

Jesse Zhang

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

I'm a 5th-year PhD candidate interested in deep reinforcement learning (RL) and robotics. I want to enable autonomous, generalist agents via guidance from large pre-trained models. My previous work spans hierarchical, offline, model-based, and skill-based RL, robotic platforms, and program synthesis.

EDUCATION

University of Southern California , Los Angeles, CA	2020 - Present
<i>Ph.D.</i> in Computer Science (Advisors: Erdem Biyik, Joseph Lim, Jesse Thomason)	GPA: 4.00/4.00
UC Berkeley , Berkeley, CA	2016 - 2020
<i>B.A.</i> in Computer Science (Honors in CS, Graduated w/ Highest Distinction)	GPA: 3.96/4.00

IN SUBMISSION

- [S2] Matthew Hong*, Anthony Liang*, Kevin J. Kim, Harshitha Belagavi Rajaprakash, Jesse Thomason, Erdem Biyik, and **Jesse Zhang**. "HAND Me The Data: Fast Robot Adaptation via Hand Path Retrieval", *CoRL*, 2025
- [S1] Jiahui Zhang*, Yusen Luo*, Abrar Anwar*, Sumedh Anand Sontakke, Joseph J. Lim, Jesse Thomason*, Erdem Biyik*, and **Jesse Zhang***. "ReWiND: Language-Guided Rewards Teach Robot Policies without New Demonstrations", *CoRL*, 2025

CONFERENCE PAPERS

- [C13] Yi Li*, Yuquan Deng*, **Jesse Zhang***, Joel Jang, Marius Memmel, Caelan Reed Garrett, Fabio Ramos, Dieter Fox, Anqi Li*, Abhishek Gupta*, and Ankit Goyal*. "HAMSTER: Hierarchical Action Models for Open-World Robot Manipulation", *ICLR*, 2025
- [C12] **Jesse Zhang**, Minh Heo, Zuxin Liu, Erdem Biyik, Joseph J Lim, Yao Liu, and Rasool Fakoor. "EXTRACT: Efficient Policy Learning by Extracting Transferable Robot Skills from Offline Data", *CoRL*, 2024
- [C11] Yufei Wang, Zhanyi Sun, **Jesse Zhang**, Zhou Xian, Erdem Biyik, David Held, and Zackory Erickson. "RL-VLM-F: Reinforcement Learning from Vision Language Foundation Model Feedback", *ICML*, 2024
- [C10] **Jesse Zhang**, Karl Pertsch, Jiahui Zhang, and Joseph J Lim. "SPRINT: Scalable Semantic Policy Pre-training via Language Instruction Relabeling", *ICRA 2024. Spotlight at LangRob Workshop at CoRL 2022*,
- [C9] Zuxin Liu, **Jesse Zhang**, Kavosh Asadi, Yao Liu, Ding Zhao, Shoham Sabach, and Rasool Fakoor. "TAIL: Task-Specific Adapters for Imitation Learning", *ICLR*, 2024
- [C8] Sumedh Anand Sontakke, **Jesse Zhang**, Séb Arnold, Karl Pertsch, Erdem Biyik, Dorsa Sadigh, Chelsea Finn, and Laurent Itti. "RoboCLIP: One Demonstration is Enough to Learn Robot Policies", *NeurIPS*, 2023
- [C7] **Jesse Zhang**, Jiahui Zhang, Karl Pertsch, Ziyi Liu, Xiang Ren, Minsuk Chang, Shao-Hua Sun, and Joseph J Lim. "Bootstrap Your Own Skills: Learning to Solve New Tasks with Large Language Model Guidance", *Oral at CoRL 2023 (top 6.6%). Spotlight at Articulate Robots Workshop at RSS 2023*, 2023

- [C6] Dweep Trivedi*, **Jesse Zhang***, Shao-Hua Sun, and Joseph J. Lim. “Learning to Synthesize Programs as Interpretable and Generalizable Policies”, *NeurIPS*, 2021
- [C5] **Jesse Zhang***, Haonan Yu*, and Wei Xu. “Hierarchical Reinforcement Learning by Discovering Intrinsic Options”, *ICLR*, 2021
- [C4] Avi Singh, Albert Yu, Jonathan Yang, **Jesse Zhang**, Aviral Kumar, and Sergey Levine. “COG: Connecting New Skills to Past Experience with Offline Reinforcement Learning”, *CoRL*, 2020
- [C3] **Jesse Zhang**, Brian Cheung, Chelsea Finn, Sergey Levine, and Dinesh Jayaraman. “Cautious Adaptation For Reinforcement Learning in Safety-Critical Settings”, *ICML*, 2020
- [C2] **Jesse Zhang**, Jack Sullivan, Vasudev Venkatesh PB, Kyle Tse, Andy Yan, John Leyden, Kalyanaraman Shankari, and Randy H Katz. “TripAware: Emotional and Informational Approaches to Encourage Sustainable Transportation via Mobile Applications”, *Proceedings of the 6th ACM International Conference on Systems for Energy-Efficient Buildings, Cities, and Transportation*, 2019
- [C1] Brian Yang, **Jesse Zhang**, Vitchyr Pong, Sergey Levine, and Dinesh Jayaraman. “REPLAB: A Reproducible Low-Cost Arm Benchmark for Robotic Learning”, *ICRA*, 2019

JOURNAL PAPERS

- [J1] **Zhang, Jesse**, Jiangyi Xia, Xin Liu, and John Olichney. “Machine Learning on Visibility Graph Features Discriminates the Cognitive Event-Related Potentials of Patients with Early Alzheimer’s Disease from Healthy Aging”, *Brain Sciences*, 2023

PREPRINTS AND WORKSHOP PAPERS

- [P5] Taewook Nam, Juyong Lee, **Jesse Zhang**, Sung Ju Hwang, Joseph J Lim, and Karl Pertsch. “LiFT: Unsupervised Reinforcement Learning with Foundation Models as Teachers”, *2nd Workshop on Agent Learning in Open-Endedness (ALOE) at NeurIPS 2023*, 2023
- [P4] Linghan Zhong, Ryan Lindeborg, **Jesse Zhang**, Joseph J Lim, and Shao-Hua Sun. “Hierarchical Neural Program Synthesis”, *ArXiv Preprint*, 2023
- [P3] **Jesse Zhang***, Karl Pertsch*, Jiefan Yang, and Joseph J Lim. “Minimum Description Length Skills for Accelerated Reinforcement Learning”, *ICLR 2021 Self-Supervision for Reinforcement Learning Workshop*, 2021
- [P2] Kalyanaraman Shankari, Jonathan Fuerst, Mauricio Fadel Argerich, Eleftherios Avramidis, and **Jesse Zhang**. “MobilityNet: Towards A Public Dataset For Multi-Modal Mobility Research”, *ICLR Climate Change AI Workshop 2020*, 2020
- [P1] Daiyaan Arfeen* and **Jesse Zhang***. “Unsupervised Projection Networks for Generative Adversarial Networks”, *ICCV 2019 Sensing, Understanding, and Synthesizing Humans Workshop*, 2019

HONORS AND AWARDS

- Qualcomm Innovation Fellowship Finalist 2024
- Best Paper Runner-up, CoRL LangRob Workshop 2022
- Highlighted Reviewer Award (top 8%), ICLR 2022
- Distinguished Reviewer Award (top 8%), NeurIPS 2021
- Travel Award, ICLR 2020
- Honors in Computer Science, UC Berkeley 2020

