HCI/UX/Design Jobs for New College Grads

Philip Guo
https://pg.ucsd.edu/hci-design-jobs.htm
Associate Professor of Cognitive Science
UC San Diego
2020-10-05, Prototype 8
Many students & alumni wished they had learned what’s in this talk at the beginning of college. Because all of this takes lots of time to prepare. Start early!
Opening question:
How much do classes really matter?
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How much do classes really matter?

Imagine:

4.0 / 4.0 GPA, graduated with honors, double-majored, triple-majored, never missed any homework points, took 8 classes per term!
Opening question:

How much do classes really matter?

Imagine:

3.4 GPA
The goal of this talk is to give college students an overview of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), UX, and Design ... … then show what jobs you can get with an HCI/UX/Design degree.
HCI often used in academia

UX (User eXperience) and design
job titles often used in industry
Warning: we’re gonna go fast and there’s a lot of dense text packed into slides.

This is **NOT** an example of good visual slide design!

It's actually very very very bad visual design :)  

Slides and videos online here:  
[https://pg.ucsd.edu/hci-design-jobs.htm](https://pg.ucsd.edu/hci-design-jobs.htm)
What do you typically learn in intro. Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), UX, and Design courses?
What you learn in HCI/UX/Design courses:

- User Research
- Personas/Storyboards
- Paper Prototyping
- Digital Mock-Ups
- Interactive Prototypes
- User Testing
- Online Experiments
- Final Web/Mobile App

What do people really need?
What should we consider building?
How should we start to build it?
What should it look and feel like?
How can we measure how well it works for real users?
How can we ship a finished product?
What you learn in HCI/UX/Design courses:

User Research
Personas/Storyboards
Paper Prototyping
Digital Mock-Ups
Interactive Prototypes
User Testing
Online Experiments
Final Web/Mobile App

Observe potential users in their natural habitats, interview them, find their actual problems/needs.

“Make something people want.”

“Make something people need!!”
want -> need change by Alan Kay
Motto by Y Combinator, photo by Kai-Fu Lee
What you learn in HCI/UX/Design courses:

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Make low-fidelity sketches on paper and get early user feedback

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrV2SZuRPv0
What you learn in HCI/UX/Design courses:

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Personas/Storyboards
Paper Prototyping
Digital Mock-Ups
Interactive Prototypes
User Testing
Online Experiments
Final Web/Mobile App

Use computer tools to make higher quality prototypes. Write code to turn it into a working app.
What you learn in HCI/UX/Design courses:

User Research
Personas/Storyboards
Paper Prototyping
Digital Mock-Ups
Interactive Prototypes
User Testing
Online Experiments
Final Web/Mobile App

Do science! Test on real people in their natural habitats, get users into your lab, deploy experiments online & analyze collected data.
What you learn in HCI/UX/Design courses:

- User Research
- Personas/Storyboards
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- Digital Mock-Ups
- Interactive Prototypes
- User Testing
- Online Experiments
- Final Web/Mobile App

Product is never “done”, just shipped!

Source: [https://www.creativethinkinghub.com/steve-jobs-was-right-real-artists-ship/](https://www.creativethinkinghub.com/steve-jobs-was-right-real-artists-ship/)
Outline for rest of talk:

Kinds of HCI/UX/design jobs
How to get one out of college
What about grad school?
Outline for rest of talk:

Kinds of HCI/UX/design jobs

How to get one out of college

What about grad school?
I made this talk by consulting with people (many UCSD alum) who have recently worked in top design jobs.
Contributors: Carrie Cai, Emily Danchik, Robert Ikeda, Finn Lin, Carolyn Zhang, Marcos Ojeda, Judy Chun, Sean Kross, Don Norman, Thi Dang, Kandarp Khandwala, Christi Hagen, Anvisha Pai, Rajiv Sancheti, David Wu

All of the insights are theirs; all of the mistakes are mine.

Hopefully in the future I can call on you to add your insights.
One-slide summary: if you want an HCI/UX/Design job …

Build up a design portfolio, lean hard on personal and alumni connections, and get a design internship while in college.

(This will maximize your chances of getting interviews. You still need to pass them!)
What jobs are available?

