

Motivation Letter

In my first year of school, my family moved from a remote taiga village to the city suburbs. Although I finally got access to the notorious «internet», the only available ISP could not provide a reliable connection for any substantial download. Therefore, I felt behind when my inner-city peers discussed movies they streamed or online video games they played. This cultural alienation has ultimately led me to the idea — if you can't use something, you create it yourself.

During the next few years, I spent countless hours downloading software to a school internet terminal and moving it to my home PC on a thumb drive. Tutorial by tutorial, I have become well-versed with many professional tools. My passion resulted in dozens of 3D animations, website designs for local businesses, a visual identity for the school volunteer organization and much more. It was mesmerizing to see how something I create digitally makes an impact on the real world.

However, the turning point for me was the wide adoption of smartphones. I have witnessed how computers transitioned from being professional tools to essential personal companions. Access to the internet became so effortless that mobile computing became not just a part, but a whole digital extension of our life. Seeing how intuitive, interactive and fluid touch interfaces can be, I have naturally wanted to become a part of this revolution.

Since then, I have been committed to building mobile interfaces with outstanding user experience. Taught by years of limitations, I have always strived for responsiveness and efficiency and wanted user interaction to feel the same. This desire has led me to take up competitive programming in high school. As a result, I have acquired a strong foundation in computer science, and my team ranked second at the Siberian ICPC finals. In addition, I have passed the national CS exam with a maximum score, an achievement obtained by only 0.36% of graduates, hence securing my place at ITMO University on a government-funded basis.

The university streamlined my previous knowledge and allowed me to dive deeply into complex aspects of algorithms, software engineering, computer networking, and entrepreneurship. My dedication to learning was proven multiple times by high-merit government scholarships and a bachelor degree with honours. I have had an opportunity to work on outstanding projects under different roles, lead teams during hackathons and internships, help establish distance-learning processes and serve as an advisor for joint university communities.

In addition to the degree, I have co-founded a mobile development team with my EU-based business partner. We have provided small enterprises with cross-platform applications which scaled their reach and sales, most notably during the pandemic. Although it was challenging to maintain a high quality of work and studies during busy months, this combination of education and business provided me with priceless decision-making, time management and teamwork skills, which I find crucial to succeed in any competitive environment.

Today the landscape for modern application development has seemingly settled, though I refuse to believe that a 5-inch brick of glass and metal is the endpoint. Just like once it was with smartphones, it now feels like we are on the verge of the next generation of interfaces. Specifically spatial ones.

My ultimate goal is to research and build ambient computing systems which seamlessly enhance user experience. I am interested in how computers can escape the limiting box of a screen and become a natural part of our life — inclusive, sustainable and effortless. I am convinced that the HCI program is the perfect place to become a versatile developer capable of leveraging the latest achievements in XR, IoT and ML to build the foundation for future innovation.

I am especially interested in the program's curriculum, with courses in human-computer interaction, machine learning and mobile networking, which covers all the building blocks for the digital environments of tomorrow. Moreover, I am excited to collaborate on projects for CHI, SIGGRAPH and other conferences. The immersion in international and diverse community of the university will enable me to make well-informed decisions during research and contribute to this rapidly-growing field.

In addition to academic possibilities, I am deeply interested in leveraging cutting-edge facilities such as Aalto Studios to build projects at the forefront of human-computer interfaces. I have been a longtime collaborator on 3D motion graphics with a large YouTube channel, hence the ability to leverage my visual skills in an advanced production environment inspires me.

Overall, there is no other place with such a wide range of ideas and forward-thinking scholars collaborating in an interdisciplinary community. The opportunity of being a part of it sets high standards for me as a student and drives me to bring the best ideas to life. Though the most important one for today is becoming a highly-skilled expert, which my future university will be proud of.

Looking forward to a prosperous cooperation!

Sincerely,
Aleksandr Shcherbakov