

Motivation Letter

In my first year of school, we moved from a remote taiga village to the city suburbs. Although I finally got access to the famous «internet», the only available ISP could not provide a reliable connection for any substantial download. As a result, I felt left 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.

Over the next few years, I have spent countless hours downloading software to a school's internet terminal and transferring it to my home PC on a thumb drive. Tutorial by tutorial, I have become familiar with many professional tools. My passion resulted in dozens of 3D animations, website designs for local businesses, a visual identity for Universiade 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 efficiency and wanted user interaction to feel responsive. 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 placed second in the Siberian ICPC finals. My hard work paid off when I passed the national CS exam with a maximum score, an achievement obtained by only 0.36% of graduates, thus securing my place at ITMO University on a government-funded basis.

University streamlined my previous knowledge and allowed me to dive deep into complex aspects of algorithms, software engineering, computer networking, and entrepreneurship. My dedication to learning has been proven many times over with high-merit government scholarships and a bachelor degree with honors. I have had an opportunity to work on multiple projects in a variety of roles, lead teams during hackathons and internships, help establish distance-learning processes and serve as an advisor for joint university communities.

In addition to my studies, I have co-founded a mobile development team with my EU-based business partner. We have provided small enterprises with cross-platform applications that increased their reach and sales, especially 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 succeeding in any competitive environment.

Today, the landscape for modern application development seems to have settled, though I refuse to believe that a 5-inch brick of glass and metal is the endpoint. Just as it once 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 lives — inclusive, sustainable and effortless. I am convinced that the HCI program is the perfect place for me 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 particularly interested in the program's curriculum — with courses in human-computer interaction, machine learning and mobile networking, it covers all the building blocks for the digital environments of tomorrow. I also look forward to working on projects for CHI, SIGGRAPH, and other conferences. Immersion in an international and diverse community of interdisciplinary researchers will enable me to make a well-informed contribution to this rapidly growing field.

In addition to academic potential, I am excited about using cutting-edge facilities like Aalto Studios to develop projects at the forefront of human-computer interfaces. I have been a longtime collaborator on 3D motion graphics with a large YouTube channel, therefore the prospect of applying my visual skills in an advanced production environment is deeply inspiring.

Overall, the opportunity to be a part of your program sets high standards for me as a student and drives me to bring the most innovative ideas to life. Including the ultimate one — to become a highly-skilled professional that my future university will be proud of.

Looking forward to a prosperous cooperation!

Sincerely,
Aleksandr Shcherbakov