

Sara McAllister

PhD Candidate, Carnegie Mellon University

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Biography

Sara McAllister is a PhD candidate at Carnegie Mellon University, advised by Nathan Beckmann and Greg Ganger. She is interested in computer systems, particularly caching and storage systems. Her work includes a focus on improving efficiency and sustainability through hardware-software co-design and grounding design choices in mathematical modeling. Her work has appeared at OSDI and SOSP, including receiving a Best Paper Award at SOSP 2021 for her paper “Kangaroo: Caching Billions of Tiny Objects on Flash”. She is a 2021 NDSEG fellow and a 2023 EECS Rising Star. Sara also strives to increase inclusion in computer science, including by creating a DEI course for CS PhD students. Due to these efforts, she was awarded CMU’s Graduate Student Service Award in 2022 and a Best Paper Award at SIGCSE 2023.

Education

Carnegie Mellon University

PHD IN COMPUTER SCIENCE, ADVISORS: NATHAN BECKMANN AND GREG GANGER

Pittsburgh, PA

Aug 2019. - Summer 2025 (Expected)

Carnegie Mellon University

MASTERS IN COMPUTER SCIENCE RESEARCH

Pittsburgh, PA

Aug 2019. - May 2022

Harvey Mudd College

B.S. IN COMPUTER SCIENCE, GRADUATED WITH HIGH DISTINCTION

Claremont, CA

Aug. 2015 - May 2019

Honors and Awards

2023	Rising Star in EECS	
2023	Exemplary Poster Presentation , In computer and computational sciences at fellows conference	NDSEG
2023	Best Paper Award	SIGCSE
2022	Graduate Student Service Award , For the development of 15-996 CS-JEDI	CMU
2021	Best Paper Award	SOSP
2021	Graduate Fellowship , NDSEG	DoD
2021	Graduate Research Fellowship , GRFP	NSF
2019	Class of '94 Award , Outstanding CS graduate in a combination of course work, research, and service	Harvey Mudd
2019	Departmental Honors , Computer Science Department	Harvey Mudd
2019	Clinic Team Award , Outstanding performance on an industry-sponsored team capstone project	Harvey Mudd
2019	Outstanding Undergraduate Researcher Award , Honorable Mention	CRA
2019	Best Malware , Most creative malware during capture the flag (CTF) competition	Yelp

Publications

FairyWREN: A Sustainable Cache for Emerging Write-Read-Erase Flash Interfaces

OSDI 2024

Sara McAllister, Yucong Wang, Benjamin Berg, Daniel S. Berger, George Amvrosiadis, Nathan Beckmann, Gregory R. Ganger

DéjàVu: KV-cache Streaming for Fast, Fault-tolerant Generative LLM Serving

ICML 2024

Fonteini Strati, Sara McAllister, Amar Phanishayee, Jakub Tarnawski, Ana Klimovic

Acceptance Rate: 27.5%

Towards Understanding the Carbon Impact in End-to-end Sensing Pipelines

HotEthics 2024

Harsh Desai*, Sara McAllister*, Nathan Beckmann, Brandon Lucia (* = co-first author)

CS-JEDI: Required DEI Education, by CS PhD Students, for CS PhD Students

🏆 SIGCSE 2023

Bailey Flanigan, Ananya Joshi, Sara McAllister, Catalina Vajiac

Acceptance Rate: 35%

Kangaroo: Theory and Practice of Caching Billions of Tiny Objects on Flash

ACM ToS

Sara McAllister, Benjamin Berg, Julian Tutuncu-Macias, Juncheng Yang, Sathya Gunasekar, Jimmy Lu, Daniel S. Berger, Nathan Beckmann, Gregory R. Ganger

August 2022

Kangaroo: Caching Billions of Tiny Objects on Flash

🏆 SOSP 2021

Sara McAllister, Benjamin Berg, Julian Tutuncu-Macias, Juncheng Yang, Sathya Gunasekar, Jimmy Lu, Daniel S. Berger, Nathan Beckmann, Gregory R. Ganger

Acceptance Rate: 16%

External-memory Dictionaries in the Affine and PDAM Models

Michael A. Bender, Alex Conway, Martin Farach-Colton, William Jannen, Yizheng Jiao, Rob Johnson, Eric Knorr, [Sara McAllister](#), Nirjhar Mukherjee, Prashant Pandey, Donald E. Porter, Jun Yuan, Yang Zhan

