gamalon
10 Summer Street
Boston, MA 02143
617.674.8193
info@gamalon.com

Po Bhattacharyya
Senior Product Designer
401.808.9720
po.bhattacharyya@gamalon.com
pobhattacharyya.com

November 14, 2019

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am excited to apply for the position of Assistant Professor of Interaction Design in the School of Art + Art History + Design at UW Seattle. The scope of this position combines my experience and training in interaction design (IxD) with my broader professional agenda: to advocate for the role of design in achieving sustainable and inclusive technological progress. As a digital product designer, my work focuses on improving people's lives through the careful application of emerging technologies. I will complement the program's existing faculty through my strong focus on artificial intelligence (AI), my research expertise in collaborative augmented reality, and my training as a naturalist and writer. I will also bring an extensive background in creating curriculum for children and adults, mentoring college students, and leading workshops on design, pedagogy, and storytelling.

As an interaction designer, my academic training and industry experience work in concert to advance my practice. At Carnegie Mellon, where I earned a Master of Human-Computer Interaction, I gained a rigorous background in IxD as an academic discipline; during my five years in industry, I've developed a keen intuition for IxD in service of product development. I currently work as a Senior Product Designer at Gamalon, where I am designing an AI-powered chatbot, called the Conversational Web, that learns by reading a company's website; when the bot is deployed on the website, it responds to visitors' questions about the company in real time. AI-first products depart from the traditional digital paradigm, in which the workflow *is* the product; consequently, my goal is not to create predefined workflows that are usable and useful, but to create a probabilistic interface in which the users' workflows are assembled by the AI. At the same time, I'm wrestling with a number of human-centered design goals—how to be transparent about the AI's knowledge, how to identity and fill gaps in the knowledge—and I'm running a series of quirky user tests, including a 'Wizard-of-Oz' test in which I pretend to be the AI with unsuspecting users (the test is followed by a thorough debrief). This work has given me a taste of the future of IxD, in which many of the best practices of screen-based design will fall by the wayside, while rapid prototyping and early validation will become more important than ever. As a professor of IxD, I am excited to leverage my own experiences to prepare the next generation of designers: I aim to build trust in the process among my students; simultaneously, I also aim to empower them with the confidence to make the process their own.

In my experience, good design is born out of a collaborative effort among people with various backgrounds. In 2018, I led an augmented-reality project titled "How might technology strengthen human bonds at home?" I was in charge of hiring a team, defining a vision, and providing mentorship

and feedback throughout the process. I decided to assemble a team with two developers, a researcher, and one other designer. The designers came up with lots of ideas, while the researcher and engineers narrowed them down based on desirability and technical feasibility. Further along in the project, we realized that we were in need of expertise in sound design, which none of us possessed. When an engineer volunteered to take this on, I was thrilled: it showed that the team had created an environment in which we felt safe venturing out of our comfort zone. In the end, because of the strength of our design, research, and execution, the project was a huge success. The team built an augmented-reality game, called Brick, and our work culminated in a peer-reviewed paper and a live demonstration at CHI 2019. As a professor at UW, I endeavor to continue creating opportunities for cross-functional collaboration among my students and peers, and I'm especially excited to leverage the prolific ecosystem of design-minded entities (DXArts, HCDE, DUB, Allen School, iSchool, College of Built Environments) already present at the university.

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to reflect at length on the practice of teaching. My most informative experience was at Science Action Club, which provides professional development to after-school educators in underserved communities. Our clients came from diverse backgrounds, juggled multiple part-time jobs, and often lacked formal training as educators. To address their needs, my team designed a blended curriculum with online trainings as well as in-person workshops. As the product designer, I created an interface for our clients to access their online trainings. I was also in charge of conducting in-person workshops at multiple locations around the country, and this part of my job turned out to be significantly more fulfilling. During these workshops, it was illuminating for me to receive instant feedback on the quality of my own instruction. Sometimes my students, many of whom were decades older than me, challenged my statements about pedagogy by drawing upon their own experiences. These were the hardest moments, and also the most rewarding ones: by debating first principles from a place of empathy and vulnerability, my students and I were able to find common ground upon which to build trust and learn from each other. Based on experiences such as this one, I know that the thrill of teaching has no parallel in industry. As a professor at UW, I am excited to embark upon the most meaningful, challenging, and rewarding experience of my career.

Please let me know if there are any additional materials that can assist you in evaluating my candidacy. For your convenience, I have created a website—PoForUW.design—that combines all of my application materials in one place. Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,
Po Bhattacharyya