Jobs match what you learn in intro. HCI/Design courses!
What you learn in HCI/Design courses:

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Final Web/Mobile App

What do people really need?
What should we consider building?
How should we start to build it?
What should it look and feel like?
How can we measure how well it works for real users?
How can we ship a finished product?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What you learn in HCI/Design courses:</th>
<th>What jobs allow you to do this:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User Research</td>
<td>UX (User eXperience) Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personas/Storyboards</td>
<td>PM (Product/Project) Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Prototyping</td>
<td>UX/Product Designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Mock-Ups</td>
<td>Visual Designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Prototypes</td>
<td>UX/Product Designer, UX Architect, UX Prototyper, Interaction Designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Testing</td>
<td>UX Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Experiments</td>
<td>UX Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Web/Mobile App</td>
<td>Data Scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Front-end Developer, Product Engineer, Software Engineer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A disclaimer on design *job titles*:

Can be confusing since different companies call similar jobs by different names; and these names change fast.

Read *job descriptions* and ask companies for what they really want from candidates.
The purpose of this list is to:

- Show how UX jobs often hide under non-UX names
- Provide example titles that will help you search for UX positions
- Help you justify adding UX activities to your current position

| 3D Artist | Analyst / Programmer | Analytics Product Manager | Application Usability Designer | Architect: UX / UI | Art Director – Print and Interactive | Assistant Webmaster | Associate Director – Digital Marketing | Business Analyst | Business Leader | Business Systems Analyst | Business Unit Director | Chief Design Officer | Chief of Product | Chief Research Officer | Client Website Platform Supervisor | Communications Consultant | Communications Manager Consultant | Content Manager | Content Strategist | Content Strategy Manager | Conversion Consultant | Coordinator Digital Media | Creative Director | Creative Usability Lead | Customer Engagement Manager | Customer Experience Design Team Lead | Customer Experience Manager | Design Director | Design Manager | Information Architect | Information Architect and Front End Developer | Information Architect and Interaction Designer | Information Architect, Ontology Engineer | Information Developer | Information Resource Manager | Information Systems Associate | Insight And Planning Director | Instructional Designer | Interaction Architect | Interaction Design Director | Interaction Designer | Interactive Designer | Interactive Designer and UX | Interactive Marketing and Usability Consultant | Interactive Marketing Manager | International Manager for Training Development | Internet Marketing Manager | Intranet Employee | Communications Manager | Intranet Project Manager | IT Usability Consultant | Knowledge Manager | Lead Experience Strategist | Lead Interaction Design | Lead UX / Creative Designer | Lead UX / UI Designer | Lead UX Analyst | Lead UX Designer | Manager, Applications – Web | UX / Project Manager | UX / UI Architect | UX / UI Designer | UX / UI Designer, Information Architect | UX / UI Developer | UX / Usability Consultant | UX / Usability Specialist | UX / Visual Designer | UX Analyst | UX Architect | UX Architect and Strategist | UX / UI Designer | UX / UI Specialist | UX Consultant | UX Designer | UX Designer and UX Specialist | UX Designer Engineer | UX Engineer | UX Specialist | Usability Analyst | Usability Consultant | Usability Consultant / IT Teams | Coach | Usability Coordinator | Usability Designer | Usability Engineer | Usability Engineer, Information Systems | Usability Expert | Usability Manager | Usability Specialist | User Analyst | User Centered Design Practice Lead |

2013 survey of ~1000 HCI professionals: [https://www.nngroup.com/reports/user-experience-careers/](https://www.nngroup.com/reports/user-experience-careers/) (Pages 97-99 in PDF)
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Simplified overview of design job titles\(^1\)

- **UX Researcher**: user research, user testing/experiments
  - (often are master’s or Ph.D. grads)
- **Product Manager (PM)**: user research, team coordination
- **UX/Interaction/Product Designer\(^2,3\)**: non-code prototypes
  - (most common type of job for new college grads)
- **UX Architect/UX Prototyper**: design + some coding
- **Visual Designer**: art/graphics
- **Data Scientist**: write code to analyze data; Ph.D.-focused
- **Front-end Developer**: write lots of production code

\(^1\) you may do multiple roles in one job and “wear many hats”
\(^2\) sometimes the term “product designer” refers to a person who takes on multiple design roles.
\(^3\) to learn more: [https://www.invisionapp.com/blog/building-an-enterprise-ux-team/](https://www.invisionapp.com/blog/building-an-enterprise-ux-team/)
Outline for rest of talk:

Kinds of HCI/UX/design jobs
How to get one out of college
What about grad school?
How do you get an HCI/Design job out of college?

