

UCTS Fellowship Reflection Introduction

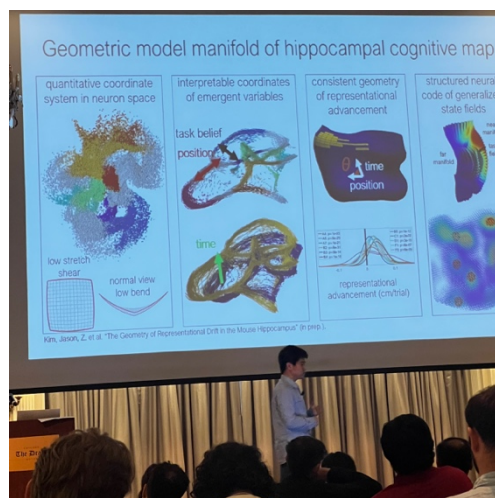
I'm Anbo Chen, a 4th-year medical student, and this summer I had the incredible opportunity to participate in the UCTS fellowship at the University of Chicago (UChicago), where I conducted research in biophysics, specifically focusing on modeling the immune system in Professor Elizabeth Jerison's lab. Whether you're interested in the UCTS program, considering research abroad, or just curious about my experience, I hope this reflection offers some useful insights!



Observations

The Intellectual Hub

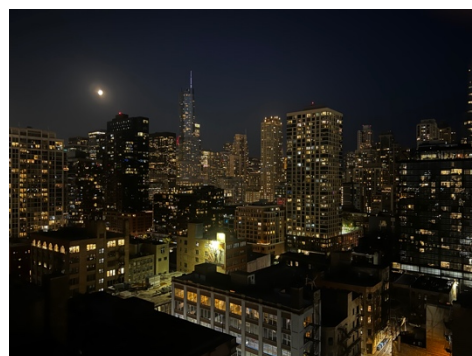
My time at the University of Chicago felt like being at the center of a global intellectual community. It was more than just lab work; it was about the constant flow of ideas. I was amazed by the sheer number of academic talks and conferences held weekly, featuring experts from fields ranging from biology and physics to economics. This environment, buzzing with new research and thought-provoking discussions, truly sets UChicago apart. What was even better was the casual atmosphere, often fueled by free coffee and food, which made networking feel natural and effortless. I found myself easily striking up conversations with leading professors and senior researchers, gaining valuable insights that went beyond my specific project. This culture of open exchange and collaborative spirit made me realize the importance of surrounding myself with a community that's always pushing the boundaries of knowledge.



NITMB conference: <https://www.nitmb.org/nitmb-mathbio-convergence-conference>

The Chicago Vibe

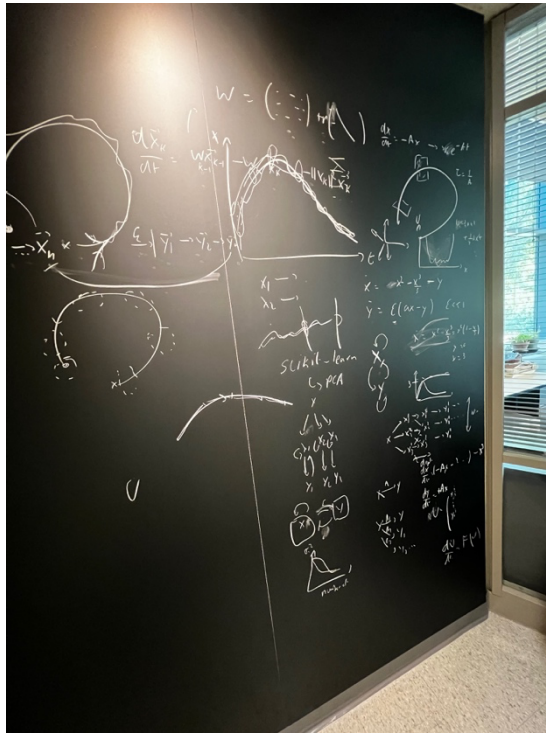
Living in Chicago was an experience in itself, a city of contrasts and vibrant energy. The urban landscape was a fascinating mix of architectural styles, from the classic Gothic buildings of the university to the sleek, modern skyscrapers downtown. My research project allowed me to see the world differently, just like how I saw the city. The dynamic, sometimes chaotic, nature of the city's events, like a boat tour on the Chicago River at night, mirrored the complex systems I was trying to model in the lab. The city's parks, like the vast, green spaces perfect for a quiet walk, offered a welcome break from the intense academic schedule. I loved how the city balanced its intellectual rigor with opportunities for relaxation and exploration.



Challenges

Bridging Disciplines

One of my biggest challenges was bridging the gap between my medical background and the quantitative, modeling-heavy work in the biophysics lab. I often felt like I was speaking a different language than my peers, who came from diverse fields like physics and statistics. This experience taught me the value of interdisciplinary collaboration and that it's okay to feel out of your depth—that's often where the most significant learning happens.



The Race Against Time

A six-week fellowship flies by, and I was constantly worried about not producing tangible results. The nature of research is that breakthroughs don't happen overnight, and I had to adjust my expectations. Instead of focusing solely on a final output, I learned to value the process itself: the troubleshooting, the long hours coding, and the small victories along the way. I realized the true goal was to immerse myself in the scientific process and gain hands-on experience. It was reassuring to know that even after the program ended, I could continue to contribute to the project remotely, ensuring my work would have a lasting impact.

What I Gained from This Experience

Looking back, I'm grateful for several aspects of my fellowship that made the experience especially meaningful:

- **Proactive Planning:** Preparing background readings and thinking ahead about computational tasks gave me a smoother transition into the lab and helped me make the most of my time there.
- **Embracing Social Opportunities:** I made a conscious effort to balance research with social experiences—exploring Chicago with peers, joining informal gatherings, and spending time with colleagues outside the lab. These moments helped me build friendships that were just as valuable as the academic growth.
- **Valuable Lessons from Conversations:** Some of the most impactful takeaways came from talking with MD/PhD students, professors, and clinicians. Hearing how they combine clinical practice with research opened my eyes to new possibilities. Their

experiences encouraged me to see an MD and a PhD not as separate paths, but as complementary ones—and they inspired me to consider pursuing both in the future.

Acknowledgment

I'm deeply grateful to **Professor Cheng Chin**, who masterminded the UCTS fellowship. His vision and tireless effort in building this program made this incredible experience possible for all of us. I also want to extend a huge thank you to my mentor, **Professor Elizabeth Jerison**, for her guidance and patience. She created a supportive environment that allowed me to grow as a researcher. Lastly, I'm thankful for my fellow UCTS participants and the NTU OIA for their invaluable support throughout this journey.

Contact Information

If you'd like to learn more about the program, my research, or my experience in Chicago, please feel free to reach out.

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Acknowledgement

Thank you for all the support from members in Jerison lab and the support from UCTS.



With Eric, Binaya and Serena