

Alumni Profile

Chris Painter – Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering PhD Program



Career

Please provide a brief overview of your career path since graduating from UCI.

After graduating from UCI, I started a career in design of micromachined gyroscopes. Initially I started at BAE systems, doing R&D on new generation gyroscopes and then transferred to Systron Donner Automotive to work on quartz gyroscope design for automotive stability systems. Shortly thereafter, I moved to the Systron Donner Inertial division, working on gyroscopes for high end industrial and military applications. After eight years at Systron Donner (2014), I moved to Apple Inc, where I continue to work today as a sensing systems engineer.

What made you get into the career that you are in?

It was really thanks to my advisor and his MEMS graduate course that I got me interested in MEMS inertial sensor technology. Originally I planned to finish a Masters in robotics at UCI and start working. But I took a course in MEMS technology that year and I was so intrigued that I decided I wanted to stay and pursue a PhD. I loved my PhD work and continue forward in the same pursuits for my career.

What do you see yourself doing in five or ten years?

My plan is to continue my career growth at Apple working on sensing technologies.

How do you hope to make a difference?

Continue to push the boundaries of technology to improve the user experience for the consumers.

Your Time at UCI

When did you attend UCI?

1999 through 2005

What program were you in?

1999 through 2000, I was in the Masters program doing work in biomechanics. From 2000

to 2005, I was in the PhD program doing work in MEMS.

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

My dad was a UCI alumni (Masters in Physics) and spoke highly of the school. The robotics programs sounded interesting, so I applied.

Reflections

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

Doing the Masters was because robotics sounded like an interesting topic and a new technology area. Doing a PhD was completely thanks to my advisor and his MEMS course.

What is your most memorable moment/experience at UCI?

I have many good memories. But one that sticks out is there was an engineering week Rube Goldberg contest for making a machine to cut an apple in quarters. I worked with another graduate student from one of the other labs and we put together this "robotic" Southpark machine with many of the characters. In the end, it was quite successful and we ended up winning second place and OCN was at the contest and I was able to see our machine on TV!

Was there one thing or one person at UCI that really helped or made a difference in your graduate/postdoctoral career? If so, tell us about whomever or what it was?

That would be my advisor, Andrei Shkel. Thanks to his class, I decided to do my PhD. But on top of that, I found that he had a good pulse on what was relevant to industry. As a result, all of the research that I did positioned me well to launch my career. I always be grateful for his help.

Alumni Life

What are you currently up to?

Today I live in Northern California. I'm married and have a 5-year-old son. When I'm not busy doing work, I spend time with the family or hike/bike outside.

How did your education at UCI benefit you in your current life?

Frankly speaking, a graduate degree in MEMS was a gating requirement to get into the technology field I am in now. Without it, I would have been stuck with a less meaningful career.

Additionally, research at UCI really instilled a sense of questioning mind in me that I leverage in life when I am approaching problems.

What advice do you have for a new graduate student?

Use graduate school as an opportunity to explore and learn new things. And not just in research, but in campus life and comradery with your fellow graduate students. The people you meet may end up being your life long colleagues.