ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

QUESTIONS

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ISHAN SAKSENA

Ishan Saksena is a recent 2025 graduate with his Masters in the LSA Statistics Data Science Program.

He will soon start a role as a Product Analyst at Carvana.

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What made you choose your program?

"What drew me in was how diverse the program was. Not just in coursework, but in people. My classmates came from economics, psychology, electronics, math — not just CS. That kind of diversity changes how you think about data and who it's for. The program was interdisciplinary, allowing me to take courses from CS, Stats, Information and beyond. It gave me the freedom to explore before narrowing down. And of course, Michigan's reputation and the strength of its faculty sealed the deal for me."

Based on what you know, would you pick the same career path?

"Yes, I would. I always knew I didn't want a purely technical role like software engineering. I was more interested in working at the intersection of data, insight, and decision-making, where you're not just building models but using them to drive strategy. The range of courses I took at Michigan helped me shape that path and figure out what kind of data work I actually enjoy."

What is your favorite part of your experience in the program?

"The first semester had this great energy where everyone was new, figuring things out together, and trying to find their rhythm. I made some of my closest friends during that time.

Then came the tougher part. Some of the courses completely wiped me and my friends out for a while. Late nights, endless hours staring at code, and more than a few "what am I doing with my life" moments. But looking back, those were the classes I learned the most from. They challenged me in ways that helped me grow.

Later on, getting to be a GSI felt like a full-circle moment. Standing on the other side of the classroom was surreal. I was the one answering questions, running labs, and helping students get through material I had once struggled with myself. It was honestly one of the most rewarding parts of the whole experience."

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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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What is a piece of advice you'd give new and current students?

"Remember to relax and take a break sometimes. Surround yourself with people who feel like home. I was lucky enough to find people like that.

Spend time on campus, not just in classrooms or libraries, but just being around. Sit on the Diag, grab coffee with a friend, walk around after class. It's easy to get caught up in deadlines, but the little things matter. Some of my best memories weren't big moments. They were small joys like laughing in a study room at 2 am, snowball fights, late-night food runs. Don't miss those. They are just as much a part of the experience.

Don't be afraid to ask for help, even if it's just to say you're not okay. Winters in Michigan can be rough, and it's easy to feel alone. But you're not. Someone will always understand, so reach out when you need to."

How did the statistics program prepare you for your career?

"Even though I haven't started my role yet, this program gave me a solid foundation in thinking critically about data. It taught me how to break down problems, choose the right methods, and communicate results clearly. I feel more confident going into the job knowing I've had experience working with real data, asking the right questions, and thinking beyond just getting the "right" answer."

Would you like to add anything?

"In this program, I learned Data Science. But I also learned how to be okay with not knowing, how to ask for help, and how to keep showing up. That's what I'll take with me. I came in thinking I needed to prove something. Like I had to earn my spot every single day. Imposter syndrome hit hard in the beginning. I kept wondering if I was the one person who didn't belong. But over time, I realized everyone feels that way at some point. I stopped trying to prove I deserved to be here and started focusing on actually being here.

Go Blue, always."