

Meriel von Stein

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EDUCATION

PhD Candidate of Computer Science (Software Engineering & Robotics) Charlottesville, VA | Dec. 2025
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Masters of Computer Science (Software Engineering & Robotics) Charlottesville, VA | Aug. 2022
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

BA Honors of Art History (Islamic Art & Architecture) Oberlin, OH | May 2016
OBERLIN COLLEGE

PUBLICATIONS

PHYSCOV: PHYSICAL TEST COVERAGE FOR AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES

CARL HILDEBRANDT, MERIEL VON STEIN, SEBASTIAN ELBAUM

TO APPEAR AT ISSTA 2023.

PYTHON, C++, ROS, GAZEBO, AUTOMATION, STOCHASTIC LEARNING, TEST COVERAGE

Quantifying test adequacy of autonomous vehicle (*AV*) behavior is complicated by large, complex physical environments that produce unique spatial signatures. We introduce the abstraction Reachable Set Reduction (*RSR*), which integrates sensor readings and physical reachability analysis to estimate the input region influencing the *AV*, then approximates that region as a parameterizable geometric function with quality-cost tradeoff. We then demonstrate our coverage metric *PhysCov*'s quantification of *AV* test suite coverage and high-positive correlation with *AV* crashes.

DEEPMANEUVER: ADVERSARIAL TEST GENERATION FOR TRAJECTORY MANIPULATION OF AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES

MERIEL VON STEIN, DAVID SHRIVER, SEBASTIAN ELBAUM

TO APPEAR IN IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON SOFTWARE ENGINEERING.

PYTHON, LUA, PYTORCH, BEAMNG, AUTOMATION, ADVERSARIAL TESTING

This paper introduces DeepManeuver, the first state-adaptive approach for adversarial testing of autonomous vehicles that can generate perturbations that can cause complex maneuvers. The key technical contribution that enables DeepManeuver's power comes from a refinement cycle that interleaves perturbation generation and simulation, jointly updating the state of the vehicle and perturbation. Our study finds that DeepManeuver is significantly more effective than the closest state-of-the-art technique, and that can successfully cause subtle multi-objective maneuvers.

FINDING PROPERTY VIOLATIONS THROUGH NETWORK FALSIFICATION: CHALLENGES, ADAPTATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM OPENPILOT

MERIEL VON STEIN, SEBASTIAN ELBAUM

ASE 2022. ROCHESTER, MI, U.S.A.

PYTHON, C++, PYTORCH, ONNX, AUTOMATION, ML, PROPERTY REDUCTION, FALSIFICATION

Like most semi-autonomous driving systems, Openpilot relies on a sophisticated DNN susceptible to safety property violations that can lead to crashes. To uncover such potential violations before deployment, we investigate the use of falsification, a form of directed testing that analyzes a DNN to generate an input that will cause such a violation. Our investigation reveals challenges in applying falsifiers to real-world DNNs, conveys engineering efforts to overcome such challenges, and showcases falsifiers' potential to detect property violations and provide meaningful counterexamples.

PREPARING SOFTWARE ENGINEERS TO DEVELOP ROBOT SYSTEMS

CARL HILDEBRANDT, MERIEL VON STEIN, TREY WOODLIEF, SEBASTIAN ELBAUM

ICSE 2022. PITTSBURGH, PA, U.S.A.

PYTHON, C++, ROS, STEM EDUCATION THEORY, VIRTUALIZED ENVIRONMENTS, SIMULATION

We have designed and delivered a course to better prepare students to develop software for robot systems and support ongoing rapid expansion of the field. Our course emphasizes the distinctive challenges of software development for robots paired with related software engineering techniques, it provides many opportunities for experiential learning across both disciplines, and it lowers the barriers for learning how to build robotic systems.

AUTOMATED ENVIRONMENT REDUCTION FOR DEBUGGING ROBOTIC SYSTEMS

MERIEL VON STEIN, SEBASTIAN ELBAUM

ICRA 2021. XI'AN, CHINA.

PYTHON, C++, ROS, GAZEBO, AUTOMATION, STOCHASTIC LEARNING

In this work we present the first automated approach for reducing the environment in which a robot failed. Similar to software debugging techniques, our approach systematically performs a partition of the environment space causing a failure, executes the robot in each partition containing a reduced environment, and further partitions reduced environments that still lead to a failure.

PROBABILISTIC CONDITIONAL SYSTEM INVARIANT GENERATION WITH BAYESIAN INFERENCE

MERIEL VON STEIN, SEBASTIAN ELBAUM, LU FENG, SHILI SHENG

AVAILABLE VIA ARXIV AS OF DECEMBER 2020.

PYTHON, JAVA, ROS, MOTION CAPTURE, AUTOMATION, PROBABILISTIC ANALYSIS

Probabilistic invariants can encode a family of conditional patterns, are generated using Bayesian inference to leverage observed trace data against priors gleaned from previous experience and expert knowledge, and are ranked based on their surprise value and information content. Our studies on two semi-autonomous mobile robotic systems show how the proposed approach is able to generate valuable and previously hidden stateful invariants.

