

# Research Statement

## Introduction

My research efforts center on understanding and improving human mobility by developing biomimetic controllers for powered assistive devices and humanoid robots and on developing control augmentation for small manually controlled vehicles. The ability humans have to ambulate and manipulate devices continues to be the envy of engineers who desire to artificially mimic their motion. Understanding and mimicking the intricacies of the mammalian neuromuscular system have the potential to allow us to improve human life through assistive machine and device design. However, contemporary robots and machines are still limited in their ability to emulate the robust capabilities of mammalian sensing and actuation.

The fundamental question that I am interested in is:

Can dynamically human-similar machines and their controllers be designed to move as a human would move, if provided neurally-limited driving control inputs?

I am interested in identifying practical controllers for devices, robots, and vehicles which encode feed-forward and feedback control such that the combined human/machine system has nearly identical motion to an able-bodied human. My current focus is on improving balance while standing and walking with lower limb prostheses and exoskeletons. To do this my research currently has three primary foci:

1. Identifying how humans balance and locomote through data intensive computational estimation, learning, and identification.
2. Applying biomimetic control algorithms and design enhancements derived from identified controllers to assistive devices such as exoskeletons, powered prostheses, small vehicles, and humanoid robots.
3. Developing next generation open and collaborative computational tools to back efforts in the first two items.

## Current State of Human Locomotion Simulation & Assistive Control

Deep reinforcement learning has had growing success in creating joint torque driven closed loop controlled simulation of low-fidelity humanoid models in complex virtual environments (e.g. [45, 9]). Parallel to the reinforcement learning are efforts to generate closed and open loop controllers through optimal control methods (shooting and trajectory optimization) that focus on minimizing energy expenditure of high-fidelity neuromuscular models in more basic walking and running tasks. These methods produce simulations of much more realistic gait [2, 47, 48, 8, 39, 46, 6]. Very recently these parallel efforts have merged with signs of promise. For example, in the 2017 NIPS AI challenge contestants used deep reinforcement learning to discover realistic gait control for a muscle activated high-fidelity lower body neuromuscular model [12]. Machine learning and shooting based optimal control using the high-fidelity models are bound by the forward dynamics computation speeds, which are real-time at best. Advancements that reduce forward simulation speeds or circumvent the need to explicitly evaluate the stiff dynamics are needed to make more rapid progress. Successful simulations that incorporate modeled prostheses have just emerging (e.g. [13]) which is an exciting new path in the field.

Powered assistive devices such as powered below- and above-knee prostheses have improved drastically in the last decade and have been shown to reduce the metabolic cost of walking in amputees [3], with some now

moving to commercial products (e.g. Rheo Knee). Unpowered [4] and powered [49] exoskeletons can also do the same for able bodied walkers [4]. Powered lower limb exoskeleton for paraplegics are just now being approved by the FDA for the US and European markets (e.g. Rewalk, Indego, Esko). These devices rely primarily on non-neural control, offer no balance during gait, and move with a very unnatural gait. Future research will improve all three of these aspects to bring natural self-balanced walking back to the paralyzed.

In the past year, we have started to see merger of the successes in software and the successes in hardware with demonstrations such as in [40] alluding to a bright future for discovery with lower limb systems.

## My Past Work in Human Motion and Control

Much of my prior research has focused on the problem of control identification in human balance where I have attempted to answer this question:

Given the simultaneous measurements of the kinematics of human motion and optionally human/environment interface and internal system forces, what is the casual relationship from sensing to actuation in human motion?

My graduate work focused on understanding the control mechanisms humans use while balancing on a bicycle. Because the bicycle is a dynamically complex vehicle [1, 15, 34, 18] that acts as an intermediary between the human and the environment it is a powerful platform for understanding balance.

I began by applying principal component analysis to a large collection of motion capture data during steady state bicycling on a treadmill, which identified dominant motion patterns and exposed subtle leg motions used for balance at extreme cases [17], [32]. We further confirmed this behavior with video analysis of more natural bicycling behavior around a city and on a treadmill [14]. Following those initial experiments, I developed an instrumented bicycle, capable of accurately measuring the full dynamic state of the rider-vehicle system [20, 30] and collected copious amounts of data during responses to lateral perturbations in path tracking tasks. Using a manual control based theoretic controller [10] and data driven parameter estimation, I identified a set of controllers that explained the dominant rider perturbation linear response behavior [20], which was then used to characterize a general controller able to mimic human behavior for a broader set of control tasks. This was expanded further with other theoretic controller structures for bicycling [41, 43, 42] and also applied to aircraft control identification [11].