ACM ToPC

September 2021

The CacheLib Caching Engine: Design and Experiences at Scale

Benjamin Berg, Daniel S. Berger, [Sara McAllister](#), Isaac Grosz, Sathya Gunasekar, Jimmy Lu, Michael Uhlar, Jim Carrig, Nathan Beckmann, Mor Harchol-Balter, Gregory R. Ganger

OSDI 2020

Acceptance Rate: 18%

Small Refinements to DAM Can Have Big Consequences for Data-Structure Design

Michael A. Bender, Alexander Conway, Martin Farach-Colton, William Jannen, Yizheng Jiao, Rob Johnson, Eric Knorr, [Sara McAllister](#), Nirjhar Mukherjee, Prashant Pandey, Donald E. Porter, Jun Yuan, Yang Zhan

SPAA 2019

Acceptance Rate: 40%

Talks

Towards Understanding the Carbon Impact in End-to-end Sensing Pipelines

HotEthics – Co-presented with Harsh Desai

29 Apr 2024

Overcoming Write Limitations to achieve Sustainable Flash Caching

AMD (Remote) – Research and Advance Development (RAD) and Xilinx Labs

29 Mar 2024

Salesforce (Remote) – Database Reading Group

27 Mar 2024

UC Berkeley – Hosted by Natacha Crooks

25 Jan 2024

Stanford – Hosted by Keith Winstein

24 Jan 2024

UC Santa Cruz – Hosted by Andrew Quinn

11 Jan 2024

McGill (Remote) – Hosted by Oana Balmau

16 Nov 2023

Microsoft Pittsburgh – Hosted by Jeff Butler

2 Nov 2023

MIT – Hosted by Frans Kaashoek

10 Oct 2023

NDSEG 2021 Fellows Conference – Received best poster-presentation award

31 July 2023

University of Toronto – Hosted by Bianca Schroeder

20 Mar 2023

Scaling the bandwidth-per-TB wall with Declarative Storage Interfaces

PDL Retreat – Presented to a large group of industry attendees

6 Nov 2023

FairyWREN: A Sustainable Cache for Write-Read-Erase Interfaces

PDL Retreat – Presented to a large group of industry attendees

7 Nov 2023

PDL Retreat – Presented to a large group of industry attendees

7 Nov 2022

CS-JEDI: DEI education by PhD students, for PhD students

McGill (Remote) – Hosted by Oana Balmau

31 Oct 2023

Caching on Flash: Kangaroo and Beyond

Meta (Remote) – Core Data Tech Talk

11 Mar 2022

Kangaroo: Caching Billions of Objects on Flash

Microsoft Research (Remote) – Hosted by Daniel Berger

22 Nov 2021

SOSP (Remote)

27 Oct 2021

Cache@Scale (Remote) – Industry Caching Meetup hosted by Meta

4 Mar 2021

Building a Stronger, More Just Academic Community Through Mandatory Anti-bias Learning

University of Pittsburgh Diversity Forum (Remote) – Co-presented w/ Bailey Flanigan and Catalina Vajiac

28 July 2021

Teaching

Carnegie Mellon University

Storage Systems (15-746/18-746)

TA, Fall 2023

Parallel Computer Architecture and Programming (15-418/618)

TA, Spring 2022

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Computer Science and Society (15-996)

Co-Creator and TA, Spring 2021

Harvey Mudd College

Programming Languages (CS131)

Grader and Tutor, Spring 2019

Introduction to Computer Systems (CS105)

Grader and Tutor, Fall 2018

Introduction to Computer Systems (CS105)

Grader and Tutor, Spring 2018

Data Structures and Programming Development (CS70)
Principles of Computer Science (CS60)
Introduction to Biology and Computer Science (CS5 Green)

Grader and Tutor, Fall 2017
Grader and Tutor, Spring 2017
Grader and Tutor, Fall 2016

Guest Lecturer

Storage Systems – Overcoming Flash’s Write Limitations to Achieve Sustainable Caching (CMU 15/18-746)	<i>Fall 2023</i>
Graduate Computer Architecture – Sustainable Computing (CMU 15-740)	<i>Fall 2023</i>
Computer Systems – Kangaroo: Caching Billions of Tiny Objects on Flash (CMU 18-213/613)	<i>Fall 2022</i>
Data Center Computing – Kangaroo Discussion (CMU 18-847C)	<i>Spring 2022</i>
CS-JEDI – Panel on Allyship (CMU 15-996)	<i>Spring 2022</i>
Computer Systems – Kangaroo: Caching Billions of Tiny Objects on Flash (CMU 18-213)	<i>Fall 2021</i>
Storage Systems – Kangaroo: Caching Billions of Tiny Objects on Flash (CMU 18-746)	<i>Fall 2021</i>

