

Testimonials For REU-CAAR Summer 2023

Andrew Brady (Mentored by Laxman Dhulipala)

REU-CAAR was a great program! My project, mentored by Professor Laxman Dhulipala, was on "parallel algorithms for high dimensional clustering." It was cool to read lots of papers about many ways researchers have improved the k-means method; I had no idea there was so much research behind k-means until this project. I also got the chance to improve my C++, which will come in handy in the future. I learned some new board games (Olympus, Navegador, Carnegie) during the board game nights which was cool. The other students were fun to be around and enhanced my experience.

David Yang (Mentored by Furong Huang)

I would definitely recommend REU-CAAR as an REU program. I worked under Professor Furong Huang to study fairness in diffusion models, which was a new experience after two math research experiences at my home institution. In addition to working on our research everyday, we also had planned talks with the Math and Computational biology programs, as well as Monday lunch activities to get all the groups together and learn new things.

What really makes this program great is the people. Everyone lives in the dorms together, and this creates a nice environment for everyone to hang out and interact with each other – which I didn't get to have in either of my previous two research experiences. My research group was quite close with each other and we also made great, lasting friendships with our suitemates and others. I enjoyed all the board game nights, movie nights, and planned activities (Karaoke, hikes, etc.) that were set up either by us or by the REU (Bill and Auguste are really great directors of the program and help organize so many things). Bill and Auguste are two of the most energetic people you will ever meet and are pleasures to be around and talk to).

If you're looking for a great blend of research and a positive social experience (that hopefully you will contribute to), you should definitely consider REU-CAAR.

Jasmine Stefano (Mentored by Aviva Prins)

As someone from a small liberal arts college with few research opportunities and very little talk of graduate studies, REU-CAAR was a very rewarding experience for me! Not only did it introduce me to reinforcement learning and let me explore the topic further while getting to experience what the research process is really like, but there were also countless talks regarding graduate

school opportunities, academia, a bit about industry, etc. so I gained tons of knowledge about future possibilities that I otherwise was unsure of. My mentor Aviva Prins was also great at giving my team direct insights and advice as far as what to expect out of grad school and application processes. There are a ton of fun events planned including weekly talks and sometimes day trips, so you get a nice balance.

I highly recommended REU-CAAR, especially to those from lesser known schools who really want to get out there and explore research in computer science and math!

David Skora (Mentored by Auguste Gezalyan and David Mount)

REU CAAR is an awesome program, and I think it's a great opportunity for any math/CS students looking for a research project. UMD is a strong research institution, and working under the supervision of these faculty is a valuable experience for any undergraduate. Bill (the director) and Auguste (his assistant) are actually hilarious made the program a lot of fun. My research group worked with Auguste and Professor David Mount on a designing a new computational geometry algorithm. Both advisors were very knowledgeable in the subject, and they were able to get us up-to-speed quickly with the material as well as guide us in the right direction in looking for potential approaches to solving the problem. The research project was chosen well in the sense that it was an applicable and interesting problem, but also a reasonable level of difficulty for an undergraduate, so we were each able to offer useful insights. I had a ton of fun working with my group this summer, and we're now in the process of producing a research paper about our algorithm. Aside from the research, I made a lot of friends this summer and became very close with my cohort, and we still keep in touch. Outside of working hours there is plenty of free time, which we spent playing basketball, exploring DC, visiting the beach, or singing karaoke. All in all, it was a 10/10 experience, and I'm not just saying that cause Bill told me to write this testimonial. If you have the chance to apply to/attend REU CAAR you ABSOLUTELY should!

Linh Hoang (Mentored by Marine Carpuat and Eleftheria Briakou)

If you are reading my testimonial, you must like REU-CAAR very much because you have read all of my friends thoughts above. And you are right, REU-CAAR is the coolest program.

I'm an international student so I had some limitations coming to the

program. However, the people at UMD (especially Bill) were very supportive which helped me have a great time there. So if you are also an international student, you SHOULD apply!!!

My research topic was “Improving Machine Translation for Wikipedia” where my research group was training deep learning models to evaluate and correct errors in Wikipedia translations for African languages under the supervision of Professor Marine Carpuat and Eleftheria Briakou. I had so much fun exploring NLP and I also had the chance to learn about future careers.

At first, I thought the program would be competitive but the people here were so chill and I made a lot of friends. Bill and Auguste arranged a lot of talks and they were so helpful because I was able to learn about other fields besides Machine Learning. Moreover, we had a lot of bonding activities like board game nights and hikes (shout out to Bill, Auguste, and Paul). We also went to a karaoke place, visited Annapolis Beach, spent some nights in DC, etc on our own. We had a lot of fun and we still keep in touch now.

Lastly, I just wanted to say that Bill is the best PI (even though he thought it was an odd compliment because he was the only PI that I ever knew). He made me feel comfortable sharing my difficulties. I am grateful for being selected to be a part of REU-CAAR!