

AKANKSHA SARAN

<https://asaran.github.io>

EDUCATION

University of Texas at Austin
PhD in Computer Science

Aug 2015 - Nov 2021
GPA: 3.96/4.00

Carnegie Mellon University
MS in Robotics

Aug 2013 - Dec 2014
GPA: 4.11/4.33

Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur
Bachelor of Technology in Computer Science and Engineering

Aug 2009 - May 2013
GPA: 10.0/10.0

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Reinforcement Learning, Imitation Learning, Modeling Human Behavior across Multimodal Interfaces

PUBLICATIONS

Yuchen Cui, Bo Liu, Akanksha Saran, Stephen Giguere, Peter Stone, Scott Niekum. **Aux-AIRL: End-to-End Self-Supervised Reward Learning for Extrapolating beyond Suboptimal Demonstrations.** Short Version: Workshop on Self-Supervised Learning for Reasoning and Perception, ICML 2021.

Akanksha Saran, Kush Desai, Andrea Thomaz, Scott Niekum. **A Case for Leveraging Human Prosody during Robot Learning.** Short Version: Workshop on Sound in Human-Robot Interaction, HRI 2021.

Akanksha Saran, Ruohan Zhang, Elaine Schaertl Short, Scott Niekum. **Efficiently Guiding Imitation Learning Algorithms with Human Gaze.** Short version: Workshop on Reinforcement Learning in Games, AAAI 2020. Full version: AAMAS 2021.

Ruohan Zhang, Akanksha Saran, Bo Liu, Yifeng Zhu, Sihang Guo, Scott Niekum, Dana H. Ballard and Mary M. Hayhoe. **Human Gaze Assisted Artificial Intelligence: A Review.** IJCAI 2020.

Akanksha Saran, Elaine Schaertl Short, Andrea Thomaz, Scott Niekum. **Understanding Teacher Gaze Patterns for Robot Learning.** Short version: Pioneers Workshop, HRI 2019. Full version: CoRL 2019.

Akanksha Saran, Srinjoy Majumdar, Elaine Schaertl Short, Andrea Thomaz, Scott Niekum. **Human Gaze Following for Human-Robot Interaction.** Short version: Workshop on Social Robots in the Wild, HRI 2018. Full version: IROS 2018.

Akanksha Saran, Branka Lakic, Srinjoy Majumdar, Juergen Hess, Scott Niekum. **Viewpoint Selection for Visual Failure Detection.** IROS 2017.

Akanksha Saran, Damien Teney, Kris Kitani. **Hand Parsing for Fine-Grained Recognition of Human Grasps in Monocular Images.** Short version: Workshop on Observing and Understanding Hands in Action, CVPR 2015. Full version: IROS 2015.

WORKING PAPERS

Akanksha Saran, Kush Desai, Mai Lee Chang, Rudolf Lioutikov, Andrea Thomaz, Scott Niekum. **A Characterization of Acoustic Patterns from Human Teachers Demonstrating Tasks to Robots.**

Harshit Sikchi, Akanksha Saran, Wonjoon Goo, Scott Niekum. **A Ranking Game for Imitation Learning.**

WORK EXPERIENCE

Microsoft Research, New York City, USA May - Aug 2018
Postdoctoral Researcher

- Working as a member of the Reinforcement Learning group on problems related to interaction grounded learning, sequential decision making, and imitation learning.

NVIDIA, Seattle, USA May - Aug 2018
Graduate Robotics Research Intern *Supervisors: Jonathan Tremblay, Mike Skolones*

- Refining human hand and object pose estimation from a monocular camera.
- Real-to-sim robot learning using generative adversarial imitation learning.

Apple, Cupertino, USA May - Aug 2016
Graduate Research Intern *Supervisors: Shalini Sahoo, Samir Gehani*

- Worked with the Interactive Media Group (IMG) to develop algorithms pertaining to user media search.

Quality of Life Technology Center, CMU, Pittsburgh, USA Jan - June 2015
Research Associate Staff *Supervisors: Aisling Kelliher, Thanassis Rikakis, Kris Kitani*

- Worked on an inter-disciplinary project for a vision-based stroke rehabilitation system for the home.

EPFL, Lausanne, Switzerland May - July 2012
Undergraduate Research Intern *Supervisors: Madhura Purnaprajna, Paolo Ienne*

- Search for heterogeneous logic blocks in FPGA architectures to achieve reduction in area and delay.

