June 13, 2018 – Recent doctoral graduate student Shimin Li shares his experiences earning his Ph.D. at Utah State University.

It is really a big surprise for me that Dr. Qi asked for some stories at Utah State during my Ph.D. study in these years. This is also a great opportunity for me to share my experience of being a graduate student for a Ph.D. degree at USU. Hopefully, my experience could be helpful for someone who has the similar situations.

First of all, I'd like to sincerely thank my advisor, Haitao Wang, for his help and support with my research work for my Ph.D. degree in these years. With the help of Dr. Wang, I could find my research interests and focus on them in a very short time. Once we have a paper accepted by a conference, Dr. Wang supports me to attend the conference and present our algorithms mentioned in that paper. It is also a good chance for me to travel around the world because these conferences are held in many different countries. Although the process of solving an open problem or improving an algorithm is tough, I was motivated by the travel after the acceptance of our paper. My research work is focused on algorithms and theory in computer science, so it is very important to keep thinking about the problems and techniques that may help. Before the “ah-ha” moment, you might need to try lots of approaches in different ways through multiple perspectives of the same problem. Working hard is necessary to be successful in your study, it is also very critical, however, to have a break when you feel tired on one topic. Breathing some outdoor fresh air, running on the track, or even daydreaming with closed eyes may bring you a new idea. Move step by step and don't give up until you tried every method you know. That's my experience of doing my research work.

At USU, we have lots of courses to choose from, and some of these courses are necessary for us to get a degree. However, taking courses is not the whole thing you could do here, especially each summer. I went to Cadence in Cary, NC for a summer internship. This is also an impressive experience for me because I learned something new, met new friends, and visited new places. This experience is also very helpful for me to find a job after graduating.

As a graduate student, I worked as a research assistant in the first three years at USU. The advantage of being an RA is that you can focus on your research and courses without any distractions, so I spent most of my time reading and writing papers. In the last year, I was a teaching assistant for CS 5700 taught by Dr. Clyde. Thanks to the help from Dr. Clyde, I have learned a lot of teaching techniques which are very helpful for my interview when I was looking for an academic job.

It seems four years are just a short time in the whole life, but you need to plan your school time well to be successful in your future career no matter what work you want to do. In the first two years, my major work is taking classes, writing papers, and getting my papers published. Then before my graduation, I spent much time on building my resume. So, I worked as an intern, TA, instructor, etc. In my last semester, our department offered an opportunity to have lunch with the candidates. It's a great chance for me to be trained for my own interview.

At last, I would like to thank my wife, she helped me collect the recruiting information from hundreds of universities and improve my skills of presentation. I also want to say, “thank you” to Dr. Qi, because she always stands on the student’s side whenever you need help.