

To the Anthropic Institute Hiring Team,

I dropped out of college at first. I was pursuing a bachelor's in literature, and though I loved the subject matter and was doing well, the environment was understimulating to the point of being uninspiring. I left, worked, traveled, and at twenty-eight moved alone to New York to study philosophy and experimental psychology at Columbia. Both were rigorous analytical degrees; one fundamental, one applied, and my strongest work has always drawn from the extensive supply of intellectual strategies afforded to me by each.

When people would half-jokingly ask what I intended to do with a philosophy degree, I said I would work in Silicon Valley. This was before AI had the presence in everyday life that it does today. I didn't have a precise concept of what kind of role would exist for me. I imagined one that combined research, writing, and analysis concerning the social implications of emerging technologies.

Immediately upon graduating, I was recruited to a small, experimental think tank as one of its first employees. Within a year I was a director and the strategic lead on a global guaranteed income research initiative, which entailed synthesizing across economics, behavioral science, and social policy and moving fluently between their attendant worlds. The work brought me to the Bay Area repeatedly and for weeks at a time, working closely with several Stanford departments and developing relationships throughout the broader regional intellectual and policy ecosystem. The research drew credibility from relationships I built carefully; progress, in that kind of work, moves through people before it moves through institutions.

Throughout this period I was also sustaining an independent art and research practice: exhibiting in New York, collaborating on projects for galleries and international art fairs, giving readings, attending everything I could. I organized salons at the think tank, inviting artists, curators, and critics alongside economists and policy researchers. I could observe the mutually inspiring effect this had, and it confirmed something I already suspected about the kind of intellectual environment I work best to create.

I later relocated to London for a graduate degree in critical theory. My dissertation proposed an expanded conception of mimesis as a capacity for locating affinity across categorically distinct domains and generating new conditions of possibility in the process. Previous experience in the Metacognition and Memory Lab at Columbia had already oriented me toward how cognitive systems monitor and evaluate their own operations, and the two formations together gave particular shape to the questions I now bring to AI: what formative conditions produce genuine evaluative capacity, as opposed to increasingly sophisticated pattern reproduction, and what becomes possible when that distinction is pursued rigorously.

That orientation shapes how I engage with the Institute's concerns. My application includes a précis I wrote as a writing sample for this application, examining what alignment episodes reveal when read as developmental indicators, and what follows for training design if the question of formation is treated as prior to the question of correction. It functions as a base document, a framework meant to generate further work across registers.

I did end up doing some work in Silicon Valley, but not in the way I had previously imagined. The role I envisioned hadn't quite existed yet. Now it does. I want to do it.

Sincerely,

Lauren Burns-Coady

This letter was written with assistance from Opus 4.6 and Sonnet 4.6. I work with Claude every day.