The work on bicycle control identification lead into postdoctoral work focused on developing controllers for lower extremity exoskeletons designed to assist paraplegic individuals in walking. We partnered with Parker Hannifin Corp. and targeted their Indego Exoskeleton. My goal was to provide natural gait and unassisted balance for these devices, something that is still lacking today. Utilizing an actuated treadmill coupled with full body kinematic tracking, I collected large quantities of walking data from both normal walking and longitudinally perturbed walking. I published the data as one of the first data papers in the field [29] and demonstrated the effectiveness of the treadmill belt perturbation method. I used this data with a direct gait cycle gain scheduled feedback identification technique to identify possible closed loop controllers [36, 27, 28]. This work led to the development of an indirect identification technique based on parameter estimation with direct collocation to enable simulated validation of the controllers. Direct collocation gave us the computational speed to discretely simulate hours of data. Starting with a simpler problem, I developed methods with data derived from human perturbed standing data. The techniques led to orders of magnitude of improvement in computation speed and control identification strictly from kinematic data [37, 38].

Since moving into a teaching faculty position at UC Davis I have mentored and led a number of sensing, instrumentation, and robotics projects that build on the prior research with various local companies and undergraduate students. We have developed an adaptive mouth-based control for an electric tricycle which is ALS and quadriplegic friendly with Outrider USA and Disability Reports. This past year my students developed a powered cable driven hand prostheses for partial upper body paralysis with Ekso Bionics. With SRE Engineering we developed a wireless boot for measuring ground reaction forces for horse trotting in non-laboratory settings that I would like to apply to human walking. I also mentored a group of students that developed a robot to tie a shoe, one of the more complex tasks human hands perform. Lastly, I have developed a desktop balancing robot that will be used to validate the indirect identification methods for standing balance that I mentioned above. Some of my current projects can be viewed on my lab website: <http://mechmotum.github.io>.

All of my research relies heavily on open source computational data analysis and simulation tools, much of which I have developed and published. Most notably, I am a core developer of SymPy [44], a computer algebra system, and the maintainer of the classical mechanics package [7]. Our 2017 paper [16] on the 11 year old software has over 150 citations, along with thousands of users and hundreds of contributors making it one of the most popular packages in the Scientific Python ecosystem. Additionally, I have developed a suite of bicycle dynamics related software packages [21, 22, 23, 19] and dynamics/biomechanics packages [5, 24, 25, 26, 33, 31]. Recently I have published a package for general purpose trajectory optimization and parameter estimation [35] and also for ski jump design [31].

## My Research Plans

As a new professor I will play an integral role in your department’s vision for mechanical and aerospace engineering. I plan to lead a laboratory that will provide computational and experimental biomechanics expertise alongside humanoid robot and assistive device design. I hope to contribute to the department with a modernized biomechatronics research and teaching focus.

With more than a decade in Northern California, I have a wide network of partners to bring this vision to life that span orthotics companies to Bay Area biomechanic and robotics companies. My network also spans beyond the region to the state, national, and international collaborations. I plan to grow my collaborations with regional companies and labs (e.g. Toyota Research Institute, Motion Analysis, Ekso Bionics, Inscitech, Open Robotics, Stanford’s Neuromuscular Biomechanics Lab) along with my expanded collaborators (e.g. Cleveland State’s Human Motion and Control Laboratory, Cornell’s Biorobotics Lab, TU Delft’s Biomechanics Department, and Meijo University). I also look forward to developing more cross disciplinary research partners, many which have begun with the 90+ capstone design projects I have mentored.

I will continue to participate in a number of academic communities that I am currently involved with. The lab will target conferences such as Dynamic Walking and ROSCon along with the American and International Societies of Biomechanics (including the ISB Technical Simulation group). On the software side, we will continue to present at SciPy, PyData, and PyCon for open source computation.

The lab I am planning will be able to 1) collect motion data from humans and robots in mobility related activities both in the lab and in natural environments, 2) apply cutting edge learning, estimation, and identification methods to characterize human control, 3) build and test controllers in humanoid robots and assistive devices, and 4) contribute to and develop the next generation of open source biomechatronic related software.

