



## MAKING CONVERSATION EASIER

KITT.AI, a new Seattle-based artificial intelligence startup whose founders include two Whiting School alumni, has landed funding from Founders Co-Op and Amazon's Alexa Fund.

The company's mission: to make natural language understanding—conversational interactions with nonhuman intelligences—easily accessible to nonexpert developers.

Company co-founders include Guoguo Chen, MS '13, PhD expert in deep learning and speech recognition and creator of the "OK Google" hotword detection prototype for Android, and Xuchen Yao, PhD expert in natural language processing who was formerly an entrepreneur in residence at the Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence, a Seattle-based artificial intelligence research institute. The third co-founder is Kenji Sagae, is a past professor of natural language processing at USC and an expert in natural language parsing and dialogue systems.

KITT.AI began releasing its first developer-facing products this spring, the company notes—including a customizable hotword detection engine and a conversational understanding service.



Fugitiae quam inia qui quia dem

## Memory Maker

**WHEN ALEX MULLEN '14** PULLED out a victory last December in the World Memory Championships, he surprised even himself.

"I didn't expect to win," says Mullen, who was running second throughout the competition held in Chengdu, China. But in a white-knuckle finish, he memorized the sequence of a deck of cards in 21.504 seconds, breaking the U.S. record and beating the Swedish frontrunner by 54 points.

Mullen broke five U.S. records, in fact, and achieved the highest overall score in the 24-year history of the contest, in which competitors memorize as much information—words, dates, numbers—as they can in a given amount of time.

He even broke a world record by memorizing 3,029 digits in an hour.

A second-year medical student at the University of Mississippi, Mullen fell in love with memory sports as a junior at Johns Hopkins, where he double majored in biomedical engineering and in applied mathematics and statistics, and received the Richard J. Johns Award for Outstanding Achievement in Biomedical Engineering.

"I was frustrated with cramming for tests and then forgetting everything," he says. "Then I saw a TED talk that blew me away." It was by Joshua Foer, best-selling author of *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*.

Mullen learned that exploiting spatial memory—associating abstract things, like numbers and words, with specific places in a room, for instance—is almost magical because it is such a powerful human trait. It is invaluable in med school, which Mullen describes as a form of cross-training for memory competitions. And it's great for learning languages.

Mullen is using it to learn Chinese. The Oxford, Mississippi, native married his childhood sweetheart, Cathy Chen, last August. Chen, whose family is originally from Taiwan, is also a second-year med student at the University of Mississippi. The couple has created a website, [mullenmemory.com](http://mullenmemory.com), to spread the word about the techniques they practice together every day. — JOAN KATHERINE CRAMER