Mentoring

Lucy Wang. CMU ECE undergraduate student	<i>Spring 2024 - Present</i>
Suhas Thalanki. CMU computational data science masters capstone	<i>Spring 2024 - Present</i>
Sriya Ravi. CMU computational data science masters capstone	<i>Spring 2024 - Present</i>
Yu Liu. CMU computational data science masters capstone	<i>Spring 2024 - Present</i>
Sophia (Qingyang) Cao. CMU CS undergraduate student	<i>Fall 2023 - Present</i>
Sarvesh Tandon. CMU ECE masters student	<i>Fall 2023 - Present</i>
Sherry (Yucong) Wang. CMU ECE undergraduate student	<i>Fall 2022 - Present</i>
Akshath Karanam. CMU ECE masters student, After degree: Salesforce	<i>Fall 2022</i>
Priyal Suneja. University of Washington CS PhD student	<i>Fall 2021 - Summer 2022</i>
Julian Tutuncu-Macias. CMU CS undergraduate student, After degree: Goldman Sachs	<i>Fall 2019 - Spring 2021</i>
Sheng Xu. CMU CS masters student, After degree: Amazon Web Services	<i>Spring 2020</i>
Karina Mejia. Ontario High School	<i>Summer 2016</i>

Service

External Review Committee Member

USENIX Annual Technical Conference (ATC)	<i>2024</i>
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Faculty Hiring Committee

Carnegie Mellon University, Computer Science Department	<i>2024</i>
Harvey Mudd College, Computer Science Department	<i>2019</i>

PhD Admissions

Carnegie Mellon University, Computer Science Department	<i>2022</i>
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Student Organizer

DEI initiatives in CMU’s CS Department – <i>Informal Survey, CS-JEDI course, advisor-advisee feedback form</i>	<i>2020-2023</i>
Parallel Data Lab (PDL) Meeting Coordinator	<i>2021</i>
PhD Orientation Committee – <i>CMU CS Department’s Introductory Course (IC)</i>	<i>2020</i>

Outreach

Science Bus Volunteer and Treasurer – <i>Harvey Mudd College</i>	<i>2015 - 2018</i>
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- Instructed 4th and 5th graders from under-resourced schools in hands-on science lessons
- Managed ~\$3000 of grant money (April 2016 - May 2017)

STEAM:coders Site Coordinator and Instructor – <i>Harvey Mudd College</i>	<i>2016</i>
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- Led CS-related activities for 25 middle-school ages students from disadvantaged communities

Professional Experience

Graduate Research Assistant

Carnegie Mellon University

ADVISORS: NATHAN BECKMANN AND GREG GANGER

Aug. 2019 - Present

- Researched caching systems to decrease cost and increase sustainability of providing internet services at scale
- Explored new memory and storage hardware interfaces, particularly for caching applications

Research Intern

MENTOR: AMAR PHANISHAYEE

- Researched serving large generative ML models more efficiently

Microsoft Research

Summer 2022

Research Intern

MENTOR: DANIEL BERGER

- Researched in-kernel disaggregated memory solutions using CXL

Microsoft Research

Summer 2021

Software Engineering Intern

DATABASE TEAM

- Designed and implemented a Python library to manage MySQL database permissions
- Planned and started gradual roll out system, fully rolled out after internship across production

Yelp

Summer 2019

Clinic (Capstone) Project

SPONSORED BY PURE STORAGE

- Designed and implemented failover mechanisms for NFS VMs running on a two-controller system
- Technical lead, about file systems and network partitioning, on a team of 4

Harvey Mudd College

Aug. 2018 - May 2019

Undergraduate Research Assistant

ADVISOR: DON PORTER

- Investigated theoretical and experimental analysis of write-optimized dictionaries

UNC Chapel Hill

May 2018 - Aug. 2018

Software Engineering Intern

DEVELOPER EXPERIENCE TEAM

- Developed and tested a Python library to restart and repair development servers
- Created a React and Hack PHP user interface to receive and store user inputs

Facebook

Summer 2017

Research Assistant

ADVISOR: ANNA AHN

- Led data analysis of a three-legged walking study

Harvey Mudd College

May. 2016 - Jun. 2017