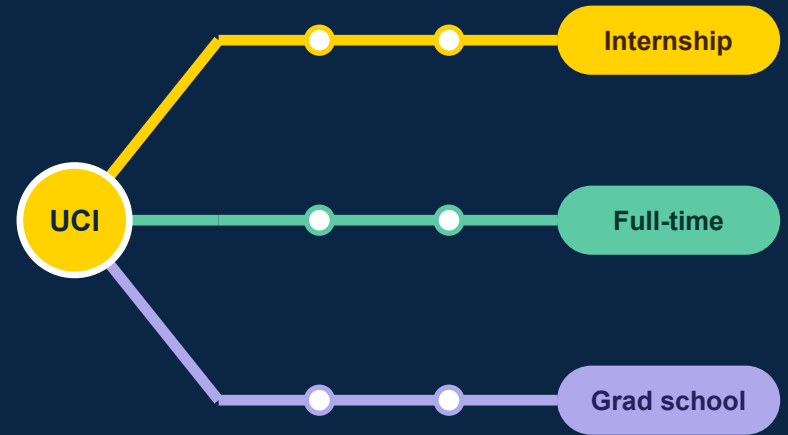


ANTEATER CAREER EXPRESS

Career Pathways Workshop

How research experience opens doors to jobs and graduate studies



DATE

Mon, Jul 20, 2026

TIME

2:00 – 3:30 PM PT

PLACE

DBH 6011 · Zoom

Hosted by Professor Chen Li's research group

TODAY'S ROUTE

Agenda

2:00		Welcome and opening	Host
2:10		New grad perspectives	Jessie He · Jae Yun Kim · Jun Xia
2:35		Senior perspectives	Zuozhi Wang · Qiushi Bai
2:55		Internship experiences	Jiadong Bai · Xiaozhen Liu
3:15		Project experience & grad school	Current members
3:20		Closing + Q&A	Host

Around five minutes per speaker, with Q&A after each session and closing.

Full-time · New grad perspectives



Jessie He

Centric Software · SQL Rewriter alum

Jae Yun Kim

Epic · Texera alum

Jun Xia

Amazon · SQL Rewriter alum

On this leg

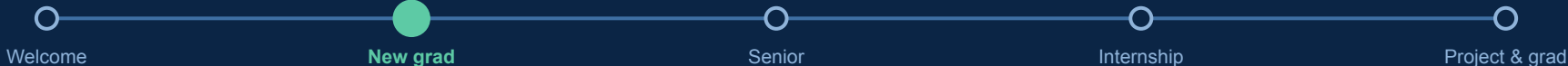
Job search & timeline

Interview prep

School → industry

Research experience

Five-minute Q&A at the end of this session — save your questions!



FROM UCI TO INDUSTRY

My Journey to Software Engineering

Software Engineer I · Centric Software | Previously Adobe | UC Irvine, CS '25

“I’m not here because I had the perfect roadmap. I’m here because I kept trying new things.”

Research, mentoring, hackathons, and leadership all looked unrelated at the time. Every one of them ended up mattering — and that’s the story I want to tell you today.

STAGE ONE

My Journey at UCI



“Try everything.” — my mentor’s advice that changed my college experience.

Mentorship & Research

Taught me debugging, ownership, and how to work on long-term problems — skills I use every day now.

CTC & Competitions

PR reviews, deadlines, and client work at CTC; UCI even flew our team to Boston for the eCTF finals.

STAGE TWO

Landing My First Job



What Worked

- ✓ Quantify your resume impact
- ✓ A few strong projects > many weak ones
- ✓ Practice technical interviews out loud
- ✓ Persistence — rejection isn't the end

Companies aren't only hiring coding ability — they're hiring teammates. Don't sound like ChatGPT.

Adobe → Layoff → Centric



“I recently experienced something many engineers eventually face — a layoff.”

Instead of panicking, I:

- ✓ Updated my resume
- ✓ Prepared again
- ✓ Stayed persistent

Every application matters.

Centric reached out because of an application I’d submitted long before. You never know when an opportunity comes back around.

THREE TAKEAWAYS

What I Hope You Remember

1

Try everything.

You don't know what you'll enjoy — or what will help later.

2

Focus on depth.

A few meaningful experiences beat many shallow ones.

3

Be someone people want to work with.

Technical skills get interviews. Communication, curiosity, and teamwork build a career.

“Try everything.” That advice has been true throughout college and even now in industry — every experience I thought was unrelated ended up helping me in ways I never expected.

