Statement of Purpose
A Product Philosophy

Kylin Follenweider, March 2020

I want to build software that connects people. I want to create applications with user-interfaces that perfectly understand human communication and seamlessly remove barriers of technology to create real human connections.

I want to help build future technology where we use devices, like phones, computers and robots, to accelerate an international culture of accessibility and understanding so strong that anyone who connects can feel included, supported, and able to contribute. This is why I am so interested in studying Human-Computer Interaction and Design.

I'm a Creative Product Manager who is passionate about user experience. I believe that the way a product is supposed to work is less important than how the users expect it to work. I believe that you can build the coolest thing ever but if no one can figure out how to use it, no one will use it. I believe that if you do not understand your users or the problems you are trying to solve, you will fail even with the best product. I believe user feedback is the only way to validate that your solution is solving the problem you think you are solving. I believe that it is pointless to roll out a product if you are unable to measure how or or at least *if* people are using your product. And lastly, beware of solutions masquerading as problems, they almost always are edge cases.

 If accepted, I will likely keep being a software Product Manager, but a PM with a clearer vision of the problems I want to solve, the products I want to work on and a better understanding of my users.

 If accepted, I would likely shift the focus of my career to pursue interaction design research, utilizing my inner joy of data to help other people understand their devices and users better.

 If accepted, I plan to pursue my PHD in internationalization, language and speech technology.

 D, All of the above? Clearly, I want to learn, to be inspired, to discover and then decide any future pursuits. One thing that is unlikely is that I stray too far from UX and HCI.

 If I am not accepted? I will likely apply again next year.

My adventures in UX undoubtedly stem from working nine or so years in IT. Being more of a front-end software tech, I spent most of my time not so much fixing computers as learning the applications people used, listening to their problems, and teaching them about the device that

was now (and for some suddenly) central to their job. Early in my career, I found I could figure out the logic of a UI for most applications and I became fascinated with design, but at the time with more with the fact that anyone could do design.

While working in IT, I completed a BS in Visual Communications, with a focus on Graphic Design. Shortly after, I was introduced to ServiceNow, and particularly found the ease of working with the knowledge base and UI appealing. I was hired as a business analyst on the Customer Experience. I had a great mentor who pushed for better and better UX even at a time when the company was almost entirely engineering driven. My design degree helped me interact with our UI designer: I knew the lingo, was allowed to have opinions about colors, and pushed not just for pretty designs but for the end-to-end flow. Show me how someone is going to use it.

Over the next 3 years, I had the pleasure of watching ServiceNow grow both the design and UX research organizations. I took over as Product Owner of User Experience for our customer support portal. We had a design team working like another Agile sprint team, and completing designs a sprint before our dev team needed them, when the company announced a design studio acquisition. I had the opportunity to work with team in the US, England and India to release multiple iterations of our customer service portal and work directly with customer feedback to build a better and better experience. I worked directly with our first UX researcher, and now we have multiple teams of researchers.

Eventually, I had had enough of using our products, I wanted to help build them and I transitioned to Product Manager of the service portal product we were using to support our customers. I've worked on multiple mainly UI-heavy products, delivering improved experiences to many different personas. This has given me the pleasure of working with UX designers, UI and Interaction architects, developers and developer architects. However, some of my favorite times have been working with our User researchers to run focus groups and usability sessions.

The most amazing thing I did last year was take a river cruise from Moscow to St. Petersburg, Russia. I discovered the most amazing culture and great people, but what I fell in love with the most was the language. With help from Duolingo, YouTube, and a few other apps, I was able to interact enough in a week, that a store clerk mistakenly started speaking to me in Russian. I also helped another tourist use an ATM in Russian. It is amazing how people's demeanor changes ever so slightly if you are at least trying to speak their language, even a little.

Inspired by how much technology had improved my ability to connect in even such a short time, I began looking into language and technology upon my return. I took the Human-Computer Interaction for User Experience Design online short course through MITCSAIL. It was amazing and fueled my desire to continue in this realm of study. Each week, we covered a different module of HCI. I was particularly drawn to the Speech Recognition, Brain-Computer Interaction,

and Accessibility sections but no module was dull. I was also immediately able to apply some of the design framework and research methods on my current project.

Master of Human Computer Interaction and Design Program is the natural next step and the University of Irvine program is a great fit for my work and interests. I think it will help me grow, provide the tools to take me into the next step in my career and will strengthen my desire and my ability to build technology that connects people.

Please see my portfolio website: