

Research Interests

My research centers on developing **Multi-Modal Foundational Models** for specialized domains, such as healthcare and biology, by addressing associated challenges:

- **Data Synthesis:** Using **LLMs** to generate synthetic data, with **meta-learning-based feedback** to optimize **data generation** for specialized tasks.
- **Continual Learning:** Enabling **LLMs** to adapt to new data streams while retaining prior knowledge, ensuring reliable performance **in dynamic environments**.

I am also interested in **Security and Reliability:** developing **watermarking techniques** for **LLMs** to reliably distinguish between human-written and machine-generated content, which is crucial for ensuring data integrity, especially in high-stakes specialized domains.

Education

2020 - Current **University of California San Diego (UC San Diego), CA.**

PhD, Electrical and Computer Engineering, *GPA: 3.96*

Advisor: Prof. Pengtao Xie

2016 - 2020 **Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad (IIT H), India.**

Bachelor of Technology; Major: Electrical Engineering, Minor: Computer Science and Engineering, *GPA: 9.68 (out of 10)*

◦ **Academic Excellence Awardee** in academic terms 2016-2017, 2018-2019.

◦ **Second Highest CGPA** in B.Tech Program across all departments (240 students).

Work Experience

June–Sept 2023 **Research Intern, Apple**, Cupertino, CA, USA.

- Pre-trained a **multi-modal LLM** for **on-device deployment**, taking both image and text inputs to improve personalized text predictions, enhancing the smart keyboard's contextual accuracy and overall user experience on **iPhones**.

June–Sept 2022 **Research Intern, Tencent AI Lab**, Bellevue, WA, USA.

- Enhanced **BERT** model performance by **~10%** on **extremely low-resource datasets** through data augmentation, employing a task-dependent similarity matrix, with both this matrix and model weights optimized via a meta-learning-based approach.

May–Aug 2019 **Research Intern, Texas A&M University**, College Station, TX, USA.

Halliburton Engineering Global Program Scholar

- Developed a control algorithm for self-driving cars to navigate crowded environments by leveraging a pedestrian behavior model built with **Inverse Reinforcement Learning**.

Selected Publications

TMLR, 2025 [TapWeight: Reweighting Pretraining Objectives for Task-Adaptive Pretraining](#)

Ruiyi Zhang, Sai Ashish Somayajula, and Pengtao Xie

TMLR, 2025 [Downstream Task Guided Masking Learning in Masked Autoencoders Using Multi-Level Optimization](#)

Han Guo, Ramtin Hosseini, Ruiyi Zhang, Sai Ashish Somayajula, Ranak Roy Chowdhury, Rajesh K Gupta, and Pengtao Xie

ICML, 2024 [Token-Specific Watermarking with Enhanced Detectability and Semantic Coherence for Large Language Models](#)

Sai Ashish Somayajula*, Mingjia Huo*, Youwei Liang, Ruisi Zhang, Farinaz Koushanfar, and Pengtao Xie

TMLR, 2024 [Transformer Architecture Search for Improving Out-of-Domain Generalization in Machine Translation](#)

Yiheng He*, Ruiyi Zhang*, Sai Ashish Somayajula*, Pengtao Xie

NAACL, 2024 [Generalizable and Stable Finetuning of Pretrained Language Models on Low-Resource Texts](#)

Sai Ashish Somayajula, Youwei Liang, Abhishek Singh, Li Zhang, and Pengtao Xie

NAACL, 2024 [AutoLoRA: Automatically Tuning Matrix Ranks in Low-Rank Adaptation Based on Meta Learning](#)

Ruiyi Zhang*, Rushi Qiang*, Sai Ashish Somayajula, and Pengtao Xie

Scientific Reports, 2024 [Improving Long COVID-Related Text Classification: A Novel End-to-End Domain-Adaptive Paraphrasing Framework](#)

Sai Ashish Somayajula, Onkar Litake, Youwei Liang, Ramtin Hosseini, Shamim Nemati, David O. Wilson, Robert N.