Build up a design \textit{portfolio}, lean hard on personal and alumni \textit{connections}, and get a design \textit{internship} while in college.
Portfolio + connections -> internship -> full-time job
Judy Chun

(619) 559-3221
judy.chun.4@gmail.com

EDUCATION
Carnegie Mellon University
August 2019 - August 2020
Masters of Human-Computer Interaction

University of California, San Diego
September 2015 - June 2019
B.S. Human-Computer Interaction Minor, Business Marketing GPA: 3.78 (Cum Laude)

SKILLS
User Research
Interviews
Journey Mapping
Personas
A/B Testing
Competitive Analysis
Heuristic Evaluation
Usability Testing
Surveys/Questionnaires
Design Tools
Sketch
Adobe CC
Invision
Principle
Figma
Framer

Development
Java
Python
JavaScript
Node.js
Express.js
Ajax
HTML5/CSS3

EXPERIENCE
IBM
June 2019 - August 2019
Design Research Intern
- Leading internal consumability evaluation of IBM Security Connects Data Explorer application to uncover and fix usability issues before GA
- Conducting heuristic evaluations with 5 cross-functional stakeholders, cognitive walk-throughs with Design/UX/PM, and UX Assessments to resolve pre-release issues

Qualcomm
June 2018 - September 2018
UX Research Intern
San Diego, CA
- Led multi-phase usability studies to enhance the UI of ID Assitration software using Continuous Multi-Factor Authentication (CMFA)
- Conducted interviews and heuristic evaluations with the Cybersecurity Solutions PM team, establishing 18 new product requirements
- Conducted testing sessions to train task completion rates, system usability scale, use of navigation, and error rate

RMK Research
June 2017 - August 2017
San Diego, CA
- Collaborated with Market Research Consulting team
- Launched visual libraries & branding guidelines for 3 new market entries in Seoul: Chanel’s Prive exhibition, Nendo’s beta, and i11 Cosmetics

TickBox
April 2017 - June 2017
San Diego, CA
- Created navigation flows, sitemaps, & wireframes for digital ticketing platforms for Warner Bros. Pictures & Fox Film Studios
- Ensured small mobile experience in iOS and Android apps

UC San Diego
HCD Design Instructional Assistant
September 2016 - December 2018
San Diego, CA
- Lead 2 design studios and helped 150+ students through fieldwork research, rapid prototyping, and user testing to develop a web application for health and recreation

PROJECTS
Felicity CBT
April 2019 - June 2019
UX Design Lead
San Diego, CA
- Provided easy access to self-administered cognitive behavioral therapy
- Created wireframes with UI specifications/UI documentation to ensure smooth development in iOS and Android platforms
Portfolio (basics)

- Start by making a personal website as your portfolio
- Class projects with design components (many at UCSD!)
- Volunteer to help on-campus groups or friends with projects; be resourceful about finding work
  - Look beyond web/mobile apps ...
  - e.g., posters, art pieces, event flyers, ...
  - business/marketing slide decks for friends
Portfolio (basics)

- Design sprints, hackathons, or challenges/contests
- Work part-time as a freelance designer for local companies or friends’ startups while in school
  - UCSD: The Basement or Rady Startup accelerator
- Once you get a design internship, put in portfolio
- Look at friends’ and alumnis’ portfolios, resumes, and LinkedIn as examples of how to make yours
Hey there – I'm David!

I'm a Product Designer with a strong lens for mission-driven products that empower the user. I've designed pay & financial services products @lyft, B2B healthcare Health, and CRM design systems @SAP.