EXPERIENCE

<i>Research Scientist Intern</i> NVIDIA Seattle Robotics Lab, Seattle, WA	May 2024 - March 2025
<i>Applied Scientist Intern</i> Amazon Lablets, Santa Clara, CA	June 2023 - November 2023
<i>Research Intern</i> NAVER CLOVA AI Research, Seongnam, Korea	February 2021 - August 2021
<i>Research Intern</i> Horizon Robotics, Cupertino, CA	January 2020 - August 2020
<i>Undergraduate Researcher</i> BAIR: Berkeley Artificial Intelligence Research, Berkeley, CA	January 2019 - August 2020
<i>Undergraduate Researcher</i> RISE Lab, Berkeley, CA	August 2017 - December 2018
<i>Undergraduate Researcher</i> UC Davis Center for Mind and Brain, Davis, CA	May 2018 - August 2018

SERVICES

Reviewer

- RL Conference (Senior Reviewer), RA-L, ICRA, NeurIPS, ICML, ICLR, CoRL, TMLR, UIST 2024, CHI 2024, IEEE ITSC 2019

Mentoring and Outreach

- **USC UGrad Mentoring Program:** 1:1 meetings to forge paths for getting involved in research.
- **Organizing UROS:** PhD-student-led robotics symposium at USC.
- **CURVE:** Mentoring USC undergrads through fellowship program.
- **Google x USC AI Community Project:** Helping undergrads design AI education outreach programs for underrepresented students in K-12 schools and Los Angeles community events. <https://sites.google.com/usc.edu/aicomunityproject>.

TEACHING

<i>Graduate Student Instructor, USC</i> CSCI-360 Intro to AI; CSCI-566 Deep Learning	2020-2025
- TA'd 5 times in two classes: Intro to AI (undergrad), Deep Learning (graduate), class sizes 200+.	
- Held OH, mentored project teams, created quizzes, held in-class discussions, wrote exam questions.	
- Median TA rating of 5.0/5.0 every semester I was evaluated, Mean: $\sim 4.6/5$.	
<i>Undergraduate Student Instructor, UC Berkeley</i> CS 188: Intro to AI (Anca Dragan)	Fall 2019
- Lead a discussion section and held office hours — received 4.75/5 rating, 0.42 above dept avg	
<i>Course Reader, UC Berkeley</i> CS 170: Algorithms/Intro to CS Theory (Lucas Trevisan and Prasad Raghavendra)	Spring 2019
- Held office hours + volunteered to write problems for and help run extra sections on difficult material.	

RESEARCH MENTORING

PhD Students

- Abrar Anwar (USC) CoRL 2025 Submission

- Anthony Liang (USC) CoRL 2025 Submission
- USC Masters Students**
- Yusen Luo CoRL 2025 Submission
 - Matthew Hong CoRL 2025 Submission
 - Ryan Lindeborg 2023 Preprint, Current
 - Jiahui Zhang CoRL 2023, ICRA 2024, CoRL 2025 Submission
- USC Undergraduate Students**
- Jiankun (Richard) Peng Current
 - Christina Wang Current
 - Kevin Kim CoRL 2025 Submission
 - Jiefan Yang ICLR Workshop 2021
- USC Visiting Scholars**
- Sarthak Bhagat 2020-2021
 - Dweep Trivedi NeurIPS 2021

INVITED TALKS

“Hierarchical VLAs for Robot Manipulation”

- OpenAI Robotics Reading Group March 2025

“Scalable robot adaptation with large pre-trained models”

- Google Deepmind Tech Talk Series (Host: Jie Tan) February 2025
- Yonsei University RLLab (Prof. Youngwoon Lee) January 2025
- NTU Robot Learning Lab (Prof. Shao-Hua Sun) December 2024
- 44th Southern California Control Workshop November 2024

“Robotics in the Context of Large Pre-Trained Models”

- Perception, Action, and Learning Group at UPenn (Prof. Dinesh Jayaraman) February 2024
- NTU Robot Learning Lab (Prof. Shao-Hua Sun) October 2023

“Learning to Synthesize Programs as Interpretable and Generalizable Policies”

- AIPlans Workshop at NeurIPS 2021 December 2021

SELECTED PRESS COVERAGE

- [P1] “REPLAB: A low-cost benchmark platform for robotic learning,” by Ingrid Fadelli, *Tech Xplore*, May 29, 2019.

Last Update : May 15, 2025