From Texera to Epic Systems

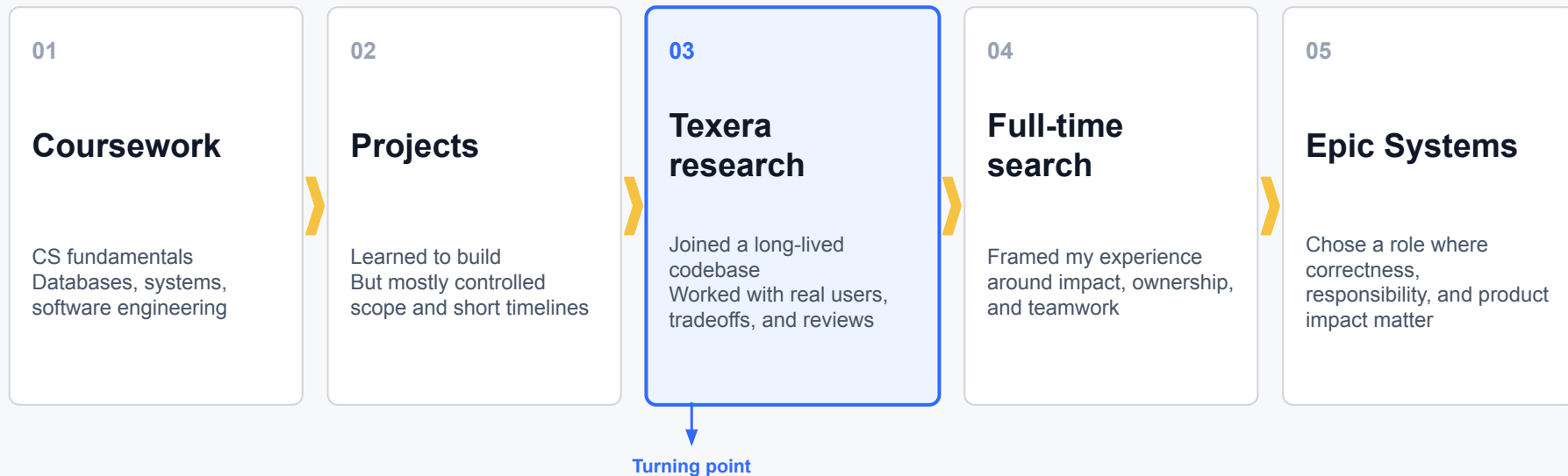
How research, project ownership, and teamwork became career preparation

Jaeyun Kim • UCI Computer Science, Class of 2026
Software Developer, Epic Systems



My journey: each step added a different layer

The turning point was moving from “coursework” to ownership in a real team.



What Texera taught me

A feature was only “done” when it worked technically and made sense to the team and the user.

Technical depth

- Trace data across frontend and backend
- Understand unfamiliar architecture
- Debug state and timing issues

Team habits

- Ask precise questions
- Write reviewable changes
- Respond to feedback without taking it personally

Ownership

- Turn an open-ended request into concrete tasks
- Follow through across multiple layers

Communication

- Explain the user problem—not just the code
- Describe tradeoffs and decisions clearly

How Texera helped me connect with Epic

The strongest interview stories showed a repeatable way of working.

What I did on Texera

- Worked in a large, existing system
- Built across UI and backend boundaries
- Debugged ambiguous behavior
- Collaborated through reviews
- Focused on the user's understanding

How I explained it

Situation → why it mattered

Task → what I personally owned

Action → decisions, tradeoffs, communication

Result → impact and what I learned

Why it matched Epic

- Ownership of meaningful software
- Correctness and reliability
- Long-lived products and codebases
- Clear communication
- Learning unfamiliar domains

The offer was not about one “perfect” project. It was about showing evidence that I could learn, contribute, and take responsibility.

What I would tell students now

Build evidence of judgment—not just a longer list of tools.

1

Join something that lasts

A research lab, open-source team, or student project with real handoffs teaches more than another isolated tutorial.

2

Keep a “story bank”

After a challenge, write down the problem, your decision, the outcome, and what you would change. Interview prep becomes much easier.

3

Practice communication early

Ask for feedback, explain tradeoffs, and make your work easy to review. These skills compound.

4

Use AI as a coach, not a substitute

Use it to explore, debug, rehearse, and compare approaches—but verify the result and be able to explain every decision.

My main takeaway: choose experiences where other people depend on your work.



From Research to Industry

How real projects, teaching, and teamwork prepared me for software engineering.

Jun Xia

UCI alumnus
Software Engineer at
Amazon

Four years at UCI.

One experience built the next.

2021-2025

UCI · B.S. Computer Science

Completed my bachelor's degree in four years.