Nature, 2024 Weinreb, Atul Malhotra, and Pengtao Xie

- Scientific Reports, Nature, 2024 [Improving Image Classification of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy Using Curriculum Self-Supervised Learning](#)
Han Guo, **Sai Ashish Somayajula**, Ramtin Hosseini, and Pengtao Xie
- ACL, 2023 [Bi-level Finetuning with Task-dependent Similarity Structure for Low-resource Training](#)
Sai Ashish Somayajula, Lifeng Jin, Linfeng Song, Haitao Mi, and Dong Yu
- TACL, 2022 [A Multi-Level Optimization Framework for End-to-End Text Augmentation](#)
Sai Ashish Somayajula, Linfeng Song, and Pengtao Xie

Preprints

[Improving the Language Understanding Capabilities of Large Language Models Using Reinforcement Learning](#)
Bokai Hu, **Sai Ashish Somayajula**, Xin Pan, Zihan Huang, and Pengtao Xie

Skills

- **Machine Learning:** Hugging Face, PyTorch, TensorFlow, spaCy, NLTK, Scikit-Learn, pre-training and fine-tuning LLMs, RLHF, PPO, DPO.
- **Programming Languages:** Python, C++, MATLAB, Java, SQL, Bash/Unix, Git.
- **Software Packages:** OpenCV, Jupyter, Pandas, Keras, Numpy, Matplotlib, seaborn.

Awards and Honors

- Travel grant for ICML 2024, NAACL 2024.
- Best **Teaching Assistant rating 10/10** for ECE 208, Computational Evolutionary Biology, Spring 2023.
- Awarded the *Jacob School of Engineering Departmental Fellowship* for PhD studies at UC San Diego 2020.
- Microsoft Azure Award winner at the [Engineering the Eye-2018 Hackathon](#) 2018.
- Runners-up in the PwC Challenge on “Smart Cities” at [Megathon](#) 2017.
- Secured a rank in the top 0.1% among 0.5 million students in the IIT-Joint Entrance Exam 2016.
- Certificate course in Indian Carnatic music, 2016.
- Bronze Medal in the National Science Olympiad 2012.

Leadership

- Current **Supervision at Dr. Pengtao Xie's Lab, UCSD, UC San Diego.**
Mentoring masters and early year PhD students on various projects, with a strong emphasis on skill development and professional growth.
- 2021 **ENLACE program, UC San Diego.**
Led a team of college and high school students on the project '*Deep Learning Algorithms for Disease Segmentation in Chest X-rays*'; managed data preprocessing, model development, and evaluation, while fostering collaboration and technical skills.
- 2020 **First-Year PhD Representative, ECE Graduate Student Council, UC San Diego.**
Elected to represent and advocate for the needs and concerns of first-year PhD students in the department.
- 2018 **Elektronika Club, Head, IIT H.**
Led the Electronics and Signal Processing Club, fostering innovation and critical thinking in electronics and signal processing among students.
- 2017 **College Counsel, Co-Founder.**
Launched a startup that guided top-ranking students from India's prestigious IIT entrance exam in selecting academic branches, using a personalized approach based on exam rank and personal career aspirations.
- 2018 **Marketing Team, Head, IIT H.**
Led efforts to engage investors in supporting student-led startup initiatives and entrepreneurial ventures.

Teaching and Reviewing Experience

Teaching Assistantship.

Random Processes, Linear Algebra and Applications, Computational Evolutionary Biology (**Best TA, 10/10 rating**), Statistical Learning I, Deep Generative Models, Linear Electronic Systems

Reviewer for Top-Tier Conferences.

Conferences: NeurIPS (2022–2024), ICML (2023–2025), ICLR (2023–2025), ACL-ARR (2023–2024), AAAI (2022), ICASSP (2022)