Design Portfolio =
Website with short intro + series of **case studies**

My undergrad courses (COGS121 and COGS127) show you how to make good case studies
Case study = single webpage of process & rationale
Class project case study -> product design intern at Lyft

Common Ground

Project Overview

At Pixar, we developed an app for designers to design, share, and collaborate on new ideas. The app allows designers to create, edit, and share sketches, mockups, and prototypes. It also provides a platform for designers to connect, network, and share ideas with other designers around the world.

Storyboarding

The project was designed to provide a better experience for our users. We created a storyboard to visualize the user journey and understand the user needs.

Design Alternatives

We explored different design alternatives to find the best solution for our users. We tested different designs and gathered feedback from users to refine the design.

Testing Design

We conducted a series of qualitative usability evaluations. We also conducted a series of usability evaluations to test how our design was received by users. We found that our design was received well by users, and we continued to refine the design based on their feedback.

In conclusion, our design was well-received by users, and we continue to improve the design based on their feedback.
Only show final app from class project -> NO INTERNSHIP :(

Final Designs and Results
Ultimately, our team was able to design and fully develop our app. We presented our completed app to an industry panel and an audience of 500 people. Against nearly 100 other teams, our team won 1st Place in the category of "Most Innovative App."
**Portfolio (advanced)**

- Be able to justify and critique your own process
  - Justify what you did, how you did it, why you made each design decision, why it matters in the end
  - Important for dispelling the myth that design is only about visual aesthetics or “making stuff look good”...
  - ... it’s about making stuff that benefits real users.
- Have a compelling personal *point-of-view* that frames your work and makes you stand out
- My undergrad courses (COGS121 and COGS127) show you how to make portfolios and case studies
Portfolio (advanced)

- It’s often better to show how you improved an existing real-world product rather than creating your own entirely from scratch
  - More authentic and with real-world constraints
  - In fact, that’s a much, much, much more realistic approximation of what you will do in your future job
- Avoid cliche class projects that everyone makes!
- In your portfolio, highlight the most relevant projects for your desired job roles
- Example portfolios: Cofolios and Bestfolios
Companies don't really care what exactly you made for your portfolio projects; they just want to see that you've been engaging in a thoughtful and user-centered design process so you can do the same for them if they hire you!
Portfolio + connections

- Cold-email alumni, especially recent alumni
  - Look them up on LinkedIn and cold-email them
    - (you can search and filter by UCSD alum)
- Talk to friends, family, dormmates, instructors
- ... and your bosses from prior jobs/internships
- Most jobs obtained via referrals from connections
- Take advantage of your .edu student email address!
- Also use your personal connections to critique your portfolio, resume, LinkedIn page, and cover letters
Portfolio + connections -> **internships**

- Basic interview prep: walk thru portfolio w/ friends
- Lots of interview prep resources[^1]
- Ideally put internship work in your portfolio[^2]
- If you can’t get internships, *spend your summers building your portfolio in any way you can*
  - One of my TAs (Rajiv) spent a summer as a DoorDash food delivery driver and then wrote a case study redesigning the DoorDash driver app; brilliant user research on himself!

[^1]: e.g.,: *A Guide to Interviewing for Product Design Internships*
[^2]: even if you can’t, then you can still talk through your design process at a high level during job interviews
Looking for a full-time job is a full-time job.

Apply broadly, and don’t worry if you don’t exactly match the job description. It’s free to apply!

Design job descriptions can be vague and not exactly what hiring managers are looking for, so it’s worthwhile to still apply in case someone is looking for your skills.
Looking for a full-time job *is* a full-time job.

Don’t have your heart set on any one specific place; successful applicants apply to dozens of jobs.

Keep track of applications using spreadsheet, take time to customize your resumes/cover letters.
Looking for a full-time job is a full-time job.

Do EVERYTHING YOU CAN to get an employee at each company to give you a referral or to send your name and resume to recruiters.

Most job openings prioritize referrals!
Looking beyond pure design jobs ...

- In 2015, 93% of surveyed designers said *coding was important* (in 2005, only ~5% said so)[1]
- Ideal ratio: 1 designer for every 5 programmers
- Reality: 1 designer every 10-30 programmers[2]
- A good adjacent role is *front-end developer*
  - Build up your design portfolio on the side while working and learn from designers on your team; transition to design later
  - *Many places still don’t value design* but do value programming; it’s your chance to sneak design thinking into your workplace!

