

Research as a career option

Why choose PhD?
And how to actually get there

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Slides available at www.harsh17.in/iimi2026



I sat exactly where you are

- IIM Indore **IPM student** — I did summer research with faculty, not just internships
- Those projects turned into publications I barely understood the value of at the time
- They carried my **PhD in Business Analytics** application to the **University of Tennessee**
- Now I'm faculty at the **American University of Sharjah, U.A.E.**
- This talk is the advice I wish someone had given me in your seat



My graduation from IPM (2021) and PhD (2025)

01 - Why research?

Why it's a genuinely good option

- Independence — you choose the questions worth answering
- Depth — you become the world's expert in your niche
- You create methods and knowledge, instead of only applying them
- Optionality — academia, industry R&D (HP, Amazon, Alibaba...), policy, startups
- And in North America, it usually pays you to do it

\$0

Tuition — most North American PhDs are fully funded

Tuition waived plus a monthly stipend to live on

You can also quit after 2 years with a Masters (usually...)

Go in with your eyes open

THE APPEAL

- Freedom to work on what fascinates you
- Funding + a global career
- Deep expertise that's genuinely rare

THE REALITY

- 5–6 years; progress is slow
- Rejection is routine — papers, grants
- No boss telling you what to do — you must self-drive

Do a PhD only if you are genuinely curious. That is the whole test.

Requirements for success:

- Curiosity
- Grit
- Resilience

02 · The application roadmap

Work backwards from the deadline

- Most North American PhD deadlines: December–January, for the following Fall
- So you apply ~9 months before you'd even start
- 12-18 months out — build the profile: research, grades, faculty relationships
- 6–12 months out — take your tests (GRE, TOEFL/IELTS)
- 2–6 months out — line up recommenders, draft CV + SOP
- Start early enough to leave room for a re-take and revisions

Tests: GRE and TOEFL / IELTS

- GRE (General) — still expected by many quant-heavy programs; aim for a strong Quant score
 - Valid 5 years · take it over the summer before you apply
- TOEFL or IELTS — English proficiency, required of international applicants
 - TOEFL leans US; IELTS leans UK/Aus/NZ — but both widely accepted now
 - Valid 2 years · some schools waive it if your degree was taught in English
- Have scores ready before deadlines — book test dates around June–August

Recommendation letters — start thinking about writers now

- You'll need three — the strongest come from people who supervised your research
- Academic referees who can vouch for your research ability beat a manager's praise
- This is why summer projects matter: they create real referees, not name-only ones
- Ask 6–8 weeks before the deadline — never at the last minute
- Hand each writer your CV, SOP draft, and a list of schools + deadlines

Your CV — research-forward, not a job résumé

- Education — degree, GPA, relevant coursework (stats, ML, econ, methods)
- Research experience — projects, your role, methods used, outcomes
- Publications, working papers, conference posters — anything, however small
- Technical skills — Python, R, SQL, the tools you can actually use
- Awards, scholarships, teaching/TA roles
- Keep it to 1–2 pages; lead with research, not internships

