



# *Student Reflections*

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**A glimpse into our stories  
and experiences**

An excerpt from the 2019-20  
Tech4Good Lab annual report

## DISHA MEVADA

**“Looking back, I can easily say that I would not be where I am today without Tech4Good and the teamwork skills I learned....”**

I had always heard about the importance of teamwork and collaboration, but this year was the first time that I truly understood the power behind it. The world has faced many challenges this year and I believe that teamwork has been one of the main reasons we have been able to tackle the obstacles at hand. The same can be said for Tech4Good. As a web developer on the UI team, when I heard that spring quarter was going to



be completely virtual, I was worried that we wouldn't be able to accomplish as much as we normally do during our in person work sessions. However, quite the opposite occurred. My team and I had multiple online check ins throughout the weeks and by the end of the quarter, we developed 2 new pages for the lab's website. These teamwork skills that I picked up from Tech4Good have helped me in many areas of my life, especially my career. I am an aspiring software engineer and this summer I got the chance to intern as one. The main reason I was able to succeed in my internship is because had already acquired the expertise needed to work in a team through Tech4Good, something that isn't taught in classes.

Looking back, I can easily say that I would not be where I am today without Tech4Good and the important teamwork skills I learned from it.

## TUCKER FISH

I'd spent much of my college career living in a constant state of stress. I had to be the best student getting the best grades. I was always the one staying up late and getting up early to study and work on assignments. I considered socializing unproductive, taking breaks counterintuitive. Because of that, I wasn't connecting well with those I most cared about. With only my fears to keep me company, this lifestyle began to eat away at me. It wasn't until I began having shortness of breath and panic attacks that I knew something had to change. I was skeptical of the lab when I first joined. The only time I came close to speaking with a professor was as a fly on the wall during office hours. After I showed interest in the lab, David was the one who called me. Our conversation was more about passions and goals rather than experience. With him, humanity followed. Before

I knew it, I was a part of something bigger than myself, a community. I could be vulnerable when finding limitations and I was surrounded with people determined to help. Learning something new and growing with challenge was common. The things that would

**“The answer was easy, it's the people that make it work....”**

cause me stress in the past began to motivate me. When I interviewed for my first internship, I almost exclusively talked about my work on the Relate platform. When I was asked more about the lab, they were surprised something like it existed. The answer was easy, it's the people that make it work.

## TIM NGUYEN



1. One of my favorite memories in Tech4Good this past year happened over Spring Quarter. Because we were amidst a pandemic, UC Santa Cruz moved all events online, and it was the first time I've led a team remotely. My birthday fell on a Friday, which coincidentally was also when I met with my team. As I was closing out my last lab session of the day, just about ready to head out, my web development team surprised me by singing "Happy Birthday"! Honestly, it made my entire day and helped remind me how unique our lab truly is and how much everybody cares about the well-being and success of everyone else.

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2. Being a part of the Tech4Good Lab family means being surrounded by a community of incredibly diverse, talented, and supportive researchers, designers, and developers who genuinely encourage you to become the best version of yourself that you can be and aspire toward your very own unique career goals.

3. One of the best things that I've probably learned in Tech4Good is the importance of patience and communication. In this lab, you're able to collaborate with people from all different educational backgrounds and experiences, so it really encourages you to communicate your ideas effectively and consider the perspective that others are coming from.

4. As a team lead, one of the most challenging things I've had to face was leading a team during the COVID-19 pandemic and national riots against police brutality and racial inequality. Because all of our work was suddenly remote, I had to figure out the best way to build community within my team, while also acknowledging (and holding space for) everything else happening in the world. As a team lead, you are responsible for being there for your team when they need it the most, so it was definitely a very difficult environment for me to learn to navigate through.

**“I learned so many things from conducting user studies to researching a unique product focusing on multi-bot interactions....”**



## JASON CHAN

I started my college career on a rocky start, exploring endless paths in the pursuit of the “ideal job”. No matter how many paths I traversed, one thing always stayed consistent in my life - art. Whether it was painting with friends in the dorms, dancing with my team, or writing poetry for school publications, art helped me stay grounded. This pattern that began to emerge, sparked my interest in pursuing a profession that involved art.

