

## RESEARCH MOTIVATION

I am captivated by the open challenges in machine learning that biology evolved to solve. Backpropagation can be inefficient due to global error signals while static architectures seem to lack the plasticity to prevent catastrophic forgetting. This rigidity in vision models appears to cause poor generalizability and vulnerability to adversarial attacks. Such fragilities in complex tasks can create intractable exploration spaces and unscalable communication. **I am motivated to research how integrating the principles of computation from biological substrates may reduce these limitations.**

## SELECTED RESEARCH EXPERIENCES

My research with Drs. Hanna, Sala, and Berland has resulted in **eight first-author full-length papers: five peer-reviewed publications in NeurIPS workshops** (four in archival proceedings), one in NSF BRAID, and two preprints under review.

**World Models for MARL.** My research began with exploring bio-inspired multi-agent reinforcement learning (MARL), contributing to my team's **first-place finish at RoboCup**, the international MARL robotics competition. Leading a group investigating inter-agent communication, we found that an emergent strategy, inspired by signaling in simple organisms, collapsed to 12.2% success at task allocation with partial observability despite stabilization. Pivoting to experiment with a **world-model based approach** improved to 96.5% success, revealing the value of an agent internally simulating the environment. This taught me to remain open to unexpected results and shift focus based on data.

**Active Inference & Structural Plasticity.** Inspired by theories of intelligence like the free energy principle and Dr. Michael Levin's work on basal cognition, I addressed the intractability of **active inference** by developing a novel approximation using **principles from RL**. After grounding this work in discussions with Dr. Josiah Hanna (RL) and Dr. Levin (biology), **Dr. Levin invited me to extend this research under his mentorship**. Without a reward, the model maintained 82% success in Cart Pole, forming a step towards computable active inference. This research strengthened my ability to navigate the intersection of theoretical biology and machine learning.

**Visual-Cortex Architecture.** Curious about macro-level perspectives, I led a team experimenting with **primate visual cortex architectures** for light field identification. We implemented biological features including **dual-stream processing and predictive coding**. Despite engineering challenges of integration, the model achieved 74.4% accuracy, outperforming the next-best by 2.3 percentage points while being 2.5 times smaller, and demonstrated the value of inductive bias through geometric neuroscience. I learned to manage complex component interactions essential to building brain-inspired systems.

**Industry Embodied AI.** Concurrently, I **lead state estimation research** at an industry AI R&D lab. State-of-the-art (SOTA) algorithms proved unsuited for our constrained hardware and low-accuracy sensors. This drove me to develop an algorithm reducing dimensionality by disentangling data manifolds. The algorithm achieved over 100x improvement in accuracy over SOTA. It is now **deployed on all company robots** and received extensive positive customer feedback. This experience taught me to navigate the entire research-to-deployment pipeline under real-world constraints.

## RESEARCH LEADERSHIP AND MENTORING

To create an interdisciplinary structure for this research at UW-Madison, **I founded and direct the Wisconsin Neuromorphic Computing and NeuroAI Lab**, securing formal funding, dedicated space, support from Dr. Akhilesh Jaiswal as advisor, and partnership

with neuroAI startup FinalSpark. Through **nine graduate-level AI and neuroscience courses**, I gained technical foundations to lead this initiative. My role involves **mentoring 15 undergraduate researchers**, providing advice to over 100 researchers, developing research proposals, organizing biweekly workshops, and lecturing on topics like spike-timing-dependent plasticity drawing audiences of over 100 undergraduates, graduates, and professionals.

## SAMPLE RESEARCH EXTENSION

One fascinating direction building on my prior research investigates autonomous **emergence of state space** through predictive compression of high-dimensional sensory streams **during navigation**. While successor representations (SR) via spike timing-dependent plasticity are established, current models rely on pre-defined place cells or passive perception.

A **visual-cortex-based encoder** fuses with internal motion cues, and lateral inhibition encourages self-organization of sparse place cells. Distinctly, the model navigates to **minimize expected surprise** of its SR map. This research explores if such a bio-mimetic objective **stabilizes the online emergence of predictive maps**.

## HOW A PHD FITS MY CAREER GOALS

Researching in industry, my development process was one of empirical iteration. I realized a deeper understanding of underlying mathematical theory may yield more efficient solutions. While I have strong practical skills, **I am driven to gain the theoretical depth to more rigorously devise novel algorithms**.

