

Student Profile

Mac Strelieff – Psychology with concentration in Cognitive Neuroscience PhD



Your Time at UCI

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

My interest in decision making grew throughout my undergraduate coursework in psychology and economics. I enjoyed conversations with professors and graduate student mentors and decided that I wanted to be surrounded by interesting people like them, so graduate school seemed like the right path.

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

I was drawn to UCI because of the unique combination of faculty with similar research interests and faculty with expertise in advanced computational modeling. I saw that, at UCI, I could develop valuable computational skills while applying them to topics that excite me.

If you are conducting research, how would you explain your research and its significance to a layperson?

I use statistical models to understand the cognitive processes that underlie value-based decision making. These processes have been used to explain consumer decision making or political preferences, and have been implicated in public health crises such as addiction.

What are your hobbies/passions outside of research?

I love traveling and have enjoyed visiting multiple locations in Europe for conferences and workshops. I also appreciate nearby spots for hiking, rock climbing, and bonfires at beaches.

Reflections

What advice do you have for a new graduate student in your program?

Graduate school is an investment in yourself. Take advantage of the opportunities, resources, and mentorship that you will have at UCI to develop a broad set of skills that you can rely on for the rest of your life. This includes technical skills like programming and statistical modeling, communication skills to motivate and interpret your work for various audiences (funders, peers, scientists outside of your field, laypeople), and professional skills involved in managing research assistants and forming enjoyable collaborations with peers.

Career

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

Thankfully I have developed a marketable skill set during my PhD in the Cognitive Sciences Department at UCI. I would be happy applying this training in either academic or private sector settings. If I stay in academia, I will be developing and testing theories of preference and choice. If I shift to the private sector, I will be using theoretical knowledge and technical skills developed at UCI to understand user data and direct product development.