

Alumni Profile

Blerim Cici – Networked Systems PhD Program



Career

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

I am a software engineer in Apple Inc. where I work on the Internet Technologies department. More specifically I work on the networking part of popular products such as FaceTime, Messges, and Apple Watch.

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

The fact that I like technology. Also, I'm a practical person and a graduate degree in Computer Science offers great career opportunities.

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

Being a senior engineer and leading my own software development team, in the same company.

How do you hope to make a difference?

By creating amazing features that our customers will love and use frequently.

Your Time at UCI

When did you attend UCI?

From 2010 to 2016

What program were you in?

In the Networked and Distributed Systems, of UCI

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

Because it is a great university with and outstanding research program. UCI offered the best research opportunities, among the schools that accepted my Ph.D. application.

Reflections

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

Towards the end of my undergraduate degree, I got exposed to research – as part of my undergraduate thesis – and I fell in love with it. I wanted to publish papers and produce new knowledge.

What is your most memorable moment/experience at UCI?

I have plenty 😊 don't know which one to choose from. If I had to pick from the top of my head, I would say the moments when I my papers got accepted

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?

I did my Ph.D. at Prof. Markopoulou's lab. During the course of 6 years many of my lab-mates influences and shaped the way that I think. First and foremost Prof. Athina Markopoulou of course.

Did you do any research while at UCI and what was it?

Yes. Research was a big part of my life in UCI since I was a Ph.D. Student.

- How would you explain your research to your grandparent? How would you help someone understand the importance/significance of this research?

My research was focused on data mining for smart city applications. I analyzed cell phone data that have rich spatiotemporal information, for the purpose of understanding the modern urban environment better. The results of the analysis offer valuable insights on how people move around a city and where they spend most of their time.

- What has impressed you most about the subject matter that you chose for your research/degree while at UCI?

I got impressed about how broad, and far-reaching, data mining and data analysis was. And how much you can learn for a city, just by looking at how people move around in it.

Alumni Life

What are you currently up to?

I am a software engineer in Apple Inc. working on amazing products 😊

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

Wouldn't have been able to get the job that I have, if it wasn't for UCI. The graduate degree that I got in UCI gave me the specialization needed to work for Apple.

What book or podcast would you suggest to someone who is just getting started with their graduate career at UCI? (Examples – *Podcast: Happier with Gretchen Rubin*; *Book: Who Moved my Cheese*)

I would suggest these two books: (1) Advice for a Young Investigator, by Santiago Ramón y Cajal, and (2) Scientific Literacy and the Myth of the Scientific Method, by Henry H. Bauer

What book or podcast would you suggest to someone who has just graduated and is transitioning to the working world? (Examples – *The First 90 Days*)

I would suggest the: (1) "Hidden Brain" podcast, (2) NPR Planet Money podcast, and (3) the Freakonomics podcast.

What advice do you have for a new graduate student?

Work Hard! Six years will pass before you realize it.

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

Keep on going! Life gets better after you graduate 😊

What was your biggest obstacle transitioning from life of a graduate student to your career?

There wasn't any major obstacle. The big change is that you have to learn to think differently. As a professional engineer in a big tech company you have to always keep in mind the end customer. This is very important when making decision about how to allocate your time. In academia there weren't any restrictions, but in a big company you have to prioritize the work that will bring the most benefit to the customers.

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

When you are working on a hard problem and feel that you are making no progress, it's better to stop, have a beer, get some sleep and then get back to work next morning.

What are your hobbies/passions outside of your work/research?

I do Pilates.

How do you balance work/life?

Hard work during the week, and relaxing on the weekend.

What person inspires you?

The senior engineers in my team. They are brilliant. They have strong CS background, many years of experience in software development, and in-depth knowledge of computer systems.

Is there a typical 'down' weekend for you—how do you relax?

Pilates.