It wasn't until junior year, when I questioned what I really wanted to do in the future and struggled a lot with imposter syndrome, that I ultimately chose a career in product design. I relentlessly studied and watched countless videos, but nothing amounted to having actual work/lab experience. That's why I am so grateful to have joined the Tech4Good lab in my senior year. When David introduced me to the lab, I finally felt the imposter syndrome wear away. I learned so many things from conducting user studies to researching a

unique product focusing on multi-bot interactions. The lessons carried over directly when I was building my portfolio and in my present work at several startups. I'm extremely fortunate to have been able to work in the lab. I truly wish I knew about this amazing opportunity earlier! This lab provided the springboard for me to propel my career in product design and network with some wonderful people.

As I have graduated when the state of the world is, for a lack of better words, in shambles, I am safely quarantining at my home. Besides working at several startups, I continue to network with industry leaders and take dance breaks on the side. I'm always looking for the next opportunity in my career. But for now, watch me research, design, and animate for the future.

## NEHA CHAWLA

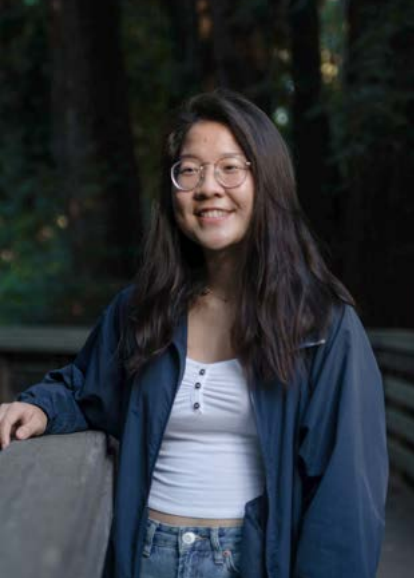
Being part of the Tech4Good family has helped me shape my future career path so much more than I realized it would. As part of the Deep Learning team, I've been able to challenge myself in new ways with the perfect ratio of guidance and independence/collaboration on lab projects. This opportunity to explore AI/Machine Learning has convinced me to pursue a career in the field after graduating and I'm very grateful to the Tech4Good Lab for helping me find something I love!





**“You can’t do it all alone--its when you work together that you can accomplish so much more...”**

## LILY LEE



Being in the Tech4Good Lab is an amazing opportunity because David gives you the space to learn new things--whether that's getting into design, dev, or research. This summer, I was fortunate enough to work as a Fellow. I was able to work on cool projects such as designing a scheduling app, and a team bonding platform. Beyond working on projects, I was given the opportunity to lead a team--something that was way out of my comfort zone. I nervously took up the role, but what I learned from it was invaluable. Being a lead taught me to trust my team, have patience, and collaborate. Most of all, I learned that you can't do it all alone--its when you work together that you can accomplish so much more. The unique perspectives and ideas we each bring to the table are a strength. Big thanks to the Tech4Good family and David for allowing me to be apart of this experience. At the end of the day, it warms my heart that I was able to meet so many cool people in this lab. It's a reminder that we're in this together.

## JONATHAN XU

I came into Tech4Good looking for a place where I could learn more about which career path I wanted to take in the future. Although I had a vague plan of working as a software engineer in the future, I hadn't thought about what I specifically wanted to accomplish with my career. After being in the lab the last couple of weeks, I've already been able to meet so many inspiring individuals who have given me valuable advice for my career and shared about their own experiences as well. As a member of the Web Development Team, I got to contribute to projects that are focused on creating a positive change in society and that's motivated me to continue improving and learning new technical skills. Being in a team setting has also helped me become a better communicator and I feel more prepared to take on internships in the future.



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## SIMRAN GUNSI



**“Throughout my time in the lab, I can see the difference and feel the growth in my skills and passions...”**

I think Tech4Good is an amazing opportunity for students because the lab is focused on not just building products but individual growth. Throughout my time in the lab, I can see the difference and feel the growth in my skills and passions. The lab is full of so many amazing learning opportunities and driven hard-working people it's an amazing community and would recommend it anyone interested in learning and helping out in their community.

## WENWEN ZHANG

Before joining Tech4Good lab, I haven't cooperated with a large group of students in a project. This is really a new experience for me. I've learned a lot of practical things, not only technical skills but also social skills, which even laid the foundation for my future internship. My teammates are always willing to help, we do pair coding, debug, and share our experience, especially in this difficult year, we are required to work from home, and thus lose a lot of opportunities to socialize with others. Thanks to these work sessions, we can share what happened in recent days and listen to others.

