

AKANKSHA SARAN

akankshasaran@utexas.edu

<https://asaran.github.io>

EDUCATION

University of Texas at Austin PhD in Computer Science	2015 - 2021
Carnegie Mellon University MS in Robotics	2013 - 2014
Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur Bachelor of Technology in Computer Science and Engineering	2009 - 2013

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Machine Learning, Deep Learning, Reinforcement Learning, Human-in-the-loop Learning

WORK EXPERIENCE

Sony Research, San Francisco, USA Research Scientist	Dec 2023 - Present <i>Supervisors: Harm Van Seijen, Peter Wurman, Peter Stone</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Member of the Reinforcement Learning group working on problems related to training generalist AI agents for Sony PlayStation games.	
Microsoft Research, New York City, USA Postdoctoral Researcher	Dec 2021 - Dec 2023 <i>Supervisors: Akshay Krishnamurthy, John Langford</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Member of the Reinforcement Learning group working on problems related to sequential decision making with an eye towards real-world interactive applications.	
NVIDIA, Seattle, USA Graduate Robotics Research Intern	May - Aug 2018 <i>Supervisors: Jonathan Tremblay, Mike Skolones</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Refining human hand and object pose estimation from a monocular camera.Real-to-sim robot learning using generative adversarial imitation learning.	
Apple, Cupertino, USA Graduate Research Intern	May - Aug 2016 <i>Supervisors: Shalini Sahoo, Samir Gehani</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Worked with the Interactive Media Group (IMG) to develop algorithms pertaining to user media search.	
Quality of Life Technology Center, CMU, Pittsburgh, USA Research Associate Staff	Jan - June 2015 <i>Supervisors: Aisling Kelliher, Kris Kitani</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Worked on an inter-disciplinary project for a vision-based stroke rehabilitation system for the home.	
EPFL, Lausanne, Switzerland Undergraduate Research Intern	May - July 2012 <i>Supervisors: Madhura Purnaprajna, Paolo Ienne</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Search for heterogeneous logic blocks in FPGA architectures to achieve reduction in area and delay.	
IIT Delhi, New Delhi, India Undergraduate Intern	May - July 2011 <i>Supervisor: Smruti Ranjan Sarangi</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Studying memory models for accelerators.	

PUBLICATIONS

$\alpha - \beta$ indicates alphabetical author order, * indicates equal contribution.

Dipendra Misra*, Akanksha Saran*, Tengyang Xie, Alex Lamb, John Langford. **Towards Principled Representation Learning from Videos for Reinforcement Learning.** ICLR 2024 [Spotlight: 5% acceptance rate].

Akanksha Saran, Safoora Yousefi, Akshay Krishnamurthy, John Langford, Jordan T. Ash. **Streaming Active Learning with Deep Neural Networks.** ICML 2023.

($\alpha - \beta$) Jessica Maghakian, Kishan Panaganti Badrinath, Paul Mineiro, Akanksha Saran, Cheng Tan. **Interaction-Grounded Learning for Recommender Systems.** Short Version: Workshop on Online Recommender Systems and User Modeling, RecSys 2022. Full Version: ICLR 2023.

Harshit Sikchi, Akanksha Saran, Wonjoon Goo, Scott Niekum. **A Ranking Game for Imitation Learning.** Short Version: Deep Reinforcement Learning Workshop, NeurIPS 2022. Full version: TMLR 2023.

Tengyang Xie*, Akanksha Saran*, Dylan Foster, Lekan Molu, Ida Momennejad, Nan Jiang, Paul Mineiro, John Langford. **Interaction-Grounded Learning with Action-Inclusive Feedback.** Short Version: Workshop on Complex Feedback for Online Learning, ICML 2022. Full version: NeurIPS 2022.

Akanksha Saran*, Kush Desai*, Mai Lee Chang, Rudolf Lioutikov, Andrea Thomaz, Scott Niekum. **Understanding Acoustic Patterns of Human Teachers Demonstrating Manipulation Tasks to Robots.** IROS 2022.

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, Jacob Alber, Danielle Bragg, Cyril Zhang, John Langford. **EyeO: Autocalibrating Gaze Output with Gaze Input.**

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Texas at Austin <i>Course: Artificial Intelligence</i>	Fall 2018
University of Texas at Austin <i>Course: Elements of Computers and Programming</i>	Fall 2015
Carnegie Mellon University <i>Course: Computational Photography</i>	Fall 2014

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 NYC	May 2021
IBM Research	May 2021
Facebook Reality Labs	June 2021
Google Research	June 2021
University of Southern California	April 2023
Sony AI Research	April 2023
Yale University	April 2023
Microsoft Research Redmond	May 2023
University of Washington	May 2023
Toyota Research Institute	June 2023
OpenAI	August 2023

HONORS AND AWARDS

EECS Rising Star	2023
AAMAS Scholar	2021
Google's CS Research Mentorship Program (CSRMP) Scholar	2021
Top 10 Finalist for the 3MT Competition, UT Austin	2020
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

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, CoRL 2022, JMLR 2023, HRI 2024

MENTEES

Jessica Maghakian	August 2022 - May 2023
Harshit Sikchi	Sept 2021 - Feb 2023
Kishan Panaganti Badrinath	June 2022 - Dec 2022
Sahil Jain	Aug 2020 - May 2022
Kush Desai	Sept 2018 - Feb 2021
Srinjoy Majumdar	Jan 2017 - Feb 2018

LEADERSHIP

Workshop Co-Organizer	2023
<i>Interactive Learning with Implicit Human Feedback, ICML 2023</i>	
Workshop Co-Organizer	2022
<i>All Things Attention: Bridging Different Perspectives on Attention, NeurIPS 2022</i>	
Research Discussion Moderator	2022
<i>Workshop on Human-Interactive Robot Learning, HRI 2022</i>	
Workshop Co-Organizer	2020 - 2021
<i>Program Chair, HRI Pioneers 2021</i>	
Workshop Co-Organizer	2020
<i>Advances and Challenges in Imitation Learning for Robotics, RSS 2020</i>	
Coordinator	2020
<i>Girl Day, UT Austin</i>	
Workshop Co-Organizer	2019 - 2020
<i>Web and Publicity Chair, HRI Pioneers 2020</i>	
Executive Committee Member	2017 - 2018
<i>Graduate Representative Association of Computer Science (GRACS), UT Austin</i>	
Secretary	2016 - 2017
<i>Graduate Women in Computing (GWC), UT Austin</i>	
Coordinator	2012, 2013
<i>Entrepreneurship Meet, IIT Jodhpur</i>	
Assistant Coordinator	2012, 2013
<i>Literature Club, IIT Jodhpur</i>	
Festival Co-Organizer	2012, 2013
<i>Techno-Cultural Festival, IIT Jodhpur</i>	

OUTREACH

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
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