[2] there are far more programming jobs than design jobs!
Looking beyond pure design jobs ...

feelin it! i liked the deck

after our podcast, i was thinking that if you're a recent HCI grad from UCSD and struggling to find a job, improving your coding skills/portfolio might be the quickest path to something that resembles a "career". i think a lot of companies would love to have a coder first, and the design skills are a bonus

Feedback from a notable UCSD alum working in tech entrepreneurship (Sep 2020)
What if you can’t find a full-time job right away?

One idea: do freelance or contract design jobs …

- to make some money from part-time work*
- to build up your portfolio and connections
  - which will improve your odds of landing a full-time job
  - Employers tend to value real-world work experiences more than class/school projects
- (find these via personal connections or online postings)
- *ideally you'd be paid, but volunteering can build your resume/portfolio and get good letters of reference
Extra notes for our current predicament ...

Bad: global pandemic, long-lasting economic recession
Bad: fewer available jobs, fewer well-paying jobs
Good: more jobs hiring remotely, location matters less
Good: can move to cheaper location or with relatives

**Idea:** look for remote work opportunities (maybe even volunteer) to boost your resume during tough times
Outline for rest of talk:

- Kinds of HCI/UX/design jobs
- How to get one out of college
- What about grad school?
Should you go to graduate school ... 
... to get a master’s degree in HCI/Design?

- **NO** - if you already have good portfolio/internships
- **NO** - if you can already get a job with bachelors
- **MAYBE** - if your major is far away from HCI/Design
- **MAYBE** - if you don’t have a strong portfolio yet
- **YES** - if you get into a top-tier 'name-brand' school...
- **YES** - ... and if you can afford the tuition and time
- **YES** - if you want to be a UX Researcher
- **YES** - if you want to be a design teacher
Should you go to graduate school ...

... to get a Ph.D. degree in HCI/Design?

- **NO** - if you’re aiming for *most* design-related jobs
  - (hired at same or slightly-higher level than bachelors/masters)
- **MAYBE** - if you want to be a UX Researcher
- **MAYBE** - if you want to be a data scientist
- **YES** - if you want to be a university professor
- **YES** - if you want to be a research scientist
  - (despite the similar-sounding job title, research scientists do more open-ended and exploratory work than UX Researchers)
Parting Thoughts

How much do classes really matter?

Judy Chun

(619) 559-3221  jchun4@gmail.com

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SKILLS
User Research Interview Journey Mapping Personas A/B Testing Competeive Analysis Heuristic Evaluation Usability Testing Surveys/Questionnaires

Design Tools Sketch Adobe CC InVision Principle Figma Framer X Figma Studio

Development Java JavaScript Node.js Express.js Ajax HTML/CSS/JS

EXPERIENCE
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Parting Thoughts

How can YOU make a large public university feel more like a small private one?

Private: great 'user experience' (everything taken care of!), but SUPER EXPENSIVE!

Public: more affordable, but everything is big, impersonal, and easy to get lost in the crowd.
Parting Thoughts

How can YOU make a large public university feel more like a small private one?

- Hidden within every large public university is a bunch of *small private ones* waiting to be found
- Hidden inside of UCSD is ...
  - a product / UX design school
  - visual and performing arts schools
  - tech and entrepreneurship incubators
  - humanities, classics, and liberal arts schools
  - pre-med, pre-law, other professional training
  - world-class research across many fields
  - ... and many more "small private schools"
Parting Thoughts

How can YOU make a large public university feel more like a small private one?

- How can you find these hidden pockets?
- Be *curious, observant*, and *open* to experiences
- One idea:
  - take the minimum number of classes per term to keep on track for graduation
  - do well enough in classes (but not perfect)
  - then add an "extra class" where you spend 10+ hours a week on finding/doing something above and beyond your classes
  - these "extra classes" count for much more on your resume
Parting Thoughts

How can YOU make a large public university feel more like a small private one?

