

Personal Statement to Students

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My father left Japan for America as a teenager, met my Mother at Los Angeles Community College in a ceramics class, married, and within a year was drafted into the United States Army. At the last minute he was switched from artillery training in Alaska to military photography in Hawaii, where I was born on May 7, 1970 for, I'm told, \$7.50.

My best friend growing up was Nye Liu. We mostly played with "Expert" Lego sets which included gears, pulleys, and pistons. We had a huge combined collection by the time we were 10, and our favorite challenge was the "all piecer," which required that we use every single Lego piece in a coherent way. Since we had lots of engine parts and wheels, we typically built massive vehicles with "Y-24" engines (as opposed to V-8's or straight-6's). Thus began my affinity for ambitious, complicated projects which involve the coordination of numerous and seemingly disparate pieces.

In my second semester at UC Berkeley I enrolled in two philosophy courses: "phenomenology" with Hubert Dreyfus, and "philosophy of mind" with John Searle. Both Searle and Dreyfus used ideas from philosophy to argue that computers could never be capable of human thought. I agreed, but thought that a computer simulation of the brain, while not itself thinking, could shed light on how thinking works. In fact, I thought that the philosophical ideas Searle and Dreyfus were using to argue *against* computational cognitive science could actually be used to *supplement* it. This led to many vigorous arguments, especially with Dreyfus. During one of these heated debates Dreyfus said, "you know, you really should study Husserl." He was right. Edmund Husserl had written over 40,000 pages of philosophy which, I came to realize, were remarkably relevant to what was being discovered about the brain. Thus began a huge, ambitious project—not unlike a Lego "all piecer"—which continues to this day: the integration of Husserlian philosophy and computational cognitive science.

My main hobby is photography. Both my father and grandfather were photographers, and my grandfather, William Reagh, is modestly well known for his efforts to document Los Angeles's downtown region between the 1950's and 1980's. His collection is now part of the California State library. I am currently doing my best to document the early days of UC Merced.

I am delighted to be a part of this campus. The interdisciplinary environment is an obvious fit for me, and the atmosphere—a bunch of visionaries right down the hall from one another—is amazing. Having been a part of the UC System for over ten years and having seen how rewarding a UC education can be, it is an honor to be involved in the development of a new UC in the Great Central Valley of California