This Spring I will be working under Peter Krafft of the Human Dynamics Group in the Media Lab. I will be working with Allan Ko to develop an Android app, Grok, whose purpose is to facilitate the exchange of difficult conversation and criticism. We are creating this app in its entirety. We have already outlined the purpose of our app, outlined the software structure, and have decided which APIs we need access to. Going forward, I will begin to translate the decisions that have already been made into code.

This app will allow users to interact with both users they know and users they do not know, but have recently been in contact with. The first interaction will be facilitated by knowledge of names or usernames, and the second interaction will be facilitated by a Bluetooth feature, which will keep track of users within a certain radius. Once a user has targeted who they want to express a sentiment to, they will input an emotion accompanied by an emoji or GIF. Given this information along with all other information accumulated for this individual, we will compile a schematic of facts and visualizations to share with the receiving user.

The purpose of this app is to breach the gap in uncomfortable communication that fails to happen either at the workplace, in a classroom, or on the subway. There is no good way to communicate with strangers, which we hope to combat with our Bluetooth feature. Further, there is no good way to constructively tell a colleague that you feel he has been rude and insensitive, or encouraging and pleasant. We will tackle this problem by allowing users to associate other users with emotions, not sentences. As a result, this app will provide individuals with feedback recovered through daily interactions. We do not want to encourage the use of this platform for any form of bullying, which is why we are only allowing for a very limited form of communication. We feel that most sentences and exchanges can be condensed to an underlying sentiment, which is what we are trying to take advantage of with his app. If we feel that the expressed sentiment was more negative than positive, or if we feel that a user has been receiving too much negative attention, we will prompt users to include a compliment. We are not aiming to upset receiving users or allow others to attempt to, but to facilitate constructive feedback.

We will complete the app by late April and then continue with user testing through May. Throughout these two processes, my role will be to facilitate both of these activities alongside my partner. We will be writing the code as well as developing and running the user tests.

I am interested in this project because of its intersection of human interaction and computer science. We will accumulate large amounts of data – including sentiments users have been feeling as well as encouraging in others. We will know if the users are female, if they are students, and where they are from. Given all of this data, we can determine much about our subset of users and how they interact. It is left to be seen if most will use this app to convey positive or negative sentiments, but the hope is to relay real information that can be used in a positive way. I am excited to build something that will outline for an individual what they do well and poorly; I am excited to facilitate these important interactions that often fail to happen because of their difficulty.