

On November 26th, 2019, The Psychology Department hosted a panel for undergraduates to ask all their graduate and career questions. On the panel was Gavin Fung (A Senior UX Researcher for Sabre and UCSC Alumni), Sam R Hughes (A UCSC Phd student in the Developmental Field) and Allison Nguyen (A UCSC Phd student in the Cognitive Field). Below are the highlights from the event, along with advice for any undergraduate interested in graduate school or user research:

Can you tell us a bit about your undergrad and how it lead you to where you are today?

- All panelists expressed their involvement in research during their undergrad that led each of them down their specific field of interest.
- Gavin found interest in developmental psych and was even involved with the childhood center for Stanford, but after relentlessly applying to grad schools and being rejected, he found a passion in the leveraging stats and people process side of research and decided to pursue UX Research.
- Allison studied Cognitive Science at UCLA and found a passion for research after reading a linguistic research paper and wanted to pursue a Phd in Cognitive Science. She said that, “A Phd isn’t looking for someone who’s dedicated on what they wanna do, but being interested in the topics and are willing to ask the tough questions”.
- Sam was an art major at first! She was in a psychology class and loved answering questions so she decided to try out research in psych. At first, she pursued research in cognitive science, with an interest in sleep research. But after being a lab manager for two years, she decided to switch fields and is now pursuing her Phd in Developmental Psychology.

Do you have any useful tips on applying for Jobs and Phd Programs?

- For job openings, research opportunities, and post-doctoral positions sign up for the Cognitive Development Society listserv, an open email list for anyone interested in receiving position openings: <https://cogdevsoc.org/listserv/>
- **Interested in UX Research?**- Gavin recommends that UX Bootcamps are a better investment than a Masters Degree!
- **Do your research**- It’s not only the program your applying to, but the professor you want to work with. Know what the professor is researching right now!
- **Send emails**- Not only can you get your specific questions answered, but you’re getting your name out there! Don’t be afraid to reach out to certain professors you’re interested in working with, they were in your shoes once too!
- **Ask yourself important questions**- Do I need a Phd in order to get what I want in the future? Do I want to spend the next 5-6 years of my life in this area? Why is now the time to pursue this degree? These are all important questions to ask yourself before applying.
- **Save your money**- Applying to a couple of programs is reasonable, but don’t go overboard. Application fees can add up fast, but you can always apply for fee waivers!

- **Building your resume-** Be sure to include a section for relevant courses you've taken, extracurriculars, research experience, and how you contributed, no matter how big or small, to that project.
- **Master or Phd?-** Maybe you don't have to choose! Some Phd programs will allow you to get your masters (for free) along the way and your paid to pursue a Phd, masters would be out of your own pocket.
- **Masters or a Job?-** Maybe you don't have to choose! Some jobs can give you more information on obtaining a masters or offer to pay for your degree.
- **Letters of Recommendation-** Students can get graduate students to co-write a letter with their professor, can tell letter writers that their taking a gap year and would love for them to write a letter further down the road, and can ask employers to write a letter as well! There's so many options in obtaining the letter you need to complete your application.

What advice would you give your undergraduate self?

- **Rejection is normal-** Understand that rejection is a part of life. Your story in pursuing your future won't be linear and rejections could be a blessing in disguise.
- **Say yes-** Put yourself out there, try new things, and go to networking events. UC Santa Cruz has immense resources for their students that are open to anyone willing to use them!
- **Improve skills for your resume-** Want a career in UX Research? Take classes on data analysis, go to writing workshops, and get involved with research. All of these topics can be used to boost your CV and Resume!
- **Exercise-** All panelists were very vocal about the benefits of working out and its effect on their academic performance!
- **Be an advocate for yourself-** It's important to put yourself out there, go to office hours, and create the connections you'll need for your future! Follow up on emails and be persistent. It's your life, why not advocate for yourself!

By pursuing a Phd, does that mean you're dedicating the rest of your life to research?

- **NO!-** Having a Phd can open up so many doors for your future including post-doctoral research, non-profit work, getting involved with an industry, or becoming a public policy maker.

How experienced do you need to be in order to apply for Graduate School?

- **Experience helps, but-** Show your interest and how your past applies to what you'd like to do in the future
- **Try new things-** Be willing to try new things and blend it into what you've done, what you're doing now and why you're doing it!