Dear Alumni and Friends of UCSB Computer Science,

During the past year, the field of Computer Science has continued to grow in importance, impact, and demand, creating seemingly limitless opportunities for our graduates and a continued sense of excitement in the department about changing the world through our research and teaching. Nationwide, the number of CS Bachelor’s degrees has been increasing rapidly in the past decade, including double-digit growth for the past four years. The number of students applying to UCSB Computer Science as freshmen has increased dramatically, from 651 in 2009 to 7420 in 2018, while all measures of student quality have soared. We are at all-time highs in the department in the numbers of undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff.

Most importantly, the need for CS graduates and their expertise is skyrocketing, and our highly sought-after graduates are becoming major contributors and leaders in industry, government, startups, and academia.

We were excited to hire several new faculty in the past year who bring world-class research efforts and pedagogical skills to the department: Daniel Lokshtanov (from the University of Bergen in Norway) [CS theory], Lingqi Yan (from UC Berkeley) [computer graphics], Kate Kharitonova (from Harvey Mudd College) [teaching faculty], Y. Feng (from UT Austin via the University of Washington) [programming languages], and Arpit Gupta (Princeton University via Columbia University) [computer systems]. These highly accomplished new colleagues complement nicely our existing department research strengths and bring fresh perspectives and energy to our students by their teaching and mentoring. Meanwhile, our stellar faculty continue to receive major honors, awards, and acknowledgements for their many achievements.

Our annual CS Summit event was held on March 16, 2018, and once again it showcased department highlights, such as undergraduate Capstone projects and graduate research, and culminated in a captivating keynote talk by David Culler, the Dean of the Division of Data Sciences at UC Berkeley. The next CS Summit will be held on Wednesday, March 13, 2019, and you are invited to come and see what’s going on in CS at UCSB and to interact with the department’s students, faculty, alumni, and friends.

As always, we welcome your continued involvement in the Department of Computer Science. Let’s stay in touch!

Matthew Turk
Professor and Chair
Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your background?

A: I was born in Moscow, Russia, and moved to Norway when I was 6 years old. I lived in Norway since then, except for a one year exchange in Canada during my undergrad studies, and a two year postdoc in San Diego. I met my wife-to-be in San Diego and got her to move to Norway with me. You can take a California girl out of California, but you can’t take California out of the girl. So, a few years later, here we are!

Q: Tell us about your research.

A: I do research on algorithms – poetically they are the heart and soul of computer programs. Google says that an algorithm is “a process or set of rules to be followed in calculations or other problem-solving operations, especially by a computer.” What I do is that I try to make them as efficient as possible – basically there are many ways for a computer to do the same thing, and I try to make the computer do the things it is supposed to do as efficiently (fast) as possible. There’s lots of math involved. If you’ve ever seen the show Numbers, I aspire to be that guy.

Q: Are there any memorable moments in your academic career so far?

A: There is one where I solved a problem that had been open for a while, and I had been pondering about it on and off for a few years. And here I found myself on the back row of a lecture hall, zoning out during a talk, thinking about this problem instead of listening to the talk. And then, out of the blue I have this really simple idea and all of the pieces just fit into place and I’m pretty sure the problem has been solved! In the break between this talk and the next one I was pacing back and forth in the break room going over the details in my head again and again, probably talking to myself. I must have looked like a complete lunatic, even in a room full of mathematicians! But I did not care one bit because it totally seemed like the problem had been defeated (it had!).

Q: Why UCSB? What’s your first impression of this campus and the department?

A: I mean it’s pretty hard to beat Santa Barbara. Other than the real estate prices, this is pretty much as good as it gets. The university is awesome, the colleagues are super welcoming and friendly, and the more I learn about them the more I realize how impressed with everyone around me I should be at all times (pretty damn impressed, if you ask me!)

Q: What do you do in your spare time?

A: What spare time? My son just turned 1 year old. I fall asleep at 9pm totally exhausted, hoping my wife will do the dishes even though I was supposed to. She does. Ask me again in 2 years.

Q: Do you like Santa Barbara so far?

