

Jake Welde

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PhD Candidate | Researcher in Robotics, Dynamics, and Control
University of Pennsylvania, GRASP Laboratory

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RESEARCH FOCUS

My work addresses control synthesis for mechanical systems. I'm interested in rigorous geometric approaches which leverage system-level properties of these control systems and scale gracefully with system complexity, tackling challenges associated with underactuation and non-Euclidean geometry. Such structural properties persist across robot morphologies, inform mechanism and controller design for real-world systems, and enable the deployment of robots that more closely parallel the incredible example of Nature.

EDUCATION

PhD Candidate in Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics

University of Pennsylvania, GRASP Laboratory

2019 - present

Philadelphia, PA

Thesis Advisor: Vijay Kumar

Thesis Committee: Daniel Koditschek, Michael Posa, Muruhan Rathinam, and Jim Ostrowski

My ongoing work exploits symmetry, Riemannian geometry, and dynamical systems theory to develop a systematic approach to geometric control synthesis for a broad class of underactuated mechanical systems including many aerial and space robots.

Master of Science in Engineering, Robotics

University of Pennsylvania

2020

Philadelphia, PA

Bachelor of Science in Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics, magna cum laude

University of Pennsylvania

2019

Philadelphia, PA

Minor in French and Francophone Studies

HONORS AND AWARDS

RSS Pioneers Cohort, Robotics: Science and Systems

2024

Selected as 1 of 30 of the "world's top early-career researchers" in robotics for an intensive career workshop (15% acceptance rate).

John A. Goff Prize, Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics, University of Pennsylvania

2024

This prize is "awarded annually to a graduate student in the Department of Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics who has been selected by the faculty on the basis of criteria of scholarship, resourcefulness, and leadership" (1-2 PhD students per year).

Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award, Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics, University of Pennsylvania

2021

"This award is given to the Mechanical Engineering graduate student whose teaching assistant service has been exemplary... because of their initiative, reliability, commitment to the students, and their overall contribution to the teaching mission" (1-2 TA's per semester).

Finalist for "Best Paper in Unmanned Aerial Vehicles", IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation

2021

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (three years of research funding, totalling \$138,000)

2019

Couloucoundis Prize for Best Presentation, Mechanical Engineering Senior Design, University of Pennsylvania

2019

Second Place, School of Engineering Senior Design Competition, University of Pennsylvania

2019

Student Travel Grant Award, IEEE International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems

2017

PUBLICATIONS

JOURNAL ARTICLES

1. **“Almost Global Asymptotic Trajectory Tracking for Fully-Actuated Mechanical Systems on Homogeneous Riemannian Manifolds”**,
Jake Welde and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE Control Systems Letters, 2024.
2. **“A Compositional Approach to Certifying Almost Global Asymptotic Stability of Cascade Systems”**,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE Control Systems Letters, 2023.
3. **“Dynamically Feasible Task Space Planning for Underactuated Aerial Manipulators”**,
Jake Welde, James Paulos, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters, 2021.
Finalist for “Best Paper in Unmanned Aerial Vehicles” at ICRA 2021.
4. **“Autonomous Flight for Detection, Localization, and Tracking of Moving Targets With a Small Quadrotor”**,
Justin Thomas, Jake Welde, Giuseppe Loianno, Kostas Daniilidis, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters, 2017.

REFEREED CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

1. **“The Role of Symmetry in Constructing Geometric Flat Outputs for Free-Flying Robotic Systems”**,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2023.
2. **“Trajectory Planning for the Bidirectional Quadrotor as a Differentially Flat Hybrid System”**,
Katherine Mao, Jake Welde, M. Ani Hsieh, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2023.
3. **“Coordinate-Free Dynamics and Differential Flatness of a Class of 6DOF Aerial Manipulators”**,
Jake Welde and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2020.

PREPRINTS

1. **“Leveraging Symmetry to Accelerate Learning of Trajectory Tracking Controllers for Free-Flying Robotic Systems”**,
Jake Welde*, Nishanth Rao*, Pratik Kunapuli*, Dinesh Jayaraman, and Vijay Kumar, 2024.

