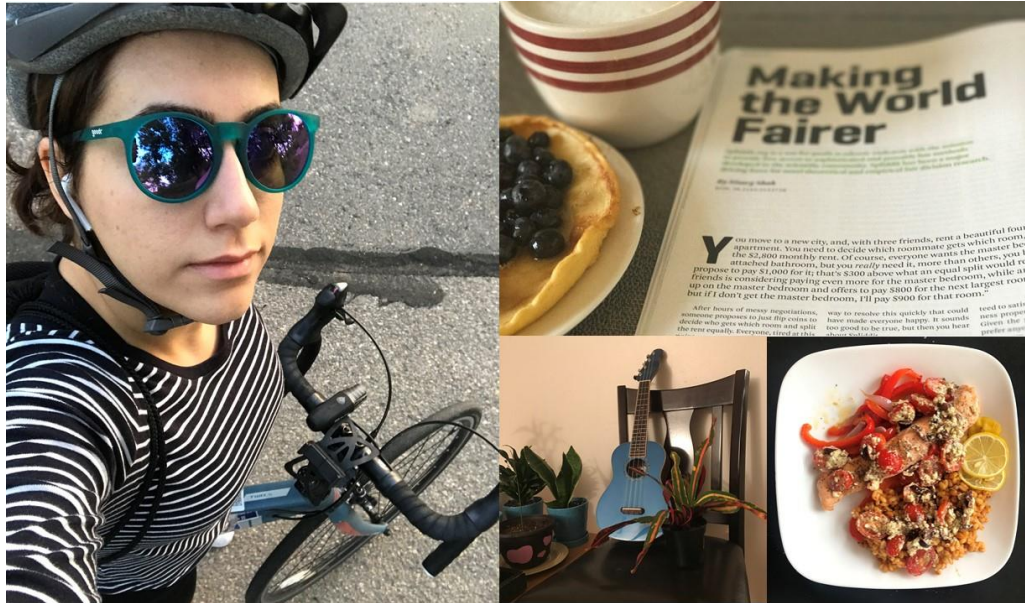# Nasim Sonboli

Nasim Sonboli (she/her/hers) is a fifth-year PhD student in the Information Science department, working with Dr. Robin Burke. She is very passionate about making the world a better place through her work, and I really hope that comes through here.

What is your path to CU Boulder?

Nasim got her undergraduate degree in Software Engineering in her home country of Iran, which led her to work briefly as a backend developer. Shortly after, she was admitted to DePaul University for her Masters in Computer Science, but soon realized her interests in were more aligned with their program in Data Science (formerly known as Predictive Analytics). In that program, she found that she wanted to take a deep dive and become an expert in her studies, leading her to do research with Dr. Robin Burke on fairness in recommender systems. At the time, Dr. Burke was a professor at DePaul, and when he moved to CU Boulder's Information Science department in 2019, Nasim moved here to continue working with That Recommender Systems group and loves living in the area. She enjoys being in an Information Science department because of its interdisciplinary nature and noted how CU is great for collaborating across departments, including Computer Science.

What about what you do makes you most excited?

Nasim loves the feeling of learning something new and being able to achieve something concrete from it, such as publishing a paper to share what she learned with her research community. She is also very motivated to make sure she is doing meaningful work that will benefit society in a positive way. This is part of what motivates Nasim to study fairness in machine learning, and to learn what that even means.[i] Given the growth of machine learning across all facets of society, understanding what it means for these algorithms to be 'fair' or 'ethical' requires a lot of careful thought and study.

Who is someone who has helped you in some way, and how?

Nasim's family is a lovely support network helping her through her PhD. If she is ever feeling down and texts her mom, her mom is known to reply with a lovely message to cheer her up- sometimes in song! Another one of Nasim's biggest supporters is her sister who lives in Vancouver. Professionally, Dr. Burke is a great advisor who has encouraged Nasim to work on projects that have pushed her beyond her limits. These projects have substantially influenced her interests as a PhD student.

What are some of your hobbies?

Nasim loves to cook and finds it to be a wonderful creative outlet. She loves to experiment with new flavors in the kitchen, even if it doesn't always turn out as expected. In the past year, she has also started playing the ukulele. To stay active, Nasim also enjoys cycling and swimming, though she has been cycling more this year because of the pandemic.

What are three-improbable facts about you?

One of Nasim's hidden talents is that she can make a flower shape with her tongue.

Nasim was a vegetarian until she was 25 and is a new meat-eater. Even now, she mostly eats white meat such as fish and chicken. This is especially surprising after learning that Persian cuisine often has meat (and often red meat) in its recipes.

After graduating, Nasim hopes to one day get a pet dog or cat (she loves both equally.) If she could have any animal as a pet, she toyed around with the idea of getting a sloth but isn't sure how great of a pet a sloth would be.

Icebreaker suggestions

Nasim enjoys reading comic strip books and loves to chat about them. Recently, she read Logicomix, which is a comic strip about Bertrand Russell's life. You can also ask her about her ukulele playing or any recent bike rides she has gone on.

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

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[i] For an example of some of Nasim's work on understanding fairness in technology, see this paper: https://arxiv.org/pdf/2103.08786.pdf