A: Yes! I’ve done a tiny bit of hiking around here (see question above wrt. why I haven’t checked out all of the peaks yet) and it is so pretty! Can’t wait to do more!
Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your background?
A: I am a Chinese male. Before joining UCSB as an Assistant Professor, I received my Ph.D. degree from UC Berkeley, but was advised remotely by my advisor from UC San Diego. My wife got her master’s degree from UC Santa Cruz. So we are kind of a UC family.

Q: Tell us about your research.
A: My research is in Computer Graphics, mainly aimed at rendering photo-realistic visual appearance at real world complexity, and building theoretical foundations mathematically and physically to reveal the principles of the visual world.

Q: Are there any memorable moments in your academic career so far?
A: In the final semester at UC Berkeley during my Ph.D., I was told that I’ve been granted C.V. Ramamoorthy Distinguished Research Award for “outstanding contributions to a new research area”. But I didn’t even know I was nominated. Besides, I thought my advisor played me because his name just happened to be the same as the award’s. I remember the moment just because it’s interesting, however, I expect to have more memorable moments here in the near future because they are epic.

Q: Why UCSB? What’s your first impression of this campus and the department?
A: Previously, because UCSB gave me an unexpected opportunity and UCSB is the best university location-wise. Now, because UCSB is home. It’s a place that respects me and my research and makes me feel comfortable working here. My first impression is that the campus is so beautiful and people from the department are both kind and awesome.

Q: What do you do in your spare time?
A: I play piano and video games. (Official answer: What is spare time?)

Q: Do you like Santa Barbara so far?
A: Yes. I would especially mention that SB downtown is the best downtown I’ve ever seen. One important reason is that there’s always public parking available, and at almost no cost.
Q: Where did you grow up? Tell us about your background.

I grew up in Northern India, in the mountainous state of Himachal Pradesh. Interestingly, all my family members (except me) are physicians. However, I studied Computer Science. I got my undergraduate degree from IIT Delhi and PhD from UT Austin.

Q: What's your favorite sport?

Being from India I naturally love cricket. But my favorite sport is soccer. I religiously follow Manchester United.

Q: Can you briefly summarize your research?

My research is in the area of computer systems, in particular, in building systems that provide strong security and privacy properties. As one example, I built an on-demand video delivery system, called Popcorn, that hides, even from the video service provider, the knowledge of which movie a user is watching. That is, the video service provider is able to serve movies without knowing which movies users are requesting!

Q: What are your short term and long term research goals?

As a researcher, I want to create technology that deeply impacts society and finds widespread use. With my line of work on private systems, I want to demonstrate a practical alternative to the status quo — a world in which people’s right to privacy on the web is not left solely in the hands of laws, policies, trust, and hope, but vigorously defended through technical solutions.

Q: What courses are you looking forward to teaching?

I think I will have a lot of fun teaching undergraduate and graduate level courses in the systems and security area. I am also looking forward to teaching special topics courses on blockchain, distributed ledgers, and cryptocurrencies.

Q: Why Computer Science at UCSB? What influenced your decision?

UCSB CS is a highly reputed institution with a top-notch faculty. Obviously, the aforementioned matters but there is another big reason — a rare-to-find family-like warmth. UCSB was my last job interview and I was naturally tired. However, somewhat counterintuitively, I felt re-energized by the end of the interview. Faculty members at UCSB frequently collaborate and passionately support each other. Students and faculty are also incredibly entrepreneurial. I felt that UCSB CS is not only high-quality but also a fun place to be.
Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your background?

A: I grew up in a small city in southern China. Then I moved to Beijing when pursuing my master degree and lived there most of my life. I started my Ph.D. in Virginia where I met my advisor, then we moved to California in 2013, and finally I managed to obtain my Ph.D. degree at UT Austin in 2018.

Q: Tell us about your research?

A: My main research area is programming languages, in particular, in program synthesis and verification. I enjoy using rigorous logical reasoning to verify and ensure the robustness of existing systems, as well as synthesize complex programs based on formal (e.g., logical formulas) or informal specifications. One compelling domain I have been exploring is program synthesis for data science. On the one hand, AI and deep learning techniques are revolutionizing our society. On the other hand, most of data scientists still spend more than 80% of their time doing tedious and repetitive tasks such as data cleaning, transformation, and visualization. The Neo framework, which is a general-purpose synthesizer that I have been maintaining, can automate those tasks using informal specifications that are easy to specify by the users, including input-output examples, natural language, and demonstration.

