­Submitted:

1 can of coconut milk, 4 tomatoes, 2 bags of frozen peas…

Sitting in the yellow of a dimly-lit kitchen, I can recall many evenings sitting by my Popo's side, translating the Indonesian dialect she spoke to English, as I jot down her grocery list for the week. I may not have realized it then, but this would be my very first experience employing the methods of a human-centered designer. For example, in order to create a grocery list my grandmother could still interpret, I would include little sketches beside each item I wrote down. Considering that my grandmother might want to make changes to the list later, I'd map out large, left-hand margins so the quantity of each item could be easily revised. These design choices I made arose from a deep empathy I developed with my grandmother, paired with the conscientious effort I made to understand her unique needs as a non-English speaking immigrant with just five years of schooling. Through the lens of a human-centered designer, a grocery list is an opportunity to use data to produce a visualization, one that fulfills a human need.

Technology is a powerful engine for bringing about innovative change in a multitude of contexts, from biomedical prosthetics, to the global environment, and especially within marginalized communities. Coming into university, I knew I was interested in technology, but I wasn't sure what I wanted to study. As part of the Interdisciplinary Honors Program, I delved into courses in linguistics, physiology, and sociology, while simultaneously taking a range of technical courses. However, it wasn't until HCDE 210 sophomore year that I finally felt like the intersection of my interest in technology had been bridged. Before HCDE 210, most of my experience consisted of design or programming projects where little time was spent considering the implications of what was being created. While I enjoyed the problem-solving process, I always felt that human aspects most fueled my curiosity. If I designed the world's most revolutionary robot, how would it be helpful? Who would it benefit? Would it do good? These were some of the questions I'd constantly reflect upon, and these were questions I felt challenged to confront throughout HCDE 210. While I initially didn't know if there was a place for my interests at UW, I found my niche in HCDE. I don't want to design without considering first, who or why. I want to engineer technologies that do good for a diverse world; this will be the focus of my studies in HCDE.

This past summer, I worked on a personal project. Frustrated by the abundance of conflicting information being communicated across news sources, I recognized a pressing need for responsible data science practice. Working with a dataset I collected on news-reading habits during COVID-19, I produced visualizations comparing accuracy and bias perceptions scaled by age and life change. Breaking down the statistical biases I uncovered, I developed a standard process anyone could follow when interpreting data referenced in the media. While Statifact is still a work in progress, my hope is that it will one day become a database where potential biases are instantaneously identified from real-time news statistics. Systems of equity are built when people have access to good information. Good information results from data being used to reveal truth rather than to conform to a narrative. This is why I hope to design more educational tools with data to cultivate a better-informed public---through the HCDE Data Science track, I will be empowered with skills to do so.

This fall, I began research with the Svoboda Diaries Project. My team's work involves applying NLP methods to render social networks. These networks are then analyzed to reveal novel insights on intercommunal relationships, such as those pertaining to race and slavery in late Ottoman Baghdad. Aside from being part of a heterogeneous team, my favorite part of research has been seeing firsthand how technology can be used as a tool to better understand human life. My academic explorations and rich learning experiences prepare me well to succeed as an HCDE student, and my character of curiosity, resourcefulness, and selflessness make me a valuable addition to the HCDE community. I believe what truly sets me apart as a student is how I intend to use my HCDE degree beyond graduation, as I plan to pursue a JD. Along with designing data-driven tools for education, I want to mobilize data to support advocacy work for marginalized communities and to promote equity in the policy-making process. I hope my degree in HCDE will spur me on in consistently challenging the status quo and being of better service to the world.