SUMMER 2024

Prof. Li's research group

Joined SqlRewriter and experienced a real shared codebase.

2024

Google Summer of Code

A global program for contributing to open-source software.

DURING UCI

LA + Reader

ICS 31 · ICS 33 · CS 122B with Prof. Li

**AMAZON
JOURNEY**
2024-2025**Applied**
Nov 2024**Online assessment**
Feb 2025**Virtual onsite**
May-Jun 2025**Offer**
Jun 2025**Started**
Jul 2025

Research was where software stopped feeling like a **toy**.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Solve a defined problem

Requirements are known. The project starts with you and usually ends when it is graded.



SQLREWRITER RESEARCH

Contribute to a shared product

I joined an existing codebase, discussed features, reviewed changes, and built software that other people used.

[Git](#)[PRs](#)[Reviews](#)[Teamwork](#)

You do not need one amazing project. You need **real stories.**

01

"Tell me about a challenge."

Show how you worked through ambiguity and learned what you needed.

Research

02

"Tell me about ownership."

Explain how you took something from an idea to a working result.

GSoC + projects

03

"Tell me about conflict."

Focus on listening, tradeoffs, and reaching a shared decision.

Teamwork

04

"Explain something complex."

Adapt the message to your audience and check for understanding.

Teaching

Writing code is only part of the job. The harder part is keeping people aligned.

01 Start earlier than you think

New-grad recruiting begins months before graduation.

02 Seek real workflows

Research, open source, internships, and team projects all count.

03 Communicate the work

Keep teammates and stakeholders informed before surprises happen.

Full-time · Senior perspectives



Zuozhi Wang

Snowflake · Texera alum

Qiushi Bai

Microsoft · SQL Rewriter alum

On this leg

Career growth

What great engineers share

AI in engineering teams

Five-minute Q&A at the end of this session — save your questions!



Zuozhi Wang

Senior Software Engineer @ Snowflake

2017

BS in CS

UC Irvine

2023

PhD in CS

UC Irvine

Advised by Prof. Chen Li

2026

Snowflake

Tech Lead for monitoring & alerting area.

GOAL // Make monitoring reliable, trustworthy, low-latency, cost-efficient, and scalable.

High-Quality, Clean Code & Good Engineering Taste

This skill has remained important throughout the entire path:

Courses -> Research -> Industry -> AI era

THE REALITY

Industry codebases are often messy due to:

- ■ Rapid movement
- ■ Complex requirements
- ■ Tight deadlines
- ■ Pressure to ship

Early in career, develop trust by consistently shipping high-quality code.

When senior engineers find your code clean, thoughtful, and easy to maintain, they begin to trust you.

Trust leads to larger, more difficult, and more important problems.



"My only ask is to focus more on coding, code quality, debugging skills, reasoning with code, code-reading skills, etc., and not do fancy algorithms like dynamic programming or fancy graph algorithms."

– MANAGER

Many interviewers are tired of
LeetCode.

Still care about problem solving, but pay close attention to:

- Clean code
- Reasoning about existing code
- Debugging skills
- Sensible abstractions

AI produces bad code faster. **Engineering taste is your shield (for now).**

01 / THE SPEED TRAP

AI makes it possible to produce code much faster, but also bad code much faster.

AI can create unnecessary abstractions, duplicate logic, hidden complexity, and code that damages overall architecture.

02 / THE JUDGMENT FILTER

Human judgment becomes more important than ever.

If an engineer has poor taste and judgment, using AI to open PRs quickly makes the team worried about damaging the system.

// **As of July 2026:** AI is advancing quickly, no one knows what will happen

There is no shortcut. No single course or book teaches it.

Develop good engineering taste by writing a lot of code and working on real systems:

01 / Environment

- Take code-heavy courses (e.g. 122B, 122C/222)
- Participate in code-heavy research projects
- Work on real, complex systems

02 / Practice

- Learn through trial and error
- Write code, then refactor it
-

03 / Refinement

- Compare different approaches
- Search for better patterns
- Notice when an abstraction helps or adds complexity

Do not stop when the code works. Keep improving it until you understand why the design is good.

Qiushi Bai

Senior Software Engineer @ Microsoft



I want to share two mindsets that still help me today

Mindset 1: Presentation is Critical

Tell a sound story to convince people

Observations



People are busy and typically lack background on your project.