Q: Are there any memorable moments in your academic career so far?

A: There are so many memorable moments. In 2012, I met my advisor Isil, who is also one of my best friends in my academic career. In 2014, I married my wife Lijuan, who has been supportive throughout my Ph.D. In 2016, my papers had five rejections streak and I learned to keep smiling when life was tough. 2018 was a fruitful year: I got my academic job at UCSB, first best paper award at PLDI, and most importantly, my baby boy Byron.

Q: Why UCSB? What’s your first impression of this campus and the department?

A: The UCSB campus is the most beautiful one that I have visited and you can literally walk from the Computer Science department to the beach within a few minutes. Beside my main research (PL), I also do interdisciplinary research on security, software engineering, and machine learning. Not surprisingly, in the Computer Science department, you can find the best researchers in those areas. In the meantime, I was amazed by the collaborative atmosphere among the faculty members at UCSB and there are so many interdisciplinary opportunities I can explore in the near future.

Q: What do you do in your spare time?

A: Soccer is my favorite sport and I have been playing it since middle school. Nowadays I still work out regularly, and I enjoy swimming and running every week. This summer I will attend the Road Ragnar event and we will run from the border of Canada to Seattle within three days!

Q: Do you like Santa Barbara so far?

A: Absolutely. I love seafood and beach, and Santa Barbara has both of them! What impressed me the most is the people in Santa Barbara. Everyone seems to be extremely happy and friendly.
New Faculty:

Yekaterina “Kate” Kharitonova

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your background?

I received my B.S. in Computer Science from the University of Hawaii-Hilo, followed by a Ph.D. in Computer Science from the University of Arizona. I spent two years as a visiting professor at Harvey Mudd College before joining UCSB in 2018.

Q: Tell us about your research.

Prior to joining UCSB, my research was in Computer Vision and Machine Learning, specifically focusing on educational technologies. Now that I am on the teaching track, my primary interests lie in integrating effective teaching practices and tools into the curriculum, developing the Data Science program, and introducing students to open source software and good software development practices. I am also passionate about supporting and empowering students, and I look forward to creating projects that benefit them.

Q: What are the courses that you are going to teach in Fall and the upcoming quarters?

A: This Fall, I will be teaching the Data Science Foundations course (currently, INT 5), which I developed at UCSB last year. It will also be my first time teaching CS 8: Introduction to Computer Science (in Python). In the Winter, I will again teach CS 16: Problem Solving with Computers I (in C++). Spring brings an exciting opportunity to team-teach an intermediate Data Science course (currently, INT 15), which I co-created this Spring with my colleague from the PSTAT department, Alexander Franks.

Q: Why UCSB? What’s your first impression of this campus and the department?

I chose UCSB because of my wonderful interactions with people: I really enjoyed talking with students, and I loved how welcoming, respectful, and supportive everyone was. I really value our department’s focus on undergraduate education and its willingness to bring positive changes to the curriculum. UCSB has a wonderful teaching-track team, and my discussions with Phil, Diba, and Richert were really exciting because of the potential impact our work can have on the department and the campus. Having such a positive and encouraging community and mentors who are dedicated to my growth and success is what convinced me that UCSB is the right place for me.

Q: What do you do in your spare time?

I have not had much "spare time" in my first year as a UCSB professor. However, whenever I’m not creating new course materials or preparing lectures, I like to read and listen to podcasts. I also practice yoga and love to dance and hula-hoop. I’m hoping to finish building a classical guitar, so that I can start learning how to play it. As an avid hiker and a backpacker, I’m really looking forward to traveling and exploring new trails.

Q: Do you like Santa Barbara so far?

Santa Barbara is a beautiful place with lovely sunsets. I love the nature and our proximity to the ocean. Seeing students sunbathing on the lawns on campus reminds me of my undergrad time in Hawaii. I recently started riding my bike and taking the Obern trail to campus feels like riding in the backcountry (I also love the really awesome weather that makes these rides such a pleasant experience). I look forward to exploring the city and adding more things-to-do to my list that currently includes farmers markets and the downtown Art Walk on the weekends.
CS Summit 2018: A Conversation about Data Science

CS Summit at UCSB’s Department of Computer Science was held on Friday, 03/16/18, at the Corwin Pavilion. This year’s event included breakfast with industry and networking; undergraduate capstone presentations; lunch with poster session and networking; graduate student distinguished lectures; a distinguished lecture, and a fireside chat with Dr. David Culler.