PRESENTATIONS

TALKS

1. **“Differential Flatness and Geometric Hierarchy in Underactuated Mechanical Systems with Symmetry”**,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
Invited Talk, *Joint Mathematics Meetings*, 2024.
2. **“Geometric Tracking Control on Homogeneous Riemannian Manifolds”**,
Jake Welde and Vijay Kumar.
Contributed Talk, *Northeast Systems and Controls Workshop*, 2024.
3. **“A Compositional Approach to Certifying Almost Global Asymptotic Stability of Cascade Systems”**,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
Contributed Talk, *Compositional Robotics Workshop (International Conference on Robotics and Automation)*, 2023.

4. **“A Geometric Perspective on Differential Flatness of Mechanical Systems with Symmetry”**,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
Contributed Lecture, *SIAM Conference on Control and Its Applications*, 2023.
5. **“A Principal Bundle Perspective on Differential Flatness in Complex Robotic and Biological Systems”**,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
Contributed Talk, *Robophysics Focus Session (APS March Meeting)*, 2023.
6. **“Hierarchical Methods for Geometric Control of Underactuated, Free-Flying Robotic Systems”**,
Jake Welde.
Research Seminar, *Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics Department, University of Pennsylvania*, 2023.

POSTERS

1. **“Geometric Methods of Systematic Controller Synthesis for Underactuated Robotic Systems”**,
Jake Welde.
RSS Pioneers Workshop, Robotics: Science and Systems, 2024.
2. **“Integrated Hardware and Software Codesign for Controlling Underactuated Aerial Robots”**,
Jack Campanella (presenter), Jake Welde, and Vijay Kumar.
Northeast Systems and Control Workshop, 2024.
3. **“Towards a Lightweight Fully-Actuated Aerial Vehicle: Thrust Vectoring and Control Allocation Under Redundancy”**,
Saibernard Yogendran (presenter), Jake Welde, and Vijay Kumar.
Northeast Systems and Control Workshop, 2024.
4. **“Towards Automatic Identification of Globally Valid Geometric Flat Outputs via Numerical Optimization”**,
Jake Welde and Vijay Kumar.
Geometric Representations Workshop, International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2023.
5. **“Some Aerial Manipulators Can Exactly Track Arbitrary Smooth End-Effector Trajectories in 6 Degrees of Freedom”**,
Jake Welde and Vijay Kumar.
Northeast Robotics Colloquium, 2019.

TEACHING

PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING

Certificate in College and University Teaching, Center for Teaching and Learning 2023
Multipart teaching preparation and credential for university instruction University of Pennsylvania

Preparation consists of participation in teaching seminars held by current faculty, expert observation of a teaching demonstration, and exploration and development of personal teaching philosophy through interaction with expert teachers and scholars.

Course in College Teaching, Center for Teaching and Learning Fall 2022
Semester-long seminar covering course design, active learning, and engaging teaching practices University of Pennsylvania

Inclusive and Equitable Teaching Mini-Course, Center for Teaching and Learning Spring 2023
One-month seminar on scholarly research and primary sources in inclusive and equitable instruction University of Pennsylvania

INSTRUCTIONAL EXPERIENCE

MEAM 520 / CIT 520: Introduction to Robotics Fall 2020 / Spring 2021 / Fall 2021
Head Teaching Assistant for Professors Cynthia Sung, Vijay Kumar, and M. Ani Hsieh University of Pennsylvania

Led development of written and laboratory assignments to achieve key pedagogical objectives across theory and practice, covering forward and inverse kinematics, motion planning, rigorous testing, and simulation-to-reality workflow. Worked closely with students in office hours, recitations, and hands-on lab sessions. Led the creation and introduction of a final capstone competition in which students implement a complete manipulation solution on industrial robot hardware. Recognized with the **Outstanding TA Award**.

MEAM 211: Engineering Mechanics, Dynamics

Head Teaching Assistant for Professor Michael Posa

Spring 2021

University of Pennsylvania

Conducted interactive problem-solving recitations with undergraduates. Developed new computational assignments for the course, in which students implement a multibody dynamics simulator via step-by-step weekly modules, putting concepts into practice.

TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE

SharpShooter: an Invisible Tripod via Reaction Wheels

2018 - 2019

Senior Design Project, Mechanical Engineering at the University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, PA

Development of a novel reaction wheel stabilizer for ergonomic, handheld long-exposure still photography with team of five peers

- Developed motor system identification pipeline to enable precise application of corrective torques
- Implemented gyroscope bias observer to enable accurate and precise attitude estimation during exposures
- Quantitative stabilization performance exceeded all other commercially available handheld stabilizers

Exyn Technologies

Summer 2018

Robotics: Software and Algorithms Intern

Philadelphia, PA

Software engineering at aerial robotics startup delivering trustworthy autonomy in challenging environments

- Evaluated and integrated range of technologies for barcode decoding and localization for autonomous warehouse inventory
- Contributed mission-critical modules to integrate low-level sensors with high-level flight software stack
- Developed and implemented novel algorithm for extrinsic calibration of any number of rigidly connected inertial measurement units, cameras, and LIDARs using only a single physical calibration target accomodating all sensing modalities

MEDIA

GRASP Lab Presents: "MEAM 520 Class Breakdown"

2022

Penn Engineering Today: "Virtual Robots: Taking Risks in an Online Classroom"

2021

National Geographic's Breakthrough: "Game of Drones"

2017

34th Street Magazine: "Penn Students Create Gingerbread Replica of Fisher Fine Arts Library"

2017

SERVICE

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Science Olympiad at the University of Pennsylvania

2017 - present

- **Event Supervisor**, *Penn Invitational Tournament*. Coordinating a team of student volunteers to run a yearly engineering challenge for high school students, with over 100 students competing.
- **Placement Leader**, *Urban Initiative*. Site supervisor for several student volunteers in affiliated outreach and mentoring program. Making weekly visits to a Philadelphia public high school to work directly with students exploring science and engineering topics.

"Fun with Robots" Outreach, Roxborough Library, Free Library of Philadelphia

April 2024

- Ran workshop for elementary, middle, and high school students, exploring basic concepts in control and stability for robotics

MENTORING STUDENT RESEARCHERS

I have been either a direct supervisor or a close mentor to each of the following students during the completion of the listed research project.

Doctoral Students

- Katie Mao, University of Pennsylvania (Mechanical Engineering)

2022

"Trajectory Planning for the Bidirectional Quadrotor as a Differentially Flat Hybrid System"

Masters Students

- Nishanth Rao, University of Pennsylvania (Robotics) 2024 - present
“Exploring Symmetries and Equivariance in Robot Learning”
- Jack Campanella, University of Pennsylvania (Robotics) 2023 - present
“Integrated Hardware and Software Codesign for Controlling Underactuated Aerial Robots”
- Saibernard Yogendran, University of Pennsylvania (Robotics) 2022 - 2024
“Towards a Lightweight Fully-Actuated Aerial Vehicle: Thrust Vectoring and Control Allocation Under Redundancy”

Undergraduate Students

- Eshan Singhal, University of Pennsylvania (Computer Engineering and Physics) Summer 2024
“Control of an Agile Quadrotor Aerial Vehicle with Articulated Propellers”
- Nicole Luna, Cal Poly Pomona (Mechanical Engineering and Physics) Summer 2021
“Aerial Manipulator Mechanical Design”
- Natasha Dilamani, University of Pennsylvania (Mechanical Engineering) Summer 2020
“Dynamic Modeling of the Sphero, a Highly Nonholonomic System”

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL

“Equivariant Robotics” Workshop at IROS 2024, Lead Organizer 2024

Leading the organization of an interdisciplinary conference workshop at IROS 2024 that will explore the role of the natural symmetries enjoyed by robotic systems in diverse problem areas across estimation, perception, and control.

GRASP “Students, Faculty, and Industry” Seminar, Organizing Committee Member 2023 - present

Curated, solicited, and hosted speakers from peer institutions and industry connections to visit the GRASP research community.

Mechanical Engineering Graduate Association, Treasurer 2020 - 2021

Managed finances while planning and executing programming to support the professional, social, engagement, and inclusion needs of the graduate student community in our department.

Review Activities for International Journals and Conferences

- IFAC Automatica 2024
- IEEE/ASME Transactions on Mechatronics 2024
- IEEE Control Systems Letters 2023 - 2024
- Springer Autonomous Robots 2023
- IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters 2021 - 2023
- ASME Journal of Dynamic Systems, Measurement and Control 2022 - 2023
- IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation 2022 - 2023
- IEEE Transactions on Robotics 2021 - 2023
- Robotics: Science and Systems 2022
- IEEE Transactions on Automatic Control 2022
- IEEE International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems 2020 - 2021
- IEEE International Conference on Automation Science and Engineering 2020