

-Full name **Portia Cooper**

-Academic standing (first year, sophomore, junior, or senior) **I am a sophomore**

-Major(s) **Computer Science and Mathematics**

-Hometown **Tucson, Arizona**

-Hobbies/activities you enjoy doing outside academics
I love thrifting and hiking.

-Something interesting that people might not generally know about you (chess champion, amateur photographer, write comics, arm wrestling champion, for examples).
I just returned from a two-week seminar in Helsinki, Finland. While I was there, I took a sauna then jumped in a frigid lake. This is standard operating procedure in Finland. So I tried it. Good times.

-Why did you decide to attend the University of Arizona?
Two reasons: Great scholarships and dual-enrollment credit—I completed CSC 110, 120, 210, 144, 252 at Pima Community College during high school.

- Why did you select computer science as your major?
I have been coding since I was 12—I actually got my start at UArizona Girls Who Code. Now, I am the Lead Facilitator at the club.

-What have you enjoyed most about your experience at UA Computer Science?

Taking challenging classes and making friends. Also, Gould Simpson is a cool spot to hang out.

-What are your career goals?
Right now, I would love to get a PhD in CS.

-Tell us about your research experience at UA. How did you get the research position and what do you enjoy most about doing research? What challenges have you experienced while doing research?

I have been working on independent research with Dr. Mihai Surdeanu and Dr. Eduardo Blanco. My work focuses on creating neural classifiers robust against hate speech containing homoglyphs aka visually similar Unicode characters. Harvesting data designed to evade detection has been challenging, but also rewarding.

-You recently received some wonderful recognition (National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT) Aspirations in Computing Program (AiC) Collegiate Award). Tell us about NCWIT and what receiving this award means to you.

NCWIT is an organization that I have been involved with since high school. Their goal is to increase representation in computing. This is one of the first big awards that I have received for my research! I am thinking about using the funds to buy a nice PC, so that I can train models locally.

-What advice would you give to an incoming student at UA CS?

Start your programming assignments as soon as possible. And get to know your TAs.

-Is there anything else you would like viewers/the audience to know?

Keep coding 😊