- **#1 tip:** talk to professors, IAs, and TAs after class and during their office hours ...
- ... not just about the material in the class *(because none of it matters that much!)* but more about broader life goals and challenges
- Find student organizations to join and be open to learning from your peers; ask questions!
- Go to on-campus talks, department events, lab meetings, anywhere you can **observe people**; you don't need to speak up, just observe!
Parting Thoughts:

BUILD YOUR OWN TIME MACHINE

(my youtube video)
To travel into your possible future, proactively seek out people who are 3, 5, or up to 10 years ahead of you in life. Learn what they've done so far and what they think they should've done differently.
Parting Thoughts:

BUILD YOUR OWN TIME MACHINE

(my youtube video)

Talking to these people will give you the superpower to make decisions today that will create your best possible future. If you wait until you're their age, it will be much, much harder to alter your path.
Recap: how do you get an HCI/UX/Design job out of college?

Build up a design *portfolio*, lean hard on personal and alumni *connections*, and get a design *internship* while in college.
Many students & alumni wished they had learned what’s in this talk at the beginning of college. Because all of this takes lots of time to prepare. Start early!
Summary of HCI/UX/Design jobs

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Visual Designer
UX/Product Designer, UX Architect, UX Prototyper, Interaction Designer
UX Researcher
UX Researcher
Data Scientist
Front-end Developer, Product Engineer, Software Engineer
Appendix A: Suggested Job-Related Resources

How To Find a Job or Graduate School in Human-Computer Interaction, Interaction, or Industrial Design, by Don Norman

Use Human-Centered Design for your Resume, by Don Norman

Cracking the PM Interview: How to Land a Product Manager Job in Technology

College Students, Product Manager is the Best Job You Never Heard Of (blog post)

Christi’s suggestion: “I'd also suggest people set up passive job post search digests on Linked-In, Glassdoor, Indeed, etc. Once you set one up for your search terms, i.e. 'UX Designer,' then every day (or whatever frequency you set) a digest will land in your inbox so you can see what's out there.”

Very detailed 2013 survey of 1000 HCI/UX professionals by Nielsen Norman Group
Appendix A: Suggested Job-Related Resources

Rajiv Sancheti's advice on design portfolios, resumes, and job hunting (Nov 2019)

The spectrum of design roles in 2018

Design Better by InVision

Creating a UX Design Portfolio Case Study (YouTube video)

Example design portfolios: Cofolios and Bestfolios

From David:

- Another book I found useful for design interviews (in particular, whiteboard challenges): Solving Product Design Exercises (by Artiom Dashinsky)

- Books related to Product Manager jobs (see next slide): Inspired (by Marty Cagan), Value Proposition Design (Strategyzer)
Most companies don't hire new grad PMs. The few that do tend to be larger - Google, Facebook, Uber, Dropbox & Yelp have Associate PM (APM) programs.

- If you want to do PM at a smaller company, you probably need a personal connection with the company or to join a startup in an engineering/operations role and try to get promoted within 2-3 years.
- IMO, the best route is to do the big company gig to start! Being a PM at a startup is very hit or miss as a first job.

Similarly, there are very few PM internships. The notable one is Google APM, but it's very competitive so a software or design internship would be a good alternative.

Given the lack of internships, good ways to tee up yourself for a PM role are...

- Technical / coding skills. Bunch of places will have a technical / algorithm interview
- Leadership roles or projects on campus that show initiative and creativity

If you want to start a startup or be a CEO someday, PM is a good path to go down. Though by no means the only way!

Relevant link: https://medium.com/@jackiebo/college-students-product-manager-is-the-best-job-you-never-heard-of-5d4b7ca41ab7
Presentation history

2020-10-05: v8, given in UCSD COGS127
2020-03-03: v7, given in UCSD COGS1
2019-11-26: v6, given in UCSD COGS1
2018-11-27: v5, given in UCSD COGS1
2018-05-29: v4, given in UCSD COGS1
2018-03-07: v3, given in UCSD COGS1
2017-12-05: v2, given in UCSD COGS1
2017-11-27: v1, first prototype, given in UCSD COGS120/CSE170
[also some intermediate drafts given in some of my own courses during week 1]