


# Solaine Zhao

February 2020 - UCLA Fast Track Student of the Month



**Birthplace:**  
San Jose

**Hometown:**  
San Jose

**High School:**  
Leland High School

**Interests:**  
Arts and humanities, music, writing, painting, drawing, crafts, and baking

### Where are you from?

I am from San Jose, CA., which is about an hour and a half from San Francisco. I attended Leland High School.

### What are some things you like?

I really like arts and humanities. I also enjoy music, writing, painting, drawing, crafts, baking. I like most kinds of music except country music. This



summer I began baking and I am now baking 2-3 times a week, but I also think I should cut down on baking though because it is not healthy (it is a lot of sugar and butter - my family probably consumes a few pounds of butter each week as a result of all the baking).

### Why are you attending UCLA?

Would you believe me if I said it was the vibe? I was really excited to be accepted into the engineering program, especially since I was invited to Fast Track. I also wanted to live in another city which wasn't super far away from the bay, but not super close either, preferably with nice weather. Lots of my friends were also moving to SoCal, and the in-state tuition was a bonus too. I guess I was really set on going to a UC, and UCLA seemed like the best choice for me.

### **What do you like doing at UCLA?**

Honestly, I regret my first 2 quarters because I didn't really do much. I do like the food, BPlate in particular. I like to try new things too - for example, I joined a dance team. It is nice that it is so easy to try new things, but I guess that is one of the good things about having lots of people - it gives me the ability to meet lots of people with a wide variety of interests.

### **What about Clubs?**

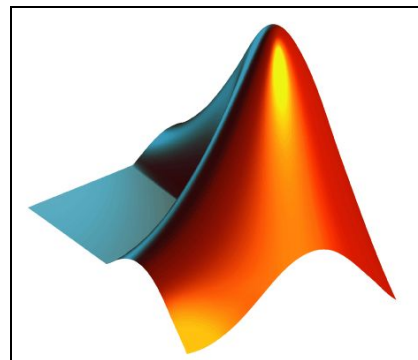
IEEE is the club that I got most involved with, and I am the publicity chair for the upcoming year. Being an officer has been cool because through this role I've gained a lot of experience with graphic design platforms such as Adobe, and now I have the motivation to sit down and learn it, and because it gives me the opportunity to meet other officers. I also participated in SMV (Super Mileage Vehicle) because one of my friends from high school convinced me to join, and I really liked the sustainability aspect, but I didn't end up doing much with it. I was also on a dance team for a quarter, but our showcase got cut off because of COVID and we had to perform in the parking lots which was a bummer.

### **How has it been, being on a big campus?**

Sometimes you feel small, and everything is moving around you, and if you don't take action, you get left behind. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by how massive UCLA is, which is why I want to find a smaller community where I feel comfortable. It was a bit weird coming from high school where my class was 400 people and I knew about 350 of them, whereas here there are thousands of people all milling around and even if I meet someone new, the chance of bumping into them is pretty low unless I have a class with them. Because of this, I feel like it is a bit difficult to make connections because it is hard to make lasting bonds.

### **What about your summer research experience?**

I thought my summer research was interesting. My research focused on using optimization to clean noisy or incomplete sets of data to clean or fill in the missing data. It was definitely different from what I expected because it was remote, but I still had a lot of fun learning new things, and meeting every week with my professor. My professor was very patient and supportive, and I learned a lot of new math tricks as well as how to use MATLAB. I am still working with the professor after SURP has officially ended, and we should soon start testing our approach on real life data sets.



### **What is your favorite aspect of the Fast Track program?**

I would definitely say it has to be the people I've met. The main group of people I got to know in my first year was through fast track, and I really appreciate how close the community is. All of the friendships that I made within the community have survived through quarantine because we took classes together in the spring, and we keep up with each other through the internet.



### **What about your career plans?**

That's still very up in the air. I don't feel like I have enough exposure to engineering to make a concrete choice. I really enjoy coding though, so I am looking into computer engineering. I will have to learn and try some more new things before I can answer this question.