

**Virtual Undergraduate Town Hall FAQ**  
***Inventing Technology for Homes and Families***  
***Speaker: A.J. Bernheim Brush, Host: Lori Pollock***  
***10/8 at 5pm ET***

**What do you use primarily for your user research studies?**

- There are a lot of ways we can do user research. Surveys work best when we are asking questions that are clear and straightforward. I (A.J.) often start with interviews, in order to learn what is going on. Typically we (Microsoft Research) build a survey out from the information collected from the interviews.

**Do we have to be worried about the future with lots of sensors watching what we do as we go about our daily lives?**

- One of the key things is figuring out as we move from physical to digital, how do we make things transparent? I don't know if someone is looking at my digital calendar. Transparency is key, helping people understand what data is being collected and what it means. It is hard to know what can be inferred from your data.

**What happens to your research ideas, when they are shown to be successful in your user studies?**

- I (A.J.) typically write a paper about what has been done, and then we submit them to conferences. I will go around and talk to collaborators and what are the implications of our findings for our (Microsoft) products.

**Why should I consider Graduate School?**

- The reason I (A.J.) went to graduate school is because I didn't feel I knew enough and wanted to learn more. But besides that, a few reasons you may want to consider graduate school are: You want to work on important issues, you want to be a university professor, you want independence, or you might enjoy being an expert. It is important to consider graduate school, and undergraduate research is a great way to find out if you are interested in this career path.

**If I am not a computer science major, but want to continue education in CS and technology, can I still go to graduate school for CS?**

- Yes, you could go to graduate school in CS. You would most likely have to take a few key undergraduate courses or demonstrate proficiency in key CS areas first. Each school has different expectations for student background applying to graduate school.

**How do I decide between a Master's and a PhD degree?**

- A Master's degree is great preparation for an industry job, and provides you the opportunity to continue on for a PhD later down the road if you are interested. A PhD degree is preparation for a career in computer science research; you need this if you want to be a professor or have a job like mine (A.J. Senior Research at Microsoft). Typically when you apply for a PhD degree, you are funded. Master's degrees are not funded. Something you might want to consider is starting a PhD program, and if you realize that it is not for you, then you can decide to end after two years with a Master's degree.

**What if I want to focus on research, but do not want to become a professor in the future?**

- It is more and more common to see industry respecting the PhD. It means that you can identify a problem, work independently, and can think through things. We see a lot of data scientists working at Microsoft; they are working in applied research. There is a wealth of jobs open to you with a PhD.

**How do I decide where to apply to graduate school?**

- I (A.J.) looked at graduate schools that were highly ranked, and looked at those with a wide breadth, I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to focus on. Look broadly! Consider making a spreadsheet of schools - identify what are important aspects of your graduate school search.

