



This site is best viewed on a desktop.

Fiona Anting Tan

Nationality:

Singapore

Faculty and Department:

Institute Of Data Science

Year of Study:

2

Undergraduate University:

The London School of Economics and Political Science

Why did you choose to do a PhD?

Back when I was doing data science at a private firm, I knew I loved the subject and wanted to further my education in this topic. My company gave me many opportunities to work on different types of data science projects, and I even had the chance to work overseas in Shanghai for a few months. Nevertheless, there were some research ideas I have that were not directly relevant to the bottom line, and thus, would not become the priority of our work. I understood the only chance for me to really deep dive into data science would be to pursue a PhD to explore my own ideas with the right environment, support and resources in an academic or research institution.

Why did you choose to do graduate education at NUS? If you received offers from other universities, why did you pick NUS?

- NUS was one of the few top universities to have a department dedicated to data science, and thus, I naturally applied for the PhD position at Institute of Data Science.
- As data science is quite interdisciplinary by nature, being a fusion of math/sta

How does graduate school compare to your undergraduate experience?

- My graduate life occurred largely during the pandemic, which meant I had a lot of remote learning and online discussions. But I believe this is unique to the pandemic.
- My graduate life, compared to undergraduate, also felt like I had a lot more freed

Briefly share about your research or thesis (i.e. dissertation topic for Masters by Coursework students).

My research focus is on causal relation extraction from text using natural language processing. I believe it is important to be able to understand causal meaning in text, as this is fundamental to understanding concepts or learning ideas. For example, extracting cause-effect agents in documents could be important for further downstream tasks like summarization or question-answering.

What impact do you hope to have with your research?

I hope to apply my solutions for causal claim extraction on real-life applications. A potential use case would be when one wishes to crawl large amounts of news articles to understand the causes of stock price changes in order to make investment decisions, or in the topic of bioinformatics, when literature-based search helps to expose unknown causal links between chemicals/diseases for drug discovery.

If you have won any academic prize/competition or been invited to speak at an international conference—share what it is, its significance, and how you worked towards achieving it.

I spoke in August 2021 at CASE workshop of ACL-IJCNLP to present our paper and methods on the event coreference identification task, where we achieved 1st/2nd place for the subtask. We achieved

this by analyzing previous researchers' work, reinventing our own solution, and repeatedly experimenting.

Share something fun from your graduate journey at NUS.

I don't have anything particularly fun to mention. But maybe a shoutout to the tea sessions (named T-Connexion) run by the ISEP team, where seniors and faculty staff can share their thoughts if you have any questions. I find them very helpful when I am in doubt.

Briefly share a highlight from your graduate school journey.

A highlight for PhD life is probably when results go your way as hypothesized, and you could go ahead and write your ideas and paper!

Share a challenge you faced in graduate school and how you overcame it.

The major challenge of any PhD student is to find a compatible supervisor that would help you along your journey. I did not enter the programme with a fixed supervisor, which meant I had to actively seek out potential supervisors within a short time frame (6 months). Thankfully, I was under the ISEP programme that allowed us to do lab rotations to familiarise ourselves with different supervisors and lab environments. I did not end up with either supervisors of my rotations, but I believe the experiences help me realise the type of environment I work best in. This guided me better when I subsequently sought out for my current supervisor and when we sit down to set our expectations together. I am very thankful to have found Prof Ng to guide and inspire me thus far in my PhD journey.

Share something about campus life at NUS that new students would be interested to hear about.

I used to go to NUS High and so as students, we always hung out at UTown, which is fun because it has so many study areas and food options. During my PhD, I also stayed at UTown for a few weeks (before I left due to personal reasons), but I did meet very friendly housemates and my room was very conducive for studying.

Do you have any interesting personal stories to share? For example, about your journey to get into graduate school, personal hobbies/interests.

Outside of school, I am actively participating in women-empowerment societies like WomenWhoCode/ TechLadies/ SheLovesData.

What message would you like to give to students interested in graduate studies in NUS?

The amount of work you put in will show eventually.

NUS Graduate School (NUSGS)

 University Hall, Tan Chin Tuan Wing Level 05, #05-03
21 Lower Kent Ridge Road
Singapore 119077
 nusgsenquiry@nus.edu.sg

