

Douglas Chan

Current Area of Study: Masters in Educational Neuroscience – Harvard University

Undergrad

In my first year, I started out in the Integrated Sciences program and specialized to PNB going into second year. I had many incredible research opportunities under this program, and within my second and third year, I was conducting research in music cognition. It was great to have this experience, and through this program, I was able to sample a little bit of everything under research, which made it easier to narrow down my choices near the end of undergrad.

A big highlight of my undergrad was the ASF grant (now known as SIF) I received during my second year. I was working on a neuroscience project, because ***I wanted to see a change in the education system around me.*** I was lucky enough to propose a grant as a second-year student, and I walked through with them the changes that I thought would work for the better in the educational experience, and we gave it a go! This opportunity was definitely what set me on my current path.

Thode Maker Space

I had in my mind a space where different technologies from various fields, and students from different faculties could come in and collaborate on different projects. I wouldn't have known that this was something I liked to do, as in talking to profs and students, and figuring out how to make their educational system better; if it weren't for this first hand experience.

For the first 2 ½ years here, I was set on the path of med-school, especially from having parents that swayed me in this direction. After second year, from having the opportunity of working within education and technology systems, ***I realized that there were other avenues available for me,*** and with this, I tried to convince myself and others around me that this would be as much of a viable career compared to my previous plan.

Master's Program

Right now, I'm doing a Master's program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. My program is the Mind, Brain, and Education degree, aka educational neuroscience. The nice thing is that my program has a bit of freedom, so I'm also learning on areas of educational technology and innovation.

Coming from a program at Mac that was so heavily based on research, I realized that it's an interest of mine that is continually evolving. While I might not be studying the same things as I did in undergrad, the same skills are proving to be very useful as I move towards the "real world". In terms of a career, I really enjoy educational technology, so I can picture myself

creating a start-up in the future, but I definitely want to take the time to explore this area thoroughly.

To apply to this program, I wrote the GRE, which tested on verbal, writing, and quantitative. I also collected reference letters from my profs, and wrote a statement of purpose, which I believe was the most important component of my application. I don't consider myself as someone who had amazing grades, they were just okay. It was through the statement of purpose where I was given the chance to shine, and this is how you show them why you would want to be at their program above anything else.

Here, you're encouraged to be idealistic. There are so many crazy ideas floating out there, and this is the place where they can come to life. I really love how everyone is open to all ideas, and how cutting edge everything is! Even just walking into the MIT media lab, or Harvard Innovation Lab, it blows your mind. A good analogy I would use for my learning right now is basically drinking out of a firehose, because I'm always receiving so much information constantly. ***You can't believe how fast everything runs here, and it's amazing.***

Words of Advice

There's this one book that I read, by Cal Newport, and he runs a blog called study hacks, giving tips to students on how to study harder but smarter. He also gives a lot of good life advice. One thing he said that struck me was "No one is born with a passion, passion is cultivated." I think right now, this is the closest thing that I've ever come to in terms of true passion. I would have never ended up here if it weren't for me exploring in different areas, testing my strengths and weaknesses, and observing how the world responded to my abilities. You should never expect opportunities to magically come to you, because ***if you desire it enough, you'll work for it that much.*** I'm much happier now than the alternate universe where I would be in or re-applying to med school, or who knows what!