

Jay Luther

Jay Luther (he/him) is a first year PhD student working with Dr. Tammy Sumner, currently working on understanding how we can teach AI concepts to middle schoolers. I got to meet Jay through the Computer Science Graduate Student Association (CSGSA), as he is currently our representative to the Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG). Jay is someone who strives for excellence and is committed to those around him and his work. He is very easy to talk to, and is very curious to learn about others, so I encourage you to send him a message and make a fast friend. Bonus fact from the author: Jay is from a small town in Rhode Island right next to my mom's hometown, and his dad is friends with my uncle, but we did not know each other until he moved to Colorado.



What is your path to CU Boulder?

Jay wanted to have a fresh start in college and attend a school where he didn't know many folks, but realized after a semester that out-of-state tuition was not worth it to him, and transferred to the University of Rhode Island after a semester to study Computer Engineering and German in an international program. Before getting to study in Germany for a year, he took an AI class. While in Germany, he continued to learn more about AI and got to make an automated trainyard demo using a Raspberry Pi and Lego robotics as an intern for the railway company Deutsche Bahn. After graduating, Jay realized he wanted to teach, and is inspired to be a college professor. After graduating, he worked for the Department of Defense in Newport, RI for a few years before pursuing his goal of getting a PhD. He found CU after reading an article by Dr. Mike Mozer in PNAS, and connected with Rajshree Shrestha, who pointed him to potential advisors. He chose CU after meeting with his now-advisor, Dr. Tammy Sumner, and being very excited to work both with her and in her lab.

How would you explain your research to a ten-year-old?

This is a fun question for Jay because he is interested in teaching AI to middle schoolers, so this is nearly his target audience. He is currently working on teaching and integrating the basics of machine learning in middle school classrooms, such as collecting data, training a model, testing it, and using it. They are working on co-designing a model for this with students and encouraging them to tap into their natural curiosity.

Who is someone that has helped you in some way? How?

Without hesitation, Jay responded, "My grandfather." Growing up, Jay and his siblings would get up at 7am every day in the summer, ride their bikes to the high school, play tennis for a few hours, then spend the rest of their day with his grandparents, helping them with chores, playing cards and games, and swimming in the lake on their property. He always pushed Jay a little bit, throwing math problems at Jay while we would be eating lunch and the like. When he passed away, Jay feels like it like a fire in him, sparking much of his ambition and drive, shaping who he is today.

If you could have an alternative career, what would it be?

Jay would be a mathematician! He has always been fascinated by digging through and thoroughly understanding the algorithms driving much of Computer Science and would also enjoy this style of algorithmic thinking in a pure math domain.

If you could make sure everybody in the world knew one thing, what would it be?

Jay wishes people really understood the negative effects of excessive social media use. He tries to stay clear of too much social media to make room for his many hobbies and is wary of the negative impacts on mental health. This fits in with his overarching research goal of using AI to help educate people.

What are some of your hobbies?

The list is long; for sports, Jay enjoys playing tennis and golf in the sunshine, and snowboarding in the winter. Growing up in Rhode Island, Jay also had a full woodshop set up in his garage and enjoys woodworking, as well as singing and playing drums. He also loves to read, which is a hobby he picked up when he got to college. The spark was lit in him when reading *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, and actually had a copy in German next to him while we were talking. He has also picked up roller blading in the pandemic!

Icebreaker suggestions

Ask Jay to go out to eat or grab a drink! He is a very curious person and is an open book. He will have plenty of questions for you and is an excellent listener who truly tries to get to know people! If he had 30 minutes to give a TEDTalk on a topic, he would choose to talk about productivity and prioritizing deep work over shallow tasks, and would recommend one of his favorite authors, Cal Newport, to learn more on the subject.

Want to see someone featured in the Neural Network? Email jefi8453@colorado.edu to suggest yourself or a friend