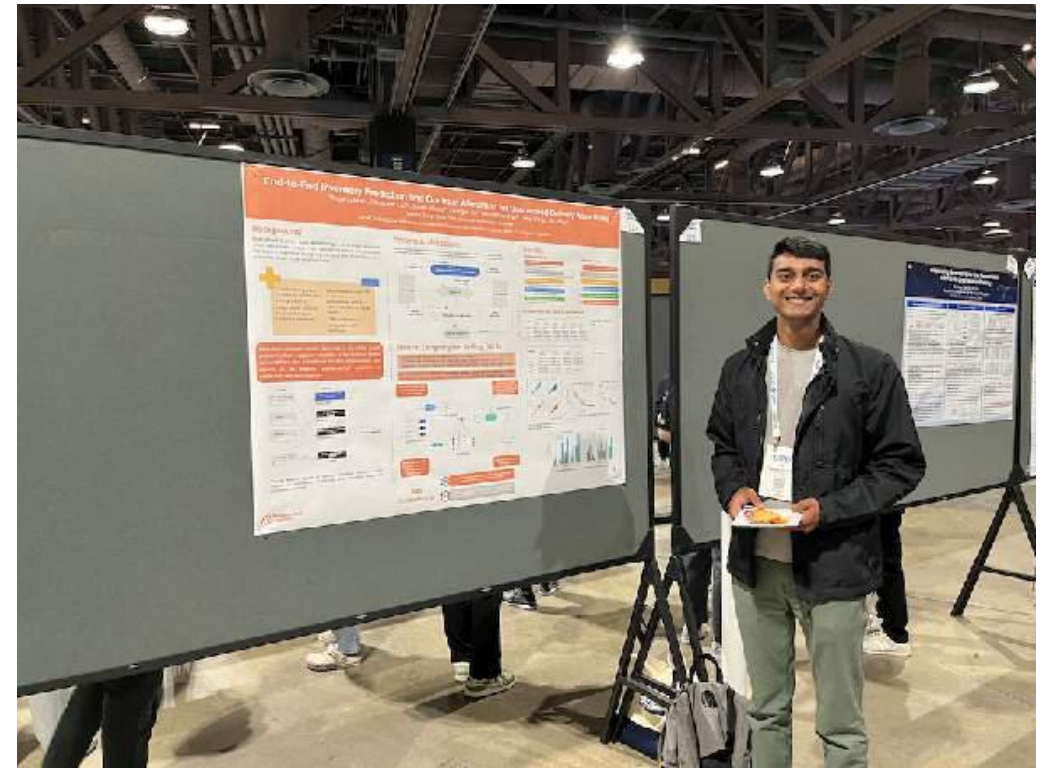
Your SOP — a focused argument, not a life story

- Why research, why this field — show intellectual maturity
- Your specific interests — a real question, not 'I love data'
- Evidence you can do research — cite your own projects
- Fit — name 2–3 faculty whose work aligns and say why
- Tailor every SOP per school; concrete always beats generic

03 - Your Edge: Research Experience

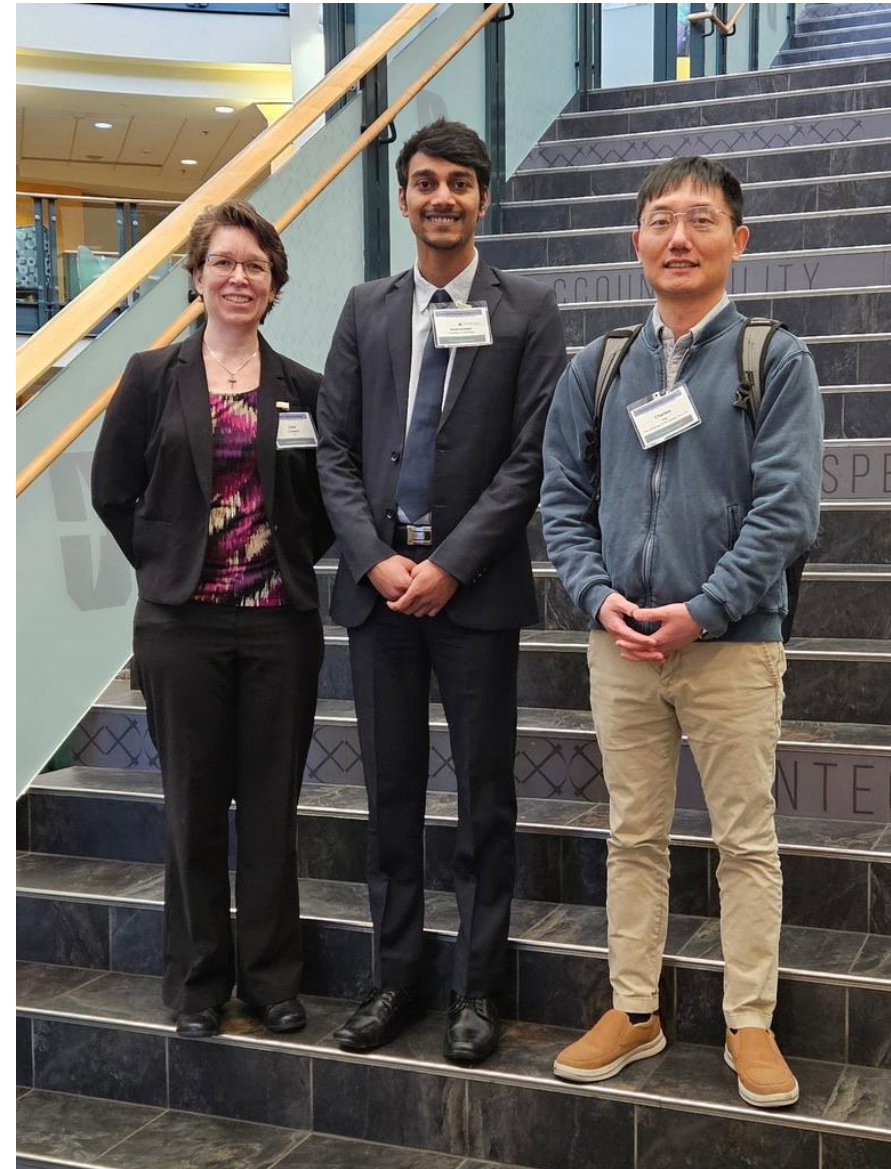
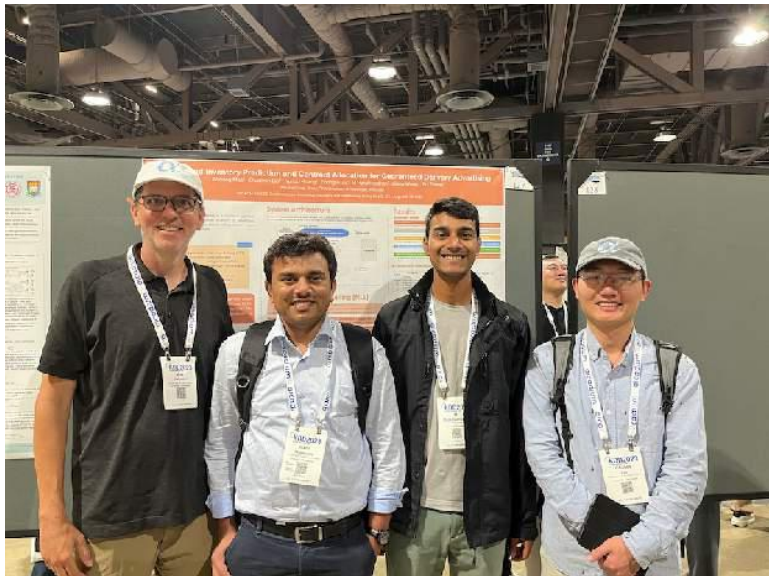
Research projects beat internships — by a lot

