

Vinitha Gadiraju



Vinitha Gadiraju (she/her/hers) is a third year PhD student working with Professor Shaun Kane in our Superhuman Computing group. She is working on designing collaborative learning tools for blind and visually impaired folks. Vinitha's light-hearted spirit and passion for making the world a better place is inspiring and contagious to those around her. Currently, Vinitha is spending the semester in France working with collaborators there.

What is your path to CU Boulder?

Vinitha grew up in Portland, Oregon! At her first college, she felt isolated as the only woman in most of her classes and transferred to the University of Oregon (UO) to study Computer Science. At UO, she joined the group *Women in Computer Science*. In WiCS, she was blown away at the feeling of acceptance, noting “it was the first time I knew what support and community looked like [in college].” WiCS helped her find her passion for Computer Science, but she always has loved the human component of computing, leading her to add a Psychology minor. She joined a Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) lab studying accessibility for folks with cognitive disabilities. She was able to attend the Tapia conference, where she met her now-advisor Shaun Kane at an accessibility workshop. Thankfully, he was recruiting students, and Boulder is all the better having Vinitha here.

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

“I build toys for kids who are blind or visually impaired.” To learn more about what it means to be blind or visually impaired, Vinitha recommends checking out the World Health Organization’s resources¹.

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

Vinitha is very thankful for her grandpa. She spent a lot of time with her grandparents as a child, and as she has grown older, they have grown a lot closer. He has taught her so many valuable lessons about life. She noted his encouragement to explore and pursue her dreams, and everything else will fall into place. He writes articles about his life and mails them to Vinitha, and she treasures all the tidbits of wisdom he shares in them. They have seen the world together, traveling through Europe a few years back. Vinitha’s favorite spot on that trip was Budapest, partially because her grandpa was looking forward to it so much! (Bonus fact: he tried beer in Budapest for the first time in his life at 86 years old.)

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

Vinitha would love to explore a few ideas of alternative careers. She is especially interested in fashion, keeping up with runway shows and new emerging designers (especially those who integrate sustainability

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/blindness-and-visual-impairment>

or technology into their work.) She thinks it would be really cool to work as a designer or buyer! Not too far from these interests, Vinitha was in theater growing up and would love to be an actress or singer on Broadway! For something she views as more realistic, she would love to be a chef of some kind.

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

Vinitha wishes everyone knew the importance of therapy, even if people don't think they need to go. She is proud of the fact that she goes to therapy, especially given the stigma of mental health in her community. It took a lot of self-reflection but getting herself to try therapy has not only helped her mental health- it has also taught her a lot about communicating with people and building deeper connections.

What are some of your hobbies?

Vinitha loves to cook, and recently learned how to make authentic Ratatouille from her roommate in France. She also loves to play around with make-up and vlog some of her makeup artwork. She loves drawing portraits of people and drawing how she sees their aura and energy. In her downtime, she also enjoys shopping and reading. Since moving to France, she has also spent a lot of time learning new languages! She is currently learning French and Spanish, and this has reinforced her respect for immigrants, especially those who must learn a new language in their new home, including her parents.

What are three improbable facts about you?

Vinitha is a huge Portland Trailblazers fan, and her favorite player is Damian Lillard. Her grandmother is also a huge fan of basketball, and it has always been important in her family and life. (According to Vinitha, basketball is popular with many folks within the Indian diaspora in America.) Fostering her passion for music and performance, Vinitha also played violin for 8 years and joined an orchestra in Boulder shortly before the pandemic. Finally, Vinitha's two front teeth are fake after a playground incident in elementary school.

Icebreaker suggestions

"What color is your aura?" It doesn't verbally say much about the person, but Vinitha loves to see if her perception of someone lines up with their perception and understanding of their self.

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

Bonus content: Vinitha out of context

Sko immigrants.

I'm hot.

Do you have any facts about me you were shocked by?

And now I'm hot again.

I like to hang out with Jessie.