

Alumni Profile

Abhishek Kurup – Mathematical and Computational Biology Gateway PhD Program



Career

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

After finishing my PhD, I took a break for a few months to unwind. Later, I started a short post-doc with my PhD advisor, Elliot Botvinick, where I worked to develop a product for a startup. After three months, Illumina offered me a position in San Diego. I've been at Illumina for over 2 years now.

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

In 5 – 10 years, I see myself as a technical leader of a large group whose responsibility is to drive development, derisk processes, and make recommendations for future directions. I'm currently leading a small group with a more focused approach, but intend on expanding my skillset with experience, technical knowledge, and training.

Your Time at UCI

When did you attend UCI?

I attended UCI from 2005, as a freshman in college, to 2016, as a Post Doc – it felt like a lifetime.

What program were you in?

Initially entered as an Undecided major and switched to Biology. But, after taking my first physics class, realized how much I enjoyed engineering. Switched my major to BME and never looked back.

*B.S Biomedical Engineering Premed with minor in Material Science, 2005-2010
MCSB Gateway program 2010-2011
M.S, PhD Biomedical Engineering 2011-2015
Postdoc Biomedical Engineering 2016*

Reflections

What is your most memorable moment/experience at UCI?

While I've had many memorable learning experiences at UCI, one that always sticks out to me

is Cell biology for Engineers with Prof. Elliot Botvinick (I would eventually go on to pursue my PhD with him). Elliot would have paragraph long True/False questions that were all factual except for one or two statements. I remember complaining to him about these trick questions. Smiling, he said, "I'm not training you to be an Encyclopedia, I'm training you to be an Engineer. Anybody can tell me what's right, be the Engineer that can tell me what's wrong." He wanted us to be able to identify problems, even if they seemed hidden, because often that takes more knowledge and requires a sharp mind. I never forgot that lesson and utilized it throughout my career to identify pitfalls and learn new subjects thoroughly.

Alumni Life

What are you currently up to?

I currently work as a Sr. Development Engineer at Illumina and am responsible for flow cell development and wafer bonding.

What advice do you have for a new graduate student?

Stick it out till Year 2 before deciding to leave the PhD. It becomes easier after you advance to candidacy – you get used to the lifestyle, you're done taking classes, you have learned enough where imposter syndrome no longer affects you as deeply, and you will know whether you are passionate about your work.

What advice would you give to a current graduate student as they look towards their future careers?

Some people will use their thesis work throughout their career. But, for most, it is the skills you pick up along the way that is more important. For example, my PhD work was in biomechanics and breast cancer. However it was the process development, design, and statistical analysis that ultimately got me hired. Always be on the lookout to learn new skills that align with your industry and always be on the lookout to demonstrate these skills on a project.

What is the most unexpected life lesson that you gained from your time at UCI?

The most unexpected life lesson was how failure was key to success. We equate failure with incompetence. But, failure is part of the learning process.