

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor of Interaction Design in the School of Art + Art History + Design at UW Seattle. As a digital product designer, my work focuses on improving people's lives through the careful application of emerging technologies. I currently work as a Senior Product Designer at Gamalon, where I create A.I.-first products that make the internet more conversational and accessible. The scope of the position at UW combines my deep knowledge of interaction design ("I.D.") with my broader professional agenda: to advocate for the role of design in achieving sustainable and inclusive technological progress. I will complement the program's existing faculty through my strong focus on artificial intelligence ("A.I."), my research expertise in collaborative augmented reality, and my training as a naturalist and writer. I will also bring an extensive background in designing curriculum for children and adults, mentoring college students, and leading workshops on design research, video production, citizen science, and storytelling.

At Carnegie Mellon, where I earned a Masters in human-computer interaction, I gained a rigorous background in I.D. as an academic discipline; during my five years in industry, I've developed a deep intuition for I.D. in service of product development. My academic training and industry experience work in concert to advance my design practice. For example, at Gamalon, I am currently designing a A.I.-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. My primary role as designer is to protect human users from the A.I.'s complexity: people don't care that a product uses A.I.; they just want to get their job done. At the same time, A.I.-first products depart from the traditional paradigm, in which the workflow *is* the product; consequently, my goal is not to create a predefined workflow that is usable and useful, but to create a probabilistic interface in which the user's workflow is assembled by the A.I. At the moment, I'm wrestling with a number of human-centered design goals for the Conversational Web —how to be transparent about the A.I.'s knowledge, how to identify 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 A.I. with unsuspecting users (the test is followed by a thorough debrief). The details of the design process are at the heart of what makes I.D. successful, and they are also at the core of my education and practice. As a teacher of I.D., 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.

Humility is central to my design practice, and I fully appreciate that interaction designers need to collaborate with people from other fields in order to actualize their vision. In 2018, I led a Verizon-funded project titled "How might technology strengthen human bonds at home?" As the project's leader, I was in charge of hiring a team, defining a vision, and providing mentorship and feedback throughout the process. Although I had a lot of experience in mentoring— in college, I ran a mentorship program for over 100 undergraduates — I'd never served as both a people manager and a product manager at the same time. I assembled a team with one other designer as well as a researcher and two developers. It was easy for the designers to come up with lots of ideas, but

narrowing them down based on desirability and technical feasibility was trickier—that's where the researcher and engineers came in. 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 people felt safe venturing out of their 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, that demonstrably encourages communication, collaboration, and laughter in its players. Our work also 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, etc.) already present at the university.

I recognize that being a competent interaction designer does not automatically translate to being a competent teacher of I.D. 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 curriculum and 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 challenging and interesting. During these workshops, our clients gained hands-on practice as after-school educators, and 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 teaching and pedagogy by drawing upon their own experiences. These were the hardest moments, and often the most fulfilling 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. I'll always cherish the present I received from one of my students, a young grandmother from rural California. During our workshop in the fall, I had mentioned my love of everything bagels; the student remembered what I said, and when she returned for another workshop in the spring, she presented me with a jar of Slug Slime—an everything-bagel topping from a quirky store in her town. Based on experiences such as this one, I know that the thrill of teaching has no parallel in industry. For me, the position of Assistant Professor of Interaction Design would be not so much a job as a calling; my role at UW, if it materializes, will be the most meaningful, challenging, and rewarding experience of my professional life.

Please let me know if there are any additional materials that can assist you in evaluating my candidacy. My website has more information about my background and work ([pobhattacharyya.com](http://pobhattacharyya.com)). Thank you for considering my application.