My long-term objective is conducting **research within a group like DeepMind's neuroscience lab**. Conversations with the current and previous lead, Drs. Kim Stachenfeld and Matthew Botvinick, solidified a PhD as the essential path to gain the theoretical depth and research freedom required. Receiving an **invitation from Dr. Karl Friston** to present my prospective doctoral research at his theoretical neurobiology group reinforced the value of a PhD for engaging with these ideas.

## WHY MIT

MIT's unique faculty concentration in neuro-inspired AI provides the ideal environment for my research goals.

**Dr. Phillip Isola's** work on world representations, especially MIRA, fascinates me. I aim to accelerate 10-second NeRF training, applying experience training foundation models to architect a foundation NeRF that learns scene priors, accelerating scene geometry inference. Additionally, leveraging embodied RL background to replace 30-image scans by bootstrapping NeRFs from previous timesteps, collecting observations necessary to resolve uncertainty.

**Dr. Daniela Rus's** efficient and auditable liquid nets and "Neural Circuit Policies Enabling Auditable Autonomy" are inspiring. Leveraging background in swarm coordination, I propose extending NCPs to vehicle-to-vehicle communication. 19 neuron compactness enables full state transmission over constrained bandwidth. LTC networks function as continuous-time ODEs, robust to packet drops and irregular sampling. Auditability extends to tracing string stability and causality across vehicles.

I value **Dr. Pulkit Agrawal's** work on self-supervised sensorimotor learning and "Curiosity-driven Exploration by Self-supervised Prediction". Building on sim-to-real transfer and Go1 multi-gait training experience, I propose transferring ICM to dribbling Go1. This investigates robustness of IDM to filter complex visual distractions causally unrelated to motor commands and sample-efficiency of exploration with sparse rewards.

I am eager to contribute my background in collaborative research and interdisciplinary curiosity to MIT's research community.

## ACADEMIC AND INTELLECTUAL JOURNEY

My research on neuroscience-inspired intelligent systems began with the scholarly challenge of academic isolation. Professors in AI told me that researching the application of neuroscience for AI is uncommon. Noting I was the only engineer in his class, a neuroscience professor expressed a wish for research on building AI's neurons into hardware, independently deducing the need for neuromorphic computing, unheard of in his department. I had a passion for a field that, on my campus, did not seem to exist.

Driven by relentless curiosity, I searched for insights from textbooks and numerous papers outside of my coursework. I began to understand the active areas of research in this discipline and gain the skills required to work in them. I learned that the relevant subdisciplines were separated into distinct departments at UW-Madison, forming a systemic barrier to discovery.

In my early studies, I sought a way to connect to others with similar interests, a mentor to teach me about neuroscience-inspired AI, or collaborators to help me start conducting relevant research. Yet I found none. To spare others that same isolation, I embodied the *Mens et Manus* ethos by creating the community I once sought.

I founded the Wisconsin Neuromorphic Computing and NeuroAI Lab (WNCNL) to create both an interdisciplinary research hub and a learning community. I secured funding, dedicated space, support from Dr. Akhilesh Jaiswal as advisor, and an official partnership with the NeuroAI startup FinalSpark. I was delighted to see the collaborative nature of the lab: students from neuroscience explaining the biomechanics of a neuron to engineers and computer scientists explaining artificial neural networks to biologists.

To share my passion for learning and for this field, I give lectures on relevant topics and organize weekly meetings including biweekly workshops. When members run into challenges like low model performance, I give advice on how to resolve them. I also explain concepts, provide research proposals, point to relevant literature, and propose avenues for future research. For instance, explaining spiking neural networks' aptitude for sparse event-driven processing motivated one group to begin new research on meteor detection.

My work with the WNCNL demonstrates my commitment to building scholarly community, a value I am eager to bring to MIT. Seeing students explain concepts from their own disciplines solidified for me that this cross-pollination is essential. I am keen to scale this model at MIT, such as by organizing a workshop series that operationally connects findings from the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences with engineering challenges in the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. My lived experience of academic isolation is what drives me to mentor. I would actively work to give undergraduates in UROP, SuperUROP, and MSRP what I lacked: a vibrant, supportive, and interdisciplinary research community from day one. At MIT, I aim to be both a researcher and a community builder who ensures no student's passion exists in isolation.