Sara Allawati

+61 426 259 998 | sara.allawati@student.rmit.edu.au
linkedin.com/in/sara-a-l | saraallawati.com | Google Scholar

Professional Profile

A self-motivated and resourceful PhD candidate working toward real-world impact. I am interested in understanding users and technologies.

Education

PhD in Computer Science, RMIT University *Aug 2024 – Present*

Melbourne, Australia

Research focuses on Information Retrieval and Human-Computer Interaction.
Supervisors: Dr. Dana McKay[1], Prof. Mark Sanderson[1], Dr. Paul Thomas[2], and Dr. Johanne Trippas[1].
[1]RMIT University [2]Microsoft Research

Master of Information Technology, RMIT University *Jul 2022 – Jul 2024*

Melbourne, Australia

Awarded a 3.7/4.0 GPA.

Bachelor of Biomedical Sciences, Deakin University *Jul 2019 – Jul 2021*

Geelong, Australia

Awarded a 3.9/4.0 GPA.

Experience

RMIT University – Sessional Academic Staff *Jul 2025 – Present*

Melbourne, Australia

- Tutor for COS3127 & COSC1183 Usability Engineering, a role that has allowed me to directly connect my research with teaching.
- Created simplified examples from my research to make usability concepts digestible for students.

ARC ADM+S Centre – Doctoral Researcher *Jun 2023 – Present*

Melbourne, Australia

- Research duties include drafting proposals, securing funding, conducting user studies, and presenting findings.
- Secured both internal and external funding, **6 in total**, to support user studies, conference travel, and event organization.
- Published **8 academic papers** at conferences independently and in collaboration with researchers.
- Part of the ARC ADM+S Centre's Executive Committee and HDR Student Representative body, proposing and organizing **at least 3–4** research and training events per year.

Oman Plastic Industries LLC. – Business Development *Jun 2021 – Aug 2022*

Muscat, Oman

- Developed business plans for client product lines and secured a **first-time sale** to a major national hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Skills

Soft Skills

- **Communication:** Bilingual (proficient in Arabic and English, verbal and written), stakeholder adaptability.
- **Analytical & Decision-Making:** Critical thinking, problem solving, data-driven decision making.
- **Self-Management:** Self-starter, time management, prioritisation.

Technical Skills

- **Programming languages:** Python, SQL, JavaScript.
- **Packages & Frameworks:** PyTorch, TensorFlow, scikit-learn, SciPy, Git, React, LaTeX.

Publications

Selected Papers:

[1] **Allawati, S.**, McKay, D., Sanderson, M., Thomas, P., & Trippas, J. R. (2026). An Eye Tracking Study: Are AI Overviews Changing Search Behavior? ACM SIGIR 2026. ***18.4% acceptance rate***.

[2] Zendel, O., **Allawati, S.**, Rashidi, L., Scholer, F. & Sanderson, M. (2025). A Comparative Analysis of Linguistic and Retrieval Diversity in LLM-Generated Search Queries. ACM CIKM 2025. ***27% acceptance rate***.

[3] **Allawati, S.** (2025). I Am Not a Caveman: An Eye-tracking Study of How Users are Influenced to Search in the Era of GenAI. ACM Web Conference 2025. ***Top 15% of accepted papers***.

[4] Trippas, J. R., **Allawati, S.**, Mackenzie, J., & Gallagher, L. (2024). What do users really ask large language models? An initial log analysis of Google Bard interactions in the wild. ACM SIGIR 2024. ***24% acceptance rate***.

Media Coverage:

[1] ABC News Article "We asked Google AI about big tobacco. Its answer was missing some controversial history" features our 2026 ACM SIGIR publication "An Eye Tracking Study: Are AI Overviews Changing Search Behavior?" [Article]

[2] Google's new AI Mode: Is AI changing what we see online?, *Automated Societies Podcast*. [Podcast]

[3] Sara Allawati presents research on LLM query generation at ACM CIKM in South Korea, ARC ADM+S Centre. [Article]

[4] Exploring the Future of Search: ADM+S PhD Student Presents at ACM Web Conference 2025, ARC ADM+S Centre. [Article]

Community Engagement

Talks & Workshops Delivered

- Attention on SERP, Microsoft *2026*
- AI Overviews Eye Tracking Presentation, University of Glasgow *2026*
- Global 3 Minute Thesis (3MT) Competition, RMIT University *2026*
- Mapping Your Career Into Tech Panel, Microsoft *2025*
- PhD Journey Panel, ARC ADM+S, University of Queensland *2025*
- HDR Research Training Workshop, ARC ADM+S, University of Queensland *2025*
- AI for Academic Research Workshop, Graduate Social Change Symposium, RMIT University *2025*
- PhD Panel for Case Studies in Data Science Course, RMIT University *2024*

Academic Service

- ACM CHIIR Conference Proceedings Co-chair *2027*
- Reviewer for ACM CIKM, ACM SIGIR, and ACM CHIIR *2025–2026*
- Student volunteer at ACM SIGIR, ACM Web Conference, and ACM CHIIR *2025–2026*

Volunteer Roles

Executive Committee Member, ARC ADM+S Centre *Jun 2025 – Present*

Melbourne, Australia

Contributing to decision-making alongside the centre's senior leadership team.

Committee Member, ACS (Australian Computer Society) *Feb 2025 – Present*

Melbourne, Australia

Supporting young ICT professionals through community-building events, career sessions, and workshops.

Information Retrieval Research Group Coordinator, RMIT University *Jan 2025 – Present*

Melbourne, Australia

Organizing a weekly research group where researchers present their work for feedback and discussion; the group has over 70 members from universities across Australia, including senior researchers and PhD students.

HDR Student Representative, ARC ADM+S Centre *Sep 2024 – Present*

Melbourne, Australia

Acting as the voice representing students' needs relating to research and training opportunities.

Academic Peer Mentor, RMIT University *Feb 2024 – Jul 2024*

Melbourne, Australia

Shared experiences and provided academic guidance to fellow students.

Mentee, Mentorship Program, Cisco *Aug 2023 – Nov 2023*

Melbourne, Australia

Built ongoing connections with tech leaders through weekly meetings, networking, and career events.

Awards and Funding

- ARC ADM+S CIKM Conference Travel Grant *2025*
- ARC ADM+S Research Grant *2025*
- ACM Web Conference Student Travel Award *2025*
- ARC ADM+S Web Conference Travel Grant *2025*
- RMIT University School of Computing Technologies Event Sponsorship *2025*
- ARC ADM+S PhD Full Tuition Fee and Stipend *2024*
- RMIT Dean's Certificate of Commendation for Outstanding Results *2023*
- RMIT–Oman Master by Coursework Full Tuition Fee *2022*
- Academic Achievement Letter from Consulate General of Oman *2018*
- Ministry of Higher Education Full Tuition Fee and Stipend *2017*

References

Available upon request.