**“I've learned a lot of practical things, not only technical skills but also social skills”**



## VINAY PRASAD



**“This lab has provided me an opportunity to expand on my career-related skills while working with a team, an experience which I believe is extremely valuable...”**

Coming into my first research opportunity, I did not know what to expect out of the Tech4Good family. I was met with so much support and care from team members, leads, and the entire lab. This lab has provided me an opportunity to expand on my career-related skills while working with a team, an experience which I believe is extremely valuable. I have been able to work on my development and communication skills while meeting new people. Even though the few quarters I have been with the Tech4Good Lab have been online, I have worked with a variety of people and have made new, valuable connections. I am proud of what I have built in my few quarters with the lab and hope to continue this development for years to come!

Thanks for this amazing opportunity!

## TAYLOR MCPHERSON

Being in the Tech4Good Lab family to me means that I always have a space I can go to (virtually, these days) where I am challenged to learn and create in new ways and be completely supported throughout the process. I get cheesy when I start to think about what the Lab means to me because it has without a doubt been the most fulfilling aspect of my college experience.

I joined the lab as a fresh transfer student looking for some meaning and community at UCSC. I found that and so much more. As a computer science major with a background in gender studies, I knew my big-picture goal was to get in tech for social good, but I wasn't sure how to exactly approach it. When I joined the lab, I was placed in a UX Research & Qualitative Analysis team. I was quickly stretched to apply my background



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knowledge in social science to user testing and interviews, and even became involved in helping write a research paper under my incredible grad-student lead, Veronica. This summer I worked in the Lab as a fellow. I not only continued in my UX Research team, but also joined a design team for the first time, which has been beyond rewarding. I expressed interest in design to David during our quarterly check-ins, and being put on the team this summer not only made me feel heard and supported by David and Lab leadership, but it also ended up revealing a new passion.

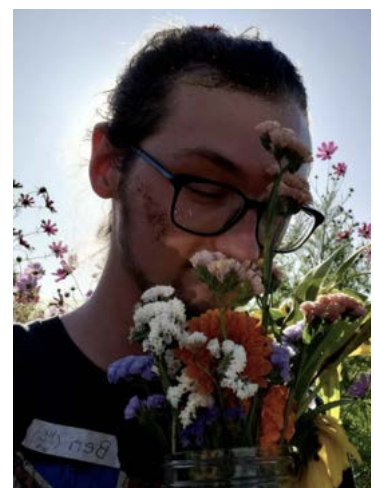
Sometimes it feels like I have learned more in the last 8 months I’ve been involved in the lab than the entire 4 years I’ve spent in undergrad combined. Everyday here brings new things to learn and problems to solve. I’m a newcomer to most of what I get involved in, and yet I always feel supported and capable of doing the work, which is so rare. I cannot thank David and the Tech4Good family enough for letting me be a part of it.

**“I learned that being open, candid, and true to myself made our teams stronger and more inventive.”**

This was a year of growth for me. My time at Tech4Good Lab helped me grow into professional life. I learned that being open, candid, and true to myself made our teams stronger and more inventive. That’s the first time I felt free to do that. Co-leading a team of developers this summer has given me the opportunity to create that same environment for others. Our unique experiences and backgrounds are a huge strength.

From the first day, Tech4Good was a rewarding experience because it asked me to expand my skill set and make important product decisions. I’ve learned the responsibility that comes with being a lead developer, and the values to develop for equity and social good.

## BEN PAULSEN





## MASON PIERCE

Over the last year, David has given me plenty of opportunities to grow as a leader and developer. One of my favorite growth experiences was when I was put in charge of completing a production version of Causeway to be used in David's class of over 100 students. The crazy thing was that we would be using an interface that I had built, following a process I had come up with, and the team I was leading had the responsibility of ensuring the project's success. The fact that David was willing to put that much trust in my abilities was exciting and it really felt like I was building something real. Since I also want to go into project management in

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the future, the opportunity to produce a significant product where I was able to handle most of the scoping and delegation of tasks on my own, was a hands-on experience that I don't think I could have gotten anywhere else at UCSC. It was experiences like this one that were key to landing an internship this summer as a frontend engineer at an AI startup. I can't wait to see what my 4th and final year in the lab will bring!

## JACK WANG

I am a rising fourth-year student at UC Santa Cruz. I have triple majors in Technology and Information Management, in Business Management Economics, and in Psychology. My short-term professional goal is to become a product manager at a tech firm; my medium-to-long-term professional goal is to create a startup and passionately build it to impact more people. I joined this lab to build on

**"I believe it is always more motivational to learn within a community than learning alone..."**

more technological skills. The lab has a strong foundation in web development, which is a very important skill to learn for my career development. The lab is also very friendly to people like me without much prior web development experience. In addition, I believe it is always more motivational to learn within a community than learning alone; after joining the lab for nearly two months, I do feel engaged and motivated.

