Testimonials for REU CAAR 2018

Yuhao Wan (Mentored by John Dickerson)

CAAR REU 2018 confirmed my plan to apply to graduate school in computer science and to pursue a research path. I enjoyed everything about this program, primarily the research. I am grateful to be advised by our awesome mentor (John Dickerson) and other phd students. I learned a lot from problem formulation, problem solving, and other aspects of research including collaboration and overcoming challenges. I also value the time spent with the peers in the REU because they are very inspiring. I am also thankful for the talks that the department organize, which made our summer a very stimulating environment. Last but not least, CAAR-REU is one of the best programs for undergraduates who are considering doing research in computer science.

Adidya Sarif (Mentored by Aarthi Sundaram)

As someone who was already committed to grad school before entering this program, this REU provided two main benefits First, it provided a lighter preview of what grad school would be like, which further reinforced my commitment to grad school. And more importantly, it provided many opportunities to help with getting into a good grad school. This included the actual research, the possibility of getting published (and if not published, a paper on Arxiv), your assigned mentor(s) (who will probably write at least one of the letters of rec for grad school), and proximity to other professors in CS Theory. This proximity includes many talks given to REU students, and can result in additional research opportunities. Overall, I would highly recommend this program to anyone interested in a CS Ph.D, especially to those interested in theory.

Lara Shonkwiler (Mentored by Tom Goldstein)

This REU program was really useful for me because it gave me the chance to work as one of the principal investigators on a research problem. When I do research with labs at my university, I normally only get the chance to be involved in the periphery because I'm a student and don't have much experience. In this project, I was involved with all aspects of the project, so I got experience with making decisions and planning the research project. I also enjoyed getting to collaborate with fellow undergraduates, and it was interesting to see a different research environment.

Dan Hoffman (Mentored by Tom Goldstein)

REU-CAAR was my first research experience, and it was an excellent one. I've known for a while that I love the my classes in theoretical computer science, but now I know furthermore that I love doing research in the field as well. I feel really excited and prepared to embark on a full-fledged career in theoretical computer science research now. Working on a team with other smart students with as strong an interest as mine made learn at a faster rate and motivated me to learn more. In addition, the talks from computer science faculty really refined my interests. Dr. Bill Gasarch was a charismatic leader who made us all eager to do well on our projects.

Darshan Chakrabarti (Mentored by John Dickerson)

The CAAR REU has been an amazing first exposure to research for me. Working on my project with my team and mentors has been a great experience and I have sharpened many skills including my abilities to clearly communicate, state current and future research goals, and analyze relevant parts of related literature. Under the supervision of my awesome, supportive, and inspiring faculty mentor, I have also really enjoyed the freedom to explore different avenues related to my project, which is something definitely not afforded by typical academic coursework. I have loved being exposed to different fields of CS through the weekly talks by faculty and presentations by other groups because they have introduced me to some topics I may potentially be interested in researching in the future. These talks have also inspired further discussion between me and other REU students regarding things we have found interesting or mutually relevant to our research. For example, after having talked to one of my suite-mates about his research, I learned that his work also involved matroids and this led us to have many discussions about matroid properties; this has culminated in us preparing a matroid talk to be presented to the rest of the REU as well as in the creation of a matroid reading group through which we hope to further explore matroid theory. Having like-minded interests has also led me to make some great friends at the REU and I have enjoyed our conversation, playing games at game night and practicing in the dorms (to beat Bill at Olympus), and exploring various neighborhoods in DC. Bill and Samir have definitely done a great job putting together both a great cohort to participate and group of faculty to mentor in the REU, and it's made for an awesome summer; this program truly has convinced me to apply to grad school (somewhat in hopes that grad school will just be like a longer version of this summer).

Ahmed Albahhar (Mentored by John Dickerson)

This REU is awesome!

Sam Estep (Mentored by Samir Khuller)

If you're reading this as a student interested in theoretical computer science, REU-CAAR would be an excellent opportunity. The only possible con is that, as more of an "umbrella" program, this program may not have a project in the specific field of computer science that (currently) most intrigues you personally. However, the benefits of doing research in your field and learning more about what you want to do after graduating far outweigh that possible con, especially since (if you're anything like me) you can easily think you want to do something without having enough experience to really know.

Now, the pros: You'll meet awesome people and get to spend weeks and weeks talking to them about awesome stuff. I have been highly impressed not only by the caliber of mentors here like Dr. Samir Khuller, but also by all the students I've been able to hang out with in downtime. The projects are well-chosen and generally allow one to hone one's general research skills and theory knowledge, and usually do some programming as well. And while you're working hard on your project, you'll be able to get a broader view of computer science research by looking at your peers' projects and what sort of work they're doing. If you want to go to grad school, this will help you be effective in that. If you're not sure, this will help you decide.