives/Negatives for down-syndrome and other conditions were properly maintained. Properly recording these misclassifications was vital because each data point was also an affected family. A single mistake equated to potentially terminating a healthy pregnancy and vice versa. Having completed my internship, my impact will be folds greater when my work eventually culminates in a working aneuploidy test for future mothers and families across the world, further reinforcing my initiative of impactful data science. Reflecting on this perspective, I used my technical skills to best prevent misdiagnosis similar to mine, and plan to utilize graduate school to apply myself to similar problems.

Leadership. Collectively, these industry experiences have helped me share the value of data science. As an instructional assistant for data science courses serving over 1200 students, I’ve contributed to my department through empowering students to learn data science. From creating exam and homework questions, holding office hours, and creating helpful guides on Pandas, I’ve provided a sandbox for students to make mistakes and witnessed their growth over time. Relating to my misdiagnosis, I wanted to foster students to accurately represent and utilize data to ensure data driven tools are reliable. Data is only as diverse as the individuals who understand it, thus influencing the next generation of data scientists is important to my initiative of ethical, equitable data science. Overall, I believe leadership is a reflection of my postgraduate goal to lead and ensure data science and ML are used for societal impact.

Future Plans & Fit. To prepare for a graduate curriculum, I cross enrolled in graduate classes such as Deep Learning, Recommender Systems, and Computer Vision. At Columbia, I hope to take a deeper dive in ML methodology to further develop my knowledge for impactful data science towards healthcare; however, it is only one aspect as to why Columbia's environment provides me a foundation to achieve my career goals. I noticed the faculty places an importance on ethical ML/AI for societal impact - a culture of integrity integral to why I pursued data science. My current research experience also aligns with this culture; to prepare for potential graduate research, I was guided by Professor [Ilya Zaslavsky](#) where I designed a regression model and robust [accessibility metric](#) to fairly score regions on how equitable public transit infrastructure is. Additionally, for my senior capstone, I am involved in Professor [Zhiting Hu](#)'s group centered around [LLM reasoning](#) to continue my initiative to make ML/AI more reliable.

Relatably, Columbia's focus on innovation perfectly aligns with my engineering experience in data science for healthcare/biotechnology. My future research interests are [increasing accessibility, reliability, and equity in healthcare ML/AI](#). Columbia captivates me because there are many labs working on problems that resonate with my misdiagnosis. For example, I would like to engage in research similar to Dr. [Min Qian](#)'s "Harnessing Big Data and ML to Learn Optimal, Individualized Dynamic Treatment Rules to Prevent Opioid Use Disorder Relapse" (Columbia Healthcare Analytics) and especially Professor [Shalmali Joshi](#)'s initiative on making healthcare ML unbiased and equitable (reAIM Lab). In Joshi's paper, "Ethical Machine Learning in Health Care" she approached questions such as "how can we mitigate algorithmic bias in healthcare?" and "what post model-deployment considerations should we make?" Having access to these opportunities is important because they resonate with my goal of making ML more reliable and equitable for societal impact. Knowing faculty like Professor Joshi's are investigating problems of similar nature to what I previously contributed to is a strong reason alone as to why Columbia intrigues me intellectually. This institution provides the curriculum, resources, and unparalleled faculty for multidisciplinary research problems like these, and will allow me the freedom to learn from minds like Joshi to achieve as a graduate student and future data scientist.

A masters in the field is an intermediate goal. I excel in an environment where I can collaborate and share my knowledge to others. Likewise, this program would provide such an environment where I can continue to mature and learn as I take courses at the cusp of innovation and am exposed to research opportunities that will allow me to continue my initiative sparked by my misdiagnosis. Reflecting on my contributions to virus transmission research, prenatal down-syndrome tests, and my future career goals, I am thrilled to pursue a graduate education at Columbia to continue growing as a student, data scientist, and leader as I transition to industry.