The Distinguished Lecture, titled “Networked Systems Design for Sustainability in the Built Environment”, was delivered by David Culler from UC Berkeley. In this talk, Dr. Culler drew the connection between his system research and sustainability and outlined the challenges in the area of interdisciplinary data science. Specifically, Dr. Culler described Brick, a system that combines entities and relations about building sensors, and how it may help conserve energy. The talk was followed by a fireside chat between Dr. Culler and Dr. Rachel Lin, where Dr. Culler recounted his memories of UCSB, and how the Computer Science Research at UCSB was established by Dr. Glen Culler.

David Culler is the Friesen Professor of Computer Science and has been a member of UC Berkeley’s EECS faculty since 1989. His research addresses the extremes of networked systems. His early work on high-performance clusters, including Berkeley Network of Workstation (NOW) Project and PlanetLab, laid foundations for today’s cloud. His research on embedded wireless sensor networks, including the Berkeley Motes, TinyOS, and 6LoWPAN, shaped the Internet of Things. He is currently focused on creating robust, secure network systems infrastructure for cyberphysical systems and its data analytics, including energy efficient buildings, smart grids, and sustainable transportation. David won the Okawa Prize in 2013 and is a member of the National Academy of Engineering, an ACM Fellow, and an IEEE Fellow. He was named one of Scientific American’s Top 50 Researchers and the creator of one of MIT’s Technology Review’s “10 Technologies that Will Change the World.”

The recorded CS Summit 2018 video can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AsQZEqmdi0

CS Summit 2019 was held Wednesday, March 13, 2019.

Video can be viewed at: https://youtu.be/8Zm0Nin32YA
On June 15th, 2018, the Department held its first End of the Year Awards Ceremony. We celebrated the wonderful accomplishments of our students, staff, and faculty acknowledging honor students, staff and faculty who have received campus or external awards throughout the academic year. Highlights included new awards to Graduate and Undergraduate students, as well as our very first Distinguished Alumnus awards for undergraduate and graduate alumni.

The Distinguished Alumnus awards went to Randy Modos - Class of ’02, who is now the president and founder of PayJunction, a company that processes over 4 billion dollars of payments annually, and to Prof. Gustavo Alonso, class of ’94, who is now a Professor of Computer Science at ETH Zürich, widely recognized for his work on systems, and fellow of the ACM and of the IEEE.

The End of the Year Awards Ceremony (and the following reception) was a great success, and will return in 2019.
Faculty
Awards & Honors

Elizabeth Belding
ACM SIGMOBILE Test of Time Award
N2Women Stars in Networking & Communication Award

Tobias Hollerer
Early Innovator Award at IEEE ISWC/Ubicomp Joint Conference

Rachel Lin
Best Paper Award at Eurocrypt

Diba Mirza
Northrup Grumman Excellence in Teaching Award

William Wang
Adobe Faculty Research Award
IBM Faculty Award

Giovanni Vigna
IEEE Fellow

Rich Wolski
Duval Family Presidential Chair in Energy Efficiency

Linda Petzold
Mehrabian Endowed Chair in College of Engineering
Ph.D. students Victory Zakhary and Cetin Sahin, and Profs. Amr El Abbadi, Rachel Lin and Stefano Tessaro
Best Demo at the International Conference on Extending Database Technology

Ph.D. students Victor Zakhary, Theodore Georgiou, Cetin Sahin and Prof. Amr El Abbadi
2nd Best Vision Award at the International Conference on Advances in Geographic Information Systems (SIGSPATIAL)

Students Joseph McMahan, Michael Christensen, Lawton Nichols, Jared Roesch, Sung-Yee Guo and Profs. Hardekopf and Sherwood
IEEE Micro “Top Pick” Award

Dr. John O’Donovan
GLOBECOM 2017 Best Paper Award

Ph.D. student Weilong Cui and Prof. Tim Sherwood
IEEE Micro “Top Pick” Award
Distinguished Graduate Lecturers
(presented at summit.cs)

