

Sagi Shaier



Sagi Shaier (he/him/his) is a second-year PhD student in Computer Science working with Dr. Maziar Raissi in the Applied Math department. Sagi is a kind, passionate person who is full of surprises; the more we talked, the more fun experiences he shared with me. Be sure to say hi to Sagi when you see him and ask about his why for his adventures and his research!

What is your path to CU Boulder?

Sagi was a pre-medical math student as an undergraduate in Kennesaw State in Georgia, and actually went through the (very intense) medical school application process. *“The math was just fun.”* After finishing his degree and MCAT and applying to medical school programs, he realized how burnt out on school and academia he was. While waiting to hear back from medical school programs, he was introduced to AI, and learned how to program. Machine learning and data science seemed like a great opportunity to combine his passions for medicine and math, so after spending some time as a machine learning intern and working in Portland, he wanted to work on projects that more closely aligned with his passions to help people and benefit society. Since many of those research positions ask for a PhD, Sagi applied for programs and chose to come to CU.

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

“I’m interested in general intelligence, meaning I’m trying to create a brain that thinks like humans do.”

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

Sagi would want to be a doctor in an alternate life and would have loved to be in emergency medicine and work with Doctors Without Borders. Emergency medicine offers something new every day, as the doctors never know who is about to come through the door, which Sagi thinks he would love.

If you could live anywhere for a month, where would it be?

Sagi would probably want to live in New Zealand or Australia. *“New Zealand is absolutely gorgeous and has penguins, where Australia is absolutely gorgeous and has kangaroos.”* He spent a month in Sydney,

which might be his favorite city in the world; the ocean is gorgeous, people are very straightforward (which reminds him of the culture back home in Israel), and the public transportation is amazing.

What are some of your hobbies?

Sagi practices martial arts and loves to hike. When he first moved to the United States, he hiked the Appalachian trail 2200 miles from Georgia to Maine. (Bonus fact: every thru-hiker gets a trail name, and Sagi's was *Bobcat*.) Sagi also enjoys helping others, cooking, playing piano, reading, and chocolate when his body needs a rest. And yes, chocolate is a hobby.

What about what you do makes you most excited?

Sagi is motivated by helping people! This is his primary motivation for a lot of what he does.

What are three improbable facts about you?

Sagi doesn't know how to swim underwater, or at least he hasn't mastered breathing while swimming yet. Languages are more of Sagi's strong suit: he has at different points known how to speak 5 languages! These include English, Hebrew, Russian, Spanish, and Latin. He also spent three years in the Israeli military.

What is something that you're proud of?

Sagi has done a lot of things that might come off as impressive (such as thru-hiking the AT), but those aren't the things he's most proud of. He is more proud of how he has stuck towards the path of a career that is oriented around helping others, despite a few changes in how that happens along the way.

Icebreaker suggestions

Sagi likes to get to know people by asking *why* they're doing what they're doing. A lot of people in Computer Science study AI, but that doesn't tell you much about *why* they're doing it; do they want to go into industry or make money or just do research? In academic settings, he likes to ask why someone is studying whatever topic they are focused on.

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