## VERONICA RIVERA



**"Both participating in the workshop and attending the conference motivated me to continue pursuing my research interests..."**

In Fall 2019 I had a workshop paper accepted to the CSCW workshop on the future of work(places), and I had the opportunity to participate in the workshop and attend the CSCW conference in Austin, TX. This was my first time attending CSCW and participating in a conference workshop. During the workshop I was able to discuss many of the ideas related to my research on future of work and education such as "how might we pay on-demand workers to learn?" It was truly inspiring to be able to have these kinds of conversations with researchers and academics whose papers I have read and whose work I look up to. Both participating in the workshop and attending the conference motivated me to continue pursuing my research interests and engaging with the CSCW community.



## ELIZABETH DINH



**“joining Tech4Good was one of the best decisions that I have made in college because working on multiple aspects of projects has helped me learn what I want in a career.”**

Although I didn't have the smoothest college experience, I have grown a lot as a person and am still glad I chose to attend a four-year university. My first three years at UCSC, I was like most other college students: I had no idea what I wanted to do after graduation and dealt with imposter syndrome after seeing so many smart people at UCSC. Joining Tech4Good was one of the best decisions that I have made in college because working on multiple aspects of projects has helped me learn what I want in a career. Learning new technologies and meeting talented, kind people also made working in Tech4Good a wonderful experience.

After graduating summer quarter, I will take a break from the chaos that the pandemic has brought upon this country. During my break, I plan on volunteering for political campaigns to help increase voter turnout in swing states for the upcoming general election. As for my career, I am more flexible although I would like a web development or UX/UI design job. I acknowledge that it is difficult to land your foot in the door for a first job especially in this economic recession. Life is also unpredictable and sometimes things don't go exactly as planned.

## CHHAVI SINGAL

My first few computer science classes in college were far from what I expected - I felt like I was not learning enough about technology that I would use in industry. In an effort to learn more, I joined Tech4Good where I was able to learn how to contribute to an application and work as a part of a large team. The skills I developed extended to the rest of my activities and I learned to equate success with the completion of my goals, not by what others thought. This change in mindset, along with the new skills I gained, helped me overcome many obstacles. Each experience paved my way and prepared me for post-graduation plans: attending graduate school at CMU. While I came into college already set on becoming a software engineer, joining Tech4Good helped me find my passion for programming and leave college satisfied that I had gained enough experience and skills to solve real-world problems.



**“I felt like I was not learning enough about technology that I would use in industry. In an effort to learn more, I joined Tech4Good...”**

## JENNY NGUYEN



**“I got to learn more, grow as a developer, and use my code to help people!”**

During my Spring 2020 quarter with Tech4Good, I worked with Google Apps Scripts for the first time to develop scripts to improve the lab's qualitative analysis process. I was stretched at the time because I was learning about this new scripting platform on top of doing my upper-division coursework. After the initial learning curve, I appreciated being stretched outside of my comfort zone because I got to learn more, grow as a developer, and use my code to help people! I never would have worked with some of these technologies through my classes or personal projects, so I'm really thankful that I get to do so as a part of the Tech4Good Lab family.

## ASHLEY HII

This was my first year in the Tech4Good Lab and being here has given me so many opportunities to learn skills that I had been wanting to learn. In the fall, I was interested in exploring HCI and UX/UI design, but until I discovered this lab, I

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struggled to find classes that would help me achieve my goals, especially as an underclassmen. Over the course of this year, I have learned so many skills that I couldn't have learned in traditional lectures. I was able to develop skills in interaction design and user research by contributing to real-world projects. I am very grateful to be a part of the Tech4Good lab!

## KRISHNA PANDIAN

**“The Tech4Good lab provides an environment for students like me to engage with passionate individuals and gain experience...”**

My name is Krishna and I am currently an undergraduate computer engineering student at UC Santa Cruz. I joined the Tech4Good lab to gain exposure with software development for social good. Some of my long-term goals involve joining a company where I can continue to grow, take on new challenges, and contribute as much value as possible to my community. The Tech4Good lab provides an environment for students like me to engage with passionate individuals and gain experience with hands-on projects.