1st Place - Yu Su
Title: Bridging the Gap Between Human and Data
AI Advisor: Xifeng Yan

2nd Place - Jedrzej Kozerawski
Title: What does “similar” mean?
Advisors: Matthew Turk & Tobias Hollerer

3rd Place - Neeraj Kumar
Title: Geometric Shortest Paths
Advisor: Subhash Suri

Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award
(presented at award ceremony)

Mohammad Amiri
Sourav Medya
William Eiers

Outstanding Publication Award
(presented at award ceremony)

Binyi Chen
Paper Title: SCRYPT IS MAXIMALLY MEMORY HARD
Publication Venue: EUROCRYPT’17
Co-Authors: Joel Alwen, Krzysztof Pietrzak, Leonid Reyzin and Stefano Tessaro

ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on scrypt, a simple candidate MHF designed by Percival, and described in RFC 7914. It has been used within a number of cryptocurrencies (e.g., Litecoin and Dogecoin) and has been an inspiration for Argon2d, one of the winners of the recent password-hashing competition. Despite its popularity, no rigorous lower bounds on its memory complexity are known. We prove that scrypt is optimally memory-hard, i.e., its cumulative memory complexity (cmc) in the parallel random oracle model is \( \Omega(n2w) \), where \( w \) and \( n \) are the output length and number of invocations of the underlying hash function, respectively. High cmc is a strong security target for MHFs introduced by Alwen and Serbinenko (STOC n’15) which implies high memory cost even for adversaries who can amortize the cost over many evaluations and evaluate the underlying hash functions many times in parallel.

Our proof is the first showing optimal memory-hardness for any MHF. Our result improves both quantitatively and qualitatively upon the recent work by Alwen et al. (EUROCRYPT ’16) who proved a weaker lower bound of \( \Omega(n2w/\log2 n) \) for a restricted class of adversaries.
Outstanding Dissertation Award

Faisal Nawab

Dissertation Title: Large scale data management and analysis in cloud computing environments
Advisors: Divyakant Agrawal and Amr El Abbadi
Prof. Nawab is currently an assistant Professor at UC Santa Cruz in the Department of Computer Science. His research lies at the intersection of Big Data Management and distributed Cloud Computing Systems. Specifically, he works on data management systems that accelerate and support data science and global connectivity, especially in the context of autonomous, mobile applications and the Internet of Things.

Outstanding Graduate Student Award

Veronika Strnadova-Neeley

Veronika received her BS in Applied Mathematics (summa cum laude) in 2010 from the University of New Mexico. She is a member of the Combinatorial Scientific Computing Laboratory at UCSB, where her research has focused on clustering and ranking of large-scale data. Her genomic clustering algorithms were part of the 2015 publication of the “grand challenge” genome of Wheat. Veronika was a 2015 MIT EE/CS "Rising Star." She held numerous roles in student leadership UCSB, including as co-president of WiCS. She has also played soccer both for the UNM Division I women’s team and for the Czech Republic women's national team. Veronika defended he PhD thesis in May 2018, and will join the Gianforte School of Computing at Montana State University as an Assistant Professor in August.

Distinction in the Major

Krassi Djonev, Jimmy Le, Caitlin Scarberry, Davina Zamazadeh

(left to right)

Capstone (presented at summit.cs)

1st Place
Stage Presence

Ryan Allen. Isaih Egan, Zach Feinn, Ryan Kemper, Josue Montenegro

Project Overview: Stage Presence is the first choice solution for people of all backgrounds who want to deliver flawless and powerful presentations.
Mentors: Nicolay Avrionov, Christfried Focke, Niles Mishra, John Spann
Partner: LogMeIn
Schrute Farms
Names: Michael Caccamo, Yuki Mano, Kunal Naik, Jonathan Segovia, Tristan Starck
Project Overview: Virual Assistant that will allow customers to set up appointments over the phone without actually needing to talk to anyone, thus allowing small businesses to streamline their appointment process.
Mentors: Mike Weaver & Peter Wilson
Partner: Invoca