IIT Delhi, New Delhi, India May - July 2011
Undergraduate Intern *Supervisor: Smruti Ranjan Sarangi*

- Studying memory models for accelerators.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Texas at Austin Fall 2018
Course: Artificial Intelligence

University of Texas at Austin Fall 2015
Course: Elements of Computers and Programming

Carnegie Mellon University Fall 2014
Course: Computational Photography

INVITED TALKS

HRI Student Speaker Series, Colorado School of Mines August 2020

Workshop on Solutions for Socially Intelligent HRI in Real World Scenarios March 2021

Microsoft Research May 2021

IBM Research May 2021

Facebook Reality Labs June 2021

REVIEWING

HRI 2019, RSS 2019, ICRA 2019, HRI 2020, RSS 2020, NeurIPS 2020 (top 10%), AAAI 2021, ICLR 2021, IROS 2021, CoRL 2021, HRI 2022, IROS 2022

UNDERGRADUATE MENTEES

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| Sahil Jain | August 2020 - Present |
| Kush Desai | Sept 2018 - Feb 2021 |
| Srinjoy Majumdar | Jan 2017 - Feb 2018 |

LEADERSHIP

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| Research Discussion Moderator <i>Workshop on Human-Interactive Robot Learning, HRI 2022</i> | 2022 |
| Workshop Co-Organizer <i>Advances and Challenges in Imitation Learning for Robotics, RSS 2020</i> | 2020 |
| Coordinator <i>Girl Day, UT Austin</i> | 2020 |
| Workshop Co-Organizer <i>Program Chair, HRI Pioneers 2021</i> | 2020 - 2021 |
| Workshop Co-Organizer <i>Web and Publicity Chair, HRI Pioneers 2020</i> | 2019 - 2020 |
| Executive Committee Member <i>Graduate Representative Association of Computer Science (GRACS), UT Austin</i> | 2017 - 2018 |
| Secretary <i>Graduate Women in Computing (GWC), UT Austin</i> | 2016 - 2017 |
| Coordinator <i>Entrepreneurship Meet, IIT Jodhpur</i> | 2012, 2013 |
| Assistant Coordinator <i>Literature Club, IIT Jodhpur</i> | 2012, 2013 |
| Festival Co-Organizer <i>Techno-Cultural Festival, IIT Jodhpur</i> | 2012, 2013 |

OUTREACH

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| Panelist <i>IIT Jodhpur Undergraduate Orientation</i> | 2021 |
| Panelist <i>UT Women in Computer Science Research Hackathon</i> | 2021 |
| Volunteer <i>AAAI Undergraduate Consortium</i> | 2021 |
| Volunteer <i>UTCS Robotics Summer Camp</i> | 2019 |

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| Volunteer <i>UT Explore</i> | 2018 |
| Volunteer and Mentor <i>Women in Engineering Program (WEP), UT Austin</i> | 2017-2020 |
| Volunteer <i>UTCS Hour of Code</i> | 2016, 2019 |
| Mentor <i>#include Fellowship Program</i> | 2014, 2016 |
| Volunteer <i>Women@SCS, CMU</i> | 2014 |
| Mentor <i>Programming Club, IIT Jodhpur</i> | 2011-2012 |
| Volunteer <i>Weekly Rural Medical Health Program, IIT Kanpur</i> | 2009-2010 |

HONORS AND AWARDS

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| AAMAS Scholar | 2021 |
| Google's CS Research Mentorship Program (CSRMP) Scholar | 2021 |
| Women in Engineering Leadership Scholarship, UT Austin | 2020 |
| HRI Pioneer | 2019 |
| Student and Developing Countries Travel Award, IROS | 2018 |
| ISSS Financial Aid Scholarship, UT Austin | 2018, 2020 |
| Adobe Research Fellowship Finalist | 2018 |
| CRA-W Graduate Women Cohort | 2017 |
| NSF Doctoral Consortium Award, IROS | 2017 |
| 3rd Place, RoboCup@Home Domestic Standard Platform League | 2017 |
| UT Professional Development Award for travel to HRI, RSS, IROS, CoRL | 2017-2020 |
| Young Women Researcher Grant, RSS | 2014 |
| GSA/Provost Research and Conference Funding Award, CMU | 2014 |
| EPFL Research Scholarship (Declined) | 2013 |
| Google Anita Borg Memorial Scholarship Asia Pacific | 2013 |
| TOEFL Scholarship | 2013 |
| American Alumni Association Scholarship | 2013 |
| President's Gold Medal, IIT Jodhpur | 2013 |
| Proficiency Medal, IIT Jodhpur | 2013 |
| Overall Performance Award, IIT Jodhpur | 2011-2013 |
| USC Viterbi Research Scholarship (Declined) | 2012 |
| IIT-EPFL Internship Scholarship (Among 7 students selected all over India) | 2012 |