My initial project plans are multifold and will build from my prior work. I will start recruiting students for 1) applying parameter identification using direct collocation to perturbed walking data to discover a gain scheduled closed loop control, 2) development of a scaled balancing robot that simulates perturbed human balancing, 3) accelerating lower body neuromuscular forward dynamics simulations through implicit dynamics and optimized code generation and common sub-expression evaluation across CPU/GPU cores, and 4) development of a low-fidelity lower limb exoskeleton for controller testing.

Given the opportunity, I have the skills, network, and vision to succeed as a professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering.

## References

- [1] Karl J. Åström, Richard E. Klein, and Anders Lennartsson. Bicycle dynamics and control: Adapted bicycles for education and research. *IEEE Control Systems Magazine*, 25(4):26–47, August 2005.
- [2] Marko Ackermann and Antonie J. van den Bogert. Optimality principles for model-based prediction of human gait. *Journal of Biomechanics*, 43(6):1055–1060, April 2010.
- [3] S. K. Au, J. Weber, and H. Herr. Powered Ankle–Foot Prosthesis Improves Walking Metabolic Economy. *IEEE Transactions on Robotics*, 25(1):51–66, February 2009.
- [4] Steven H. Collins, M. Bruce Wiggin, and Gregory S. Sawicki. Reducing the energy cost of human walking using an unpowered exoskeleton. *Nature*, 522(7555):212–215, June 2015.

- [5] Christopher Dembia, Jason K. Moore, Stefen Yin, and Oliver Lee. Yeadon: A Python Library For Human Inertia Estimation, June 2011.
- [6] Christopher L. Dembia, Amy Silder, Thomas K. Uchida, Jennifer L. Hicks, and Scott L. Delp. Simulating ideal assistive devices to reduce the metabolic cost of walking with heavy loads. *PLOS ONE*, 12(7):e0180320, July 2017.
- [7] Gilbert Gede, Dale L. Peterson, Angadh S. Nanjangud, Jason K. Moore, and Mont Hubbard. Constrained Multibody Dynamics With Python: From Symbolic Equation Generation to Publication. In *Volume 7B: 9th International Conference on Multibody Systems, Nonlinear Dynamics, and Control*, Portland, Oregon, USA, August 2013. DETC2013-13470.
- [8] Thomas Geijtenbeek. *Animating Virtual Characters Using Physics-Based Simulation*. PhD thesis, 2013.
- [9] Nicolas Heess, Dhruva TB, Srinivasan Sriram, Jay Lemmon, Josh Merel, Greg Wayne, Yuval Tassa, Tom Erez, Ziyu Wang, S. M. Ali Eslami, Martin Riedmiller, and David Silver. Emergence of Locomotion Behaviours in Rich Environments. *arXiv:1707.02286 [cs]*, July 2017.
- [10] Ronald Hess, Jason K. Moore, and Mont Hubbard. Modeling the Manually Controlled Bicycle. *IEEE Transactions on Systems, Man, and Cybernetics - Part A: Systems and Humans*, 42(3):545–557, February 2012.
- [11] Ronald A. Hess and Jason K. Moore. Estimating Parameters of the Structural Pilot Model Using Simulation Tracking Data. In *AIAA Guidance, Navigation, and Control Conference*, August 2013.
- [12] Łukasz Kidziński. Reinforcement learning with musculoskeletal models. <http://osim-rl.stanford.edu/>, 2017.
- [13] Anne D. Koelewijn and Antonie J. van den Bogert. Joint contact forces can be reduced by improving joint moment symmetry in below-knee amputee gait simulations. *Gait & Posture*, 49:219–225, September 2016.
- [14] J. D. G. Kooijman, A. L. Schwab, and Jason K. Moore. Some Observations on Human Control of a Bicycle. In *Proceedings of the ASME 2009 International Design and Engineering Technical Conferences & Computers and Information in Engineering Conference*. ASME, August 2009.
- [15] J. P. Meijaard, Jim M. Papadopoulos, Andy Ruina, and A. L. Schwab. Linearized dynamics equations for the balance and steer of a bicycle: A benchmark and review. *Proceedings of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 463(2084):1955–1982, August 2007.
- [16] Aaron Meurer, Christopher P. Smith, Mateusz Paprocki, Ondřej Čertík, Sergey B. Kirpichev, Matthew Rocklin, AMiT Kumar, Sergiu Ivanov, Jason K. Moore, Sartaj Singh, Thilina Rathnayake, Sean Vig, Brian E. Granger, Richard P. Muller, Francesco Bonazzi, Harsh Gupta, Shivam Vats, Fredrik