- Talk to faculty members — most are happy to take a keen student onto a project
- A summer of real research builds hard skills: coding, modelling, writing, rigour
- It produces the two things applications reward: letters and publications
- My own IIM publications boosted my PhD application more than anything else
- An internship gives you a line on a résumé; research gives you a profile



**One summer of real research
teaches you more than ~~any~~
most internships in IPM.**

And honestly — it's fun



How to actually get research experience

- Read faculty pages — find 3–4 whose work genuinely excites you
- Email them: specific, short, show you've read their work, offer to help
- Be willing to start small — cleaning data, replicating a result
- Be persistent — a polite second email is normal; silence is not a 'no'
- Do it for credit, a stipend, or free — the skills and the letter are the payoff

**04 - Where to
apply?**

Pick by fit, not just ranking

- In a PhD, your advisor matters more than the university's brand
- Read recent papers — apply where 2–3 faculty match your interests
- Email potential advisors before applying — are they taking students?
- Balance the list: a few reach, several match, a couple likely
- Apply to roughly 6–10 programs — enough shots, not a scattergun

Geography: where to look, in order

FIRST CHOICE · NORTH AMERICA

- US + Canada — funded PhDs, strong research, flexible structure
- Coursework + research; you find your topic over time
- Best funding-to-opportunity ratio

THEN WIDEN THE NET

- UK / Australia / New Zealand — shorter PhDs, funding varies
- Europe — Germany, Netherlands, Nordics are often fully funded
- Asia — Singapore, Hong Kong for strong, funded programs
- India — IIMs and ISB are good

Thank you — now go for it

DO A PHD IF YOU...

- 🐘 are genuinely curious
- 🥊 want to master one thing deeply
- 🇺🇸 value freedom over certainty

REACH OUT — I MEAN IT

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- www.harsh17.in
- Send me your SOP or CV — I'll give you honest feedback



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