WORK EXPERIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA | PHD CANDIDATE

Charlottesville, VA | ongoing

- Research assistant
 - Joined program August 2018, qualified in March 2020.
 - **Project leader; State-aware adversarial testing of system-embedded DNNs.** Adversarial DNN testing does not take into account the spatiotemporal relationships between the system containing the DNN and the environment containing the input space. State can be incorporated into the perturbation process and constrain the direction and magnitude of perturbation according to system state.
 - **Project leader; Extending falsification for real-world end-to-end neural networks.** Falsification tool development usually focuses on falsifying properties for small, “toy” neural network benchmarks. This leaves a dearth of functionality when applying to real-world models, which involve higher complexity. Extending these tools allows for falsification of networks in the critical path of real systems using deployment-relevant properties.
 - **Project leader; spatial partitioning and prioritization for debugging robotic systems.** Environment configurations can expose faults in robotic systems, but can also complicate the output complexity. Test environments can be programmatically reduced to produce the same failure and cut down on efforts to debug.
- Teaching assistant/Supporting instructor:
 - Introduced project concepts for robotics-oriented software analysis.
 - Developed course materials: designed, wrote skeleton code and solution, and taught 2 labs, final project, and a class debate; supported co-TAs’ work in **Robotics for Software Engineers**; education paper accepted to ICSE 2022.
 - Led office hours, graded, discussed syllabus adjustments, and designed project concepts for **Software Analysis** and **Introduction to Embedded Computer Systems**.

NASA GODDARD SPACE FLIGHT CENTER | PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Greenbelt, MD | Aug 2017 – Aug 2018

- Develop, update & maintain GMSEC satellite ground system API and component code.
- Reconcile federal infosec requirements with implementation from a top-down/bottom-up approach.
- Support code reviews & evaluate software systems from a security assurance perspective.
- Interview stakeholders on current & projected implementation of NIST and internal security standards.

NASA KENNEDY SPACE CENTER | SOFTWARE ENGINEER INTERN

Cape Canaveral, FL | Dec 2016 – Aug 2017

- Build & test proof-of-concept Beowulf cluster for granular mechanics and robotics simulations.
- Provide in-house software support for SwampWorks robotics & UAV projects.
- Design & implement in-house lab network and secure teleconferencing platform.
- Develop and debug testing suites for various prototypes.
- Design, develop and debug automated testing software for a future launch control system.
- Write, fix and execute unit tests; participating in and facilitating code inspections.
- Maintain technical points of contact and report project progress from a matrix management environment.

- Ran static analysis on malicious Android apps using bash scripting, isolating data flows.
- Wrote C++ module for static analysis tool to handle Java 8 Reflection calls and represent them in Graphviz.
- Wrote colluding Android apps in Eclipse and Android Studio for sample runs of static analysis tool.
- Wrote scripts to analyze tool output via MySQL database & text parsing of application dexcode.
- Presented progress reports to supervising faculty & suggested follow-up courses of action.

PROJECTS

OPENPILOT FALSIFICATION

PYTHON, ONNX, TENSORFLOW, PYTORCH, CLEVERHANS, FOOLBOX

Extend state-of-the-art falsification tool DNNF to apply to complex deep neural networks used in the commercial safety-critical driver assistance system OpenPilot.

DEEPMANEUVER

PYTHON, LUA

Reproduce the technique outlined in **DeepBillboard** and improve upon it to leverage the kinematics of the vehicle and state of the test environment.

DDENV

PYTHON, ROS, GAZEBO SIMULATION

End-to-end tool for delta-debugging robotic environments with a semi-known failure distribution.

ROBOTICS FOR SOFTWARE ENGINEERS

JEKYLL, PYTHON, C++, ROS, FLIGHTGOGGLES

End-to-end tool for delta-debugging robotic environments with a semi-known failure distribution.

BAYESIAN INFERENCE ENGINE FOR ROBOTICS

HTML, PYTHON, BASH, JAVA, CSS, LEX

Probabilistic inference engine for time series data traces.

SERVICE AND HONORS

University of Virginia Graduate Teaching Award Recipient of university-wide award for outstanding student teaching.

IEEE ECE/FSE'23 SE4Safe4ML workshop Organizing Committee member Co-organized first workshop on testing machine learning for safety-critical systems.

CRA-W Grad Cohort Workshop selected presenter Selected to present on my mentoring work and upcoming research efforts.

ICSE 2023 Co-reviewer Assess submitted research-track papers and provide feedback and analysis to authors and fellow reviewers.

CSGSG 2022-2023 Mentoring Chair Help new students transition to graduate life through enriching mentoring program, advocate for student well-being in faculty meetings, organize orientation and prospective visits, and host department events.

UVA CS department 2021-2023 faculty candidate student reviewer Conduct one-on-one interviews with candidates, assess candidate talks, and write recommendations for faculty search committee.

ICSE 2021 Organizing Volunteer Main conference organizing volunteer supporting paper presentation sessions.

FIRST Robotics Software Engineering Mentor Software mentor and software-hardware working group liason.

Million Woman Mentor Project, Software and Electrical Engineering mentor, grades 1 through 4.

Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) member Rowan chapter, App Development working group.

Contributor to An Efficient, Robust, and Scalable Approach for Analyzing Interacting Android Apps at University of Nebraska-Lincoln Paper accepted by 2017 ICSE conference

Panelist, thesis presenter at James A. Rawley Graduate Conference in the Humanities, University of Nebraska-Lincoln placed second overall for best undergraduate paper.

Recipient of Oberlin College Grant, John F. Oberlin Scholarship (2012-2016).

SKILLS

Languages: Python, Java, Bash, C/C++, SQL

Robotics/ML Frameworks: ROS, PyTorch, ONNX, TensorFlow, Keras

Simulation Development: Gazebo, Udacity, FlightGoggles, BeamNG, Unity, Blender, particle simulation

Spoken/Written Languages: English, Spanish, Turkish, French.

Other: Git/GitHub, MatLab, R, AutoCAD, VirtualBox, Docker, \LaTeX , Gimp, JavaScript, TypeScript, HTML/CSS