Not Our (Seg) Fault
Names: William Bennett, Ashlynn Cardoso, Clara Frausto, Caitlin Scarberry, Alex Wein
Project Overview: Keyboard biometric system for authentication.
Mentors: Alex Harrell & Renato Untalan
Partner: Novacoast

Outstanding Undergraduate Research Awards
Andy Rosales-Elias & Thomas Schibler

COE Outstanding CS Senior Award
Davina Zamanzadeh

Outstanding Mentors of the Year
Steven Fields, Sean Shelton, Shreyas Canchi Radhakrishna, Sayali Kakade

CS Students of the Year
Sierra Schwellenbach & Shreyas Canchi Radhakrishna
Congratulations to Linda Petzold, professor in the Computer Science and Mechanical Engineering Departments in the UC Santa Barbara College of Engineering, who in November received the 2018 IEEE Computer Society Sidney Fernbach Award.

Established in 1992 in memory of high-performance computing pioneer Sidney Fernbach, this award is one of the IEEE Computer Society’s most prestigious, recognizing outstanding contributions in using innovative approaches in the application of high-performance computers. The IEEE cited Petzold for her “pioneering contributions to numerical methods and software for differential-algebraic systems and for discrete stochastic simulation.”

Petzold’s recent research has focused on modeling, simulation, and analysis of multiscale systems in materials, biology, and medicine. She is best known for her pioneering work on the numerical solution of differential algebraic equations (DAEs). DAEs arise in the simulation of physical systems that involve nonlinear constraints, such as mechanical systems, electrical networks, power systems, the flow of incompressible fluids, and many others.

Differential equations, which mathematically describe movement and interaction, are often applied to aggregates of things. “A baseball moving through space, for instance, is made up of huge numbers of molecules that, together, exhibit coherent movement. Newton’s laws of motion, which comprise differential equations, very accurately describe that,” Petzold explains. “But at smaller scales, like the scale of cells in biology, there are far fewer molecules, and some of them are present in very small quantities. Sometimes, these molecules are involved in making key decisions, so where they are and what they’re doing can have a big impact.”
To capture some cellular processes, it is necessary to simulate them on a much finer, molecule-by-molecule, scale, than is possible with differential equations."

Petzold’s impact has been enhanced by the fact that she develops not only theory for the numerical solution of differential-algebraic equations and for discrete stochastic simulation, but also the software tools that enable its use in computer simulation. She created the DASSL software, which stands for “Differential Algebraic System Solver Sandia Livermore,” at Sandia National Labs shortly after earning her PhD. She also developed its successor, DASPK, for the numerical solution of large-scale DAE systems. Both software systems are widely used throughout science, engineering, and technology. She and her UCSB PhD students and postdocs in the Computational Science and Engineering Research Group developed, in collaboration with Professor Chandra Krintz of the Computer Science Department, a cloud-based development environment called StochSS (Stochastic Simulation Service), for modeling and simulating biological processes.

Being recognized both for her theoretical work and software development, she says, is what makes the Fernbach Award so special. “This award is from the computational-science community. It’s my home community, the area in which my PhD work was done,” she says. “And it recognizes my passion for developing infrastructure [software].”

In university settings, she explains, researchers tend to be incentivized more strongly to write papers than to take an idea from concept to impact. Papers are usually recognized more than software, whereas the software, which is based on the computational mathematics introduced in the papers, usually has more impact. “Software contributions are not always recognized, although they require a tremendous amount of both work and expertise. I appreciate that this award recognizes both my computational-mathematics research and the software based on that research which enables it to have an impact in science and engineering.”

Petzold is currently the Mehrabian Distinguished Professor in the Departments of Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science, and director of the Computational Science and Engineering Graduate Emphasis at UC Santa Barbara. She is a member of the US National Academy of Engineering and a Fellow of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), the Society for Industrial and Applied Mechanics (SIAM), and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Named the UCSB Faculty Research Lecturer for 2011, Petzold was awarded the SIAM/ACM Prize for Computational Science and Engineering in 2013, received an Honorary Doctorate from Uppsala University in 2015, and was awarded the SIAM Prize for Distinguished Service in 2016.

The Sidney Fernbach award was presented to Petzold at the 2018 International Conference for High Performance Computing, Networking, Storage, and Analysis (SC18) Conference in Dallas, Texas, on November 13, 2018.