

Rick Li – Statement of Purpose

I can vividly remember being in the theater to watch *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* on opening night, unable to contain my excitement as I watch the logos and title crawl appear on the big screen. It was an unforgettable moment in my life, to watch a modern take on my favorite movie franchise, probably the most excited I've ever been for a movie in my life. Even when rewatching it, I still remember the parts where the audience cheered, laughed, and gasped. Because of this captivating experience, it became a pivotal moment where I knew I wanted to make something that's as widely anticipated and beloved by their fans around the world. I want to create characters we can relate to and stories that are filled with wonder, make those cinematic and satisfying moments, and have a series that can constantly expand and come back to for years to come.

It's not just from films, as certain game franchises like *Halo* are also a big inspiration for me. Bungie, the developers and team that made the games *Halo* and *Destiny*, is an independent company I would strive to become a part of and work for. Throughout their games I've kept their works and development close to my interests, and it's always fascinating when they give a closer look at their development work such as concept arts, animating and testing, hosting social events, and overall just doing a great job at being transparent and communicative to their community. Like their content creators, I hope for an opportunity where I can contribute something to their works, maybe even work with them. This is what led me to choose Media Study as my major when I first started college, to learn the fundamentals and succeed in making my own creative works. Now, I hope to continue developing my skills and analyze more about films and games in the MFA graduate program, to have a solid and better understanding of how I'll be able to join or produce digital entertainments.

Growing up with space-themed entertainments, my main interest, inspirations, and creations are always based on sci-fi or fantasy related themes and elements. This became another reason for my focus on Media Study, which is exploring topics like the future of humanity and what we can do to improve our world, technological enhancements and innovation, and how I can use all those to create something unique and inventive. One time, my parents told me about their prediction for the future, where everything will be replaced with computers and machines, and that I should strive for a job or career that still depends on human qualities, which I interpret it as your imagination and creativity. That set me on thinking about making creative works, where it can provide entertainment and show what you're capable of to an audience. It would still require your own takes and originality to succeed. I see the futuristic and sci-fi themes interpreted in many forms in films and games, and they all provide limitless entertainment and research opportunities. All that work and effort is to produce something authentic and believable, teaming with technology to create what we see in theaters or when playing.

In any film or game, the good will always outweigh the bad for me. Even though an overall work is considered a failure, there are elements or aspects I can appreciate and know that it was executed nicely. But unfortunately, it's not how the majority sees it, and the good parts will always be underrated or forgotten due to the overall negativity. This is an issue I would like to address through my creative works, to make sure my works are compelling and polished. Many games and films recently have been missing their marks due to not being innovative enough, focusing on the wrong messages or elements, and trying to rush or force things in because of pressure or constraints. With my creative work and research, I hope to learn and develop my skills in making something that won't have those flaws, that it's something I want to do and will be proud of, and that there are other individuals or groups that will feel the same. I will do my best to bring communities and ideas together in my works, much like how media is now by being diverse, inclusive, and respectful of what people want and deserve.

By joining this program, I hope to further familiarize myself with the professors and environment by continuing to learn from them, and flesh out my skills and knowledge by taking on more challenging but fitting courses and projects. After the graduate program, I really want to start pursuing for a career in a game or film studio, be a part of a community that produces and provides media entertainment to an enthusiastic audience. I want to animate or create the things we see in games or movies, and the research program will definitely help by building a strong portfolio, becoming experienced in animating and designing, innovate and create my own works, and educating myself in what social media and entertainment will be like in the future so I can prepare for it.