Communications are the primary bottleneck;



Preparation

Each meeting is a chance



Simple Slides

Visual > words

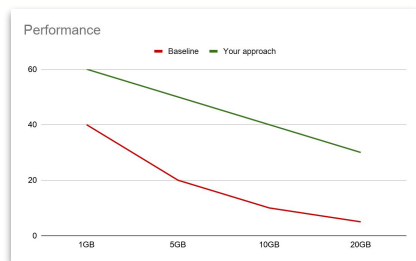


Sound Reasoning

Story is the key

Mindset 2: The A* in Projects

Design Evaluation Metrics before hand



$$Metrics = f(n)$$



Design with Expectations

What to achieve?

How to measure it?



Challenge Assumptions

Expectations help refine assumptions



Validation

Clear metrics help validate results

Internship session



Jiadong Bai

Snowflake · PhD student

Xiaozhen Liu

Google · PhD student

On this leg

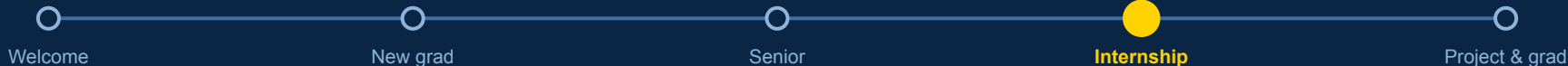
Finding opportunities

Resumes & interviews

Lessons from rejection

AI tools on the job

Five-minute Q&A at the end of this session — save your questions!



How Developing Real Projects Can Get You Hired

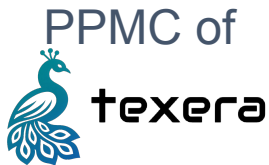
Jiadong Bai
July 20, 2026

About Myself

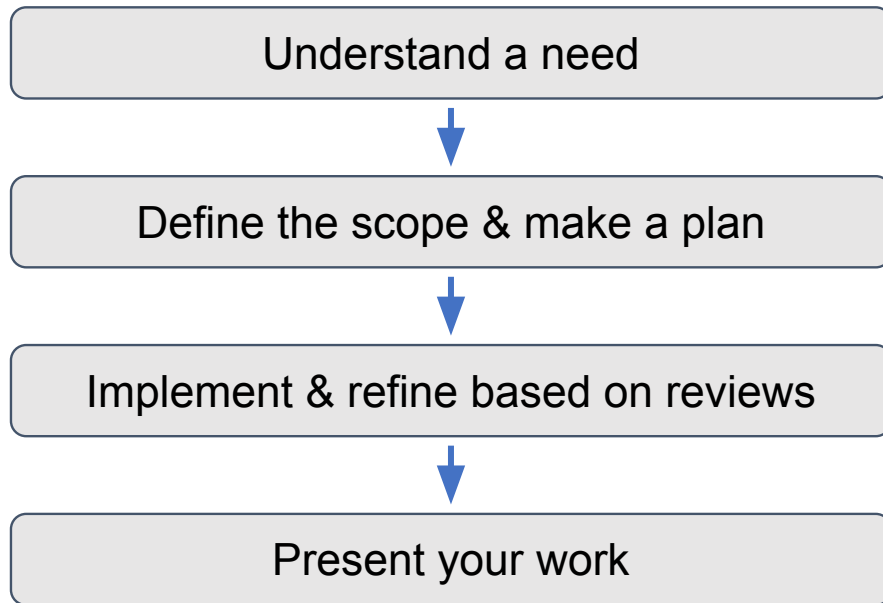
- 3rd-year PhD Student advised by Prof. Chen Li
- Current position: Software Engineer Intern at
- Past Internship Experience:



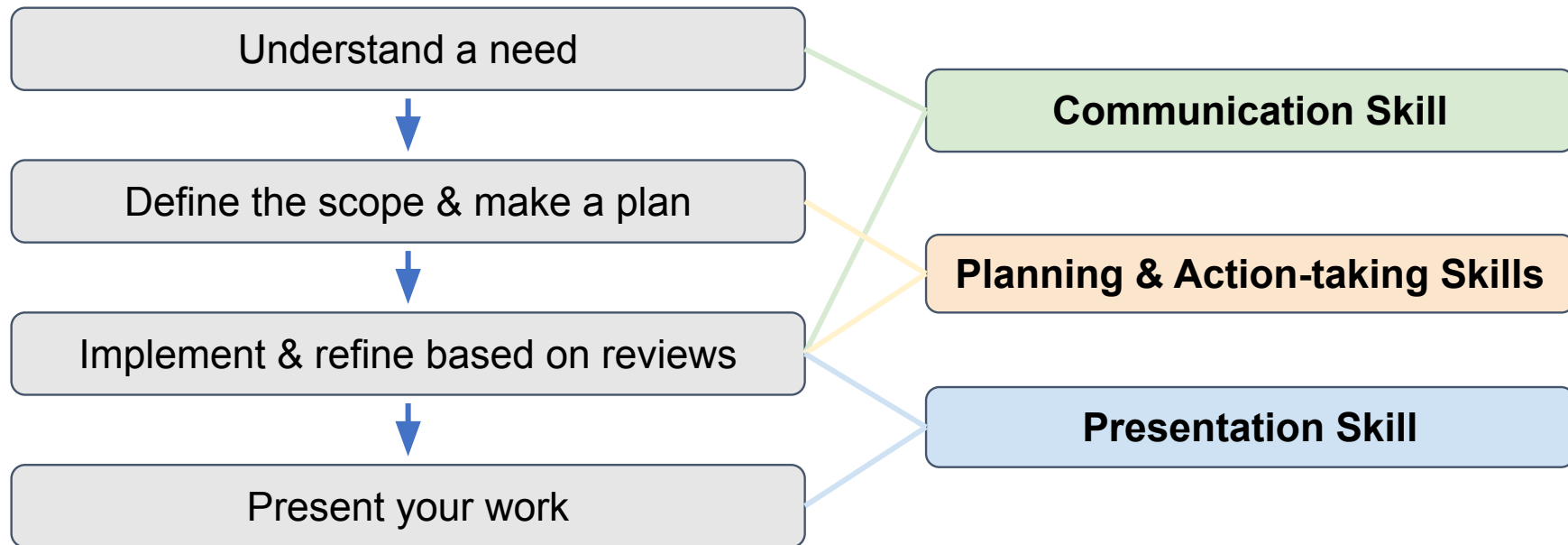
- Project Experience:



What SDE Interns Do

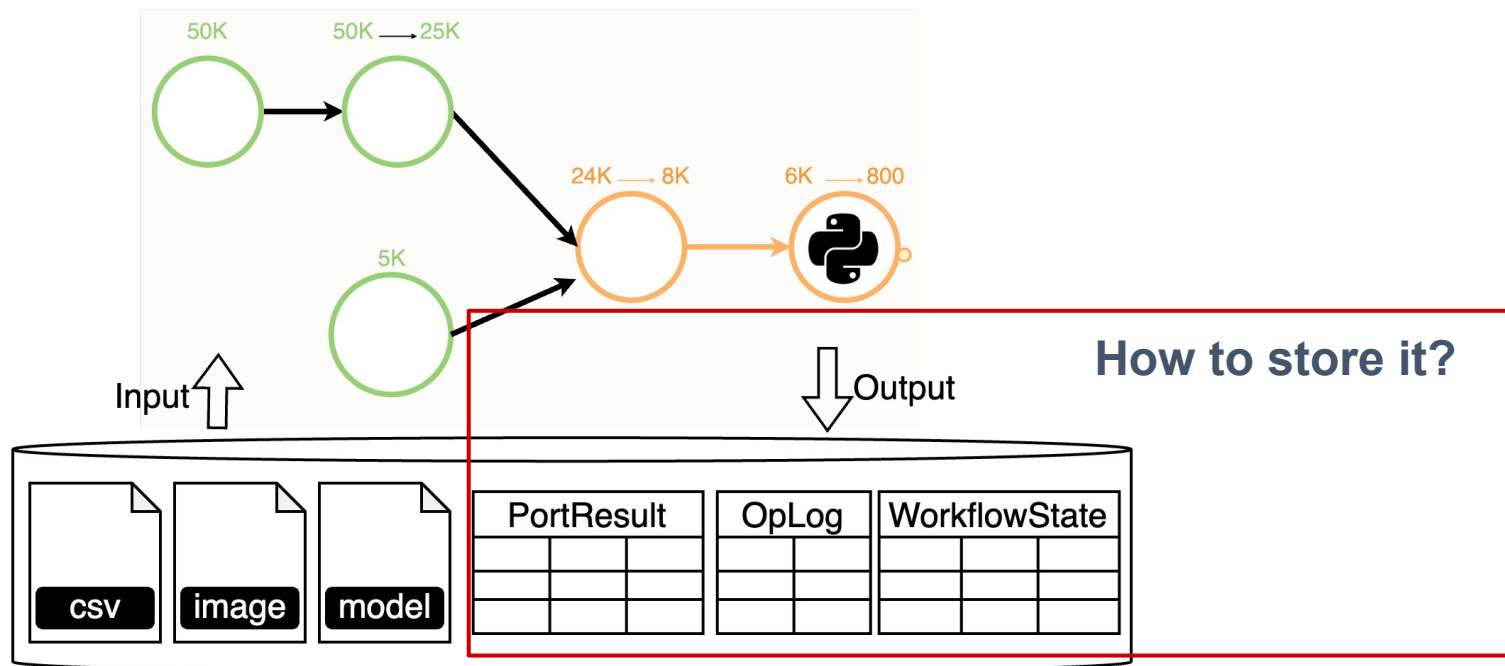


What Capabilities Recruiters & Interviewers Value Most

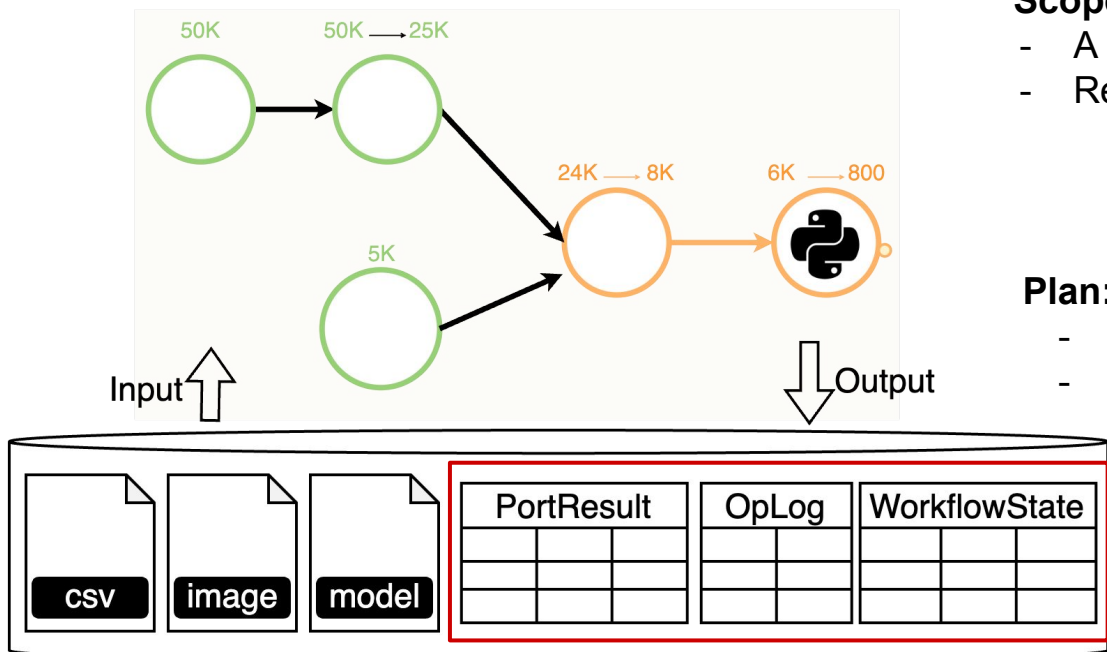


An Example

Understand a need



Define the Scope & Make a Plan



Scope:

- A storage format for workflow results
- Requirements
 - Table Semantics
 - No size limit
 - Concurrent Reads & Writes

Plan:

- use an existing solution / invent your own
- pros & cons of each candidate



Implement & Refine Based on Reviews

- Propose the plan via an issue / discussion
 - State the problem and scope
 - Justify your design
- Write code
- Write tests
- Submit Pull Request
 - Illustrate & justify the design
 - Outline the changes
 - Specify how to deploy or migrate
- Receive reviews & refine

Present Your Work

Apache Iceberg Community Calendar

The community maintains two calendar feeds:

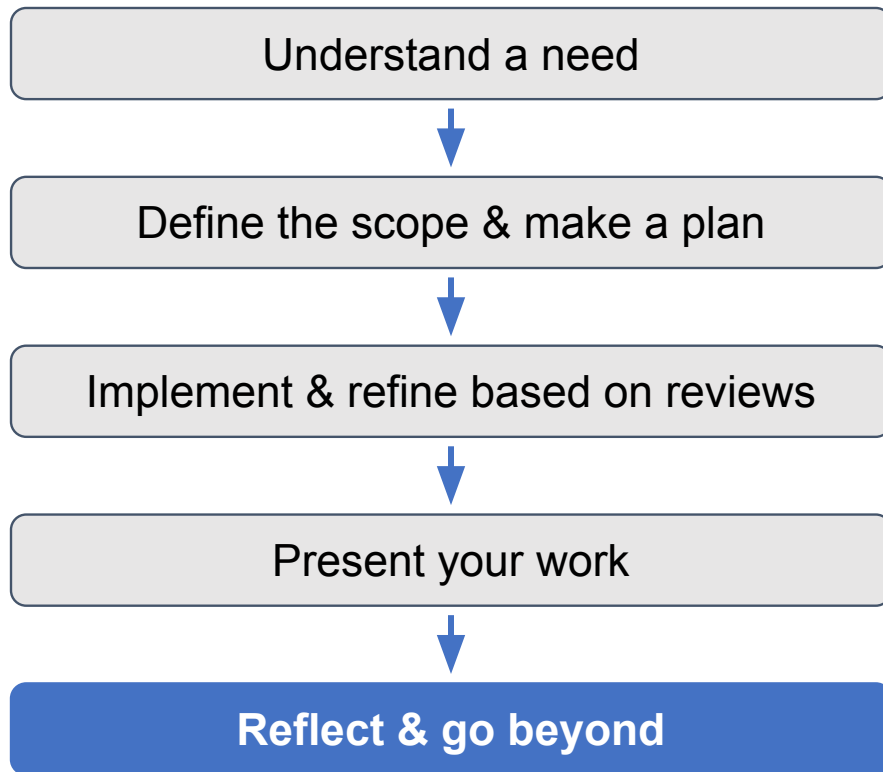
- [Iceberg Dev Events](#): A shared calendar for all Iceberg development syncs, including the triweekly community sync, subproject syncs for Python, Rust, and Go, the Iceberg Catalog Community Sync, and other ad hoc syncs the community may want to schedule or discuss.
- [Iceberg Community Events](#): Events such as conferences and meetups, aimed to educate and inspire Iceberg users.

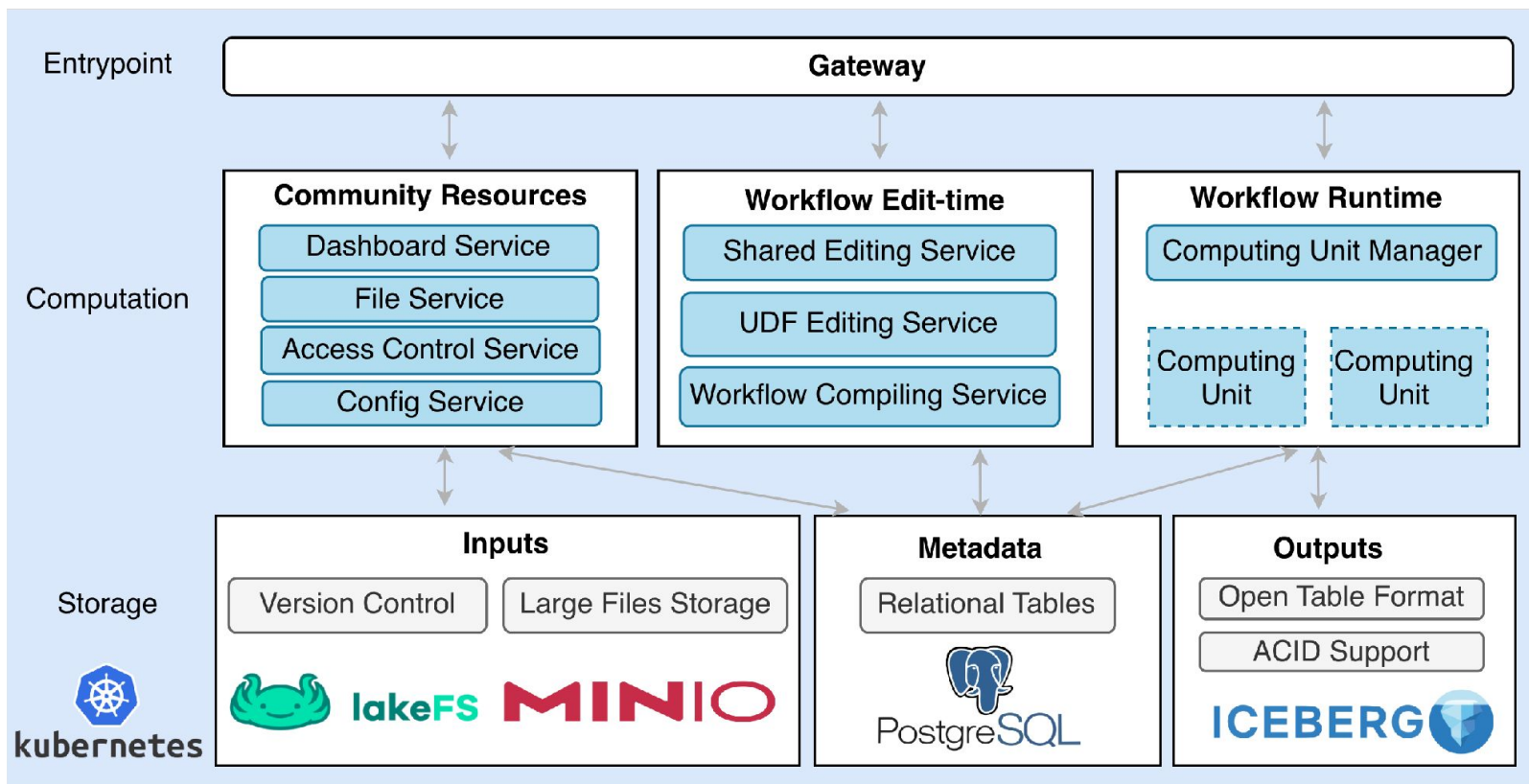


Meetings

June 30, 2026
June 2, 2026
March 31, 2026
February 24, 2026
January 27, 2026
November 25, 2025
October 28, 2025
September 30, 2025
August 28, 2025
July 30, 2025
June 30, 2025

There is one more step you should do....





Side Notes

- With AI agents, real project experience becomes a **requirement for junior candidates**
- Although AI agents are powerful, it is still important to **practice LeetCode questions**
- Use LinkedIn to connect with / **follow experienced engineers, researchers and recruiters**
- Use School resources, X, LinkedIn to **identify trendy projects** to work on

Thank you for listening!

Internship session



Jiadong Bai

Snowflake · PhD student

Xiaozhen Liu

Google · PhD student

On this leg

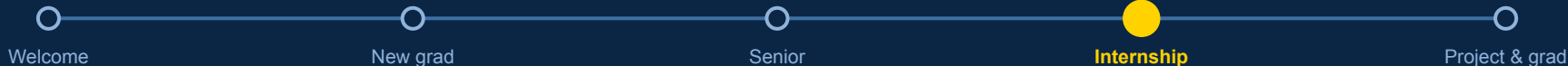
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Project experience & grad school



Project experience

Current member sharing

Grad school notes

Application timeline & fit

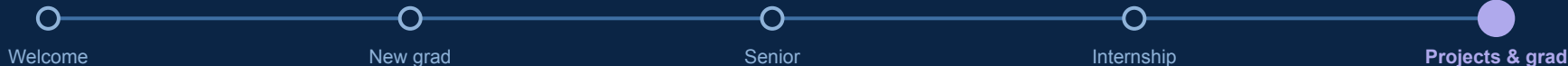
On this leg

Project experience

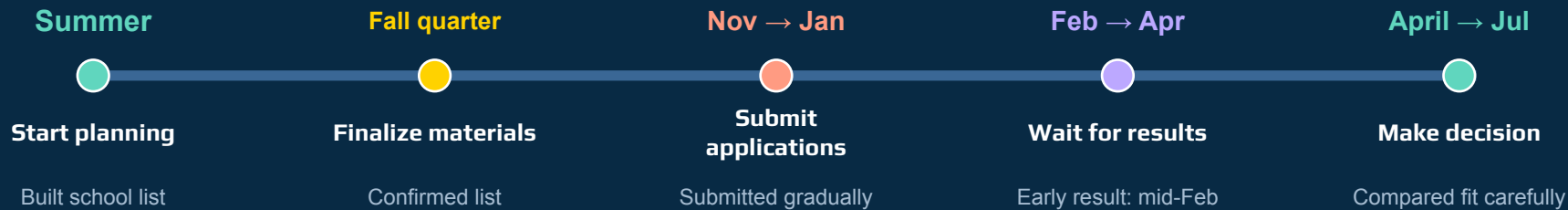
Research teamwork

Grad school next steps

Brief sharing — we'll cover as much as time allows.



Application timeline



What I would emphasize



● Start early

Research programs and draft materials early.

● Polish matters

Don't rush if your materials aren't ready.

● Expect uncertainty

Timelines vary a lot by program.

My main takeaway

A strong, well-prepared application matters more than being first.

ALL ABOARD

Questions?

Ask about anything on today's route — job searching, interviews, research, internships, grad school, or careers in the AI era.



END OF THE LINE · FOR TODAY

Thanks for riding the Anteater Career Express

Huge thanks to our speakers

Jiadong Bai · Jessie He · Jae Yun Kim · Jun Xia · Qiushi Bai · Xiaozhen Liu · Zuozhi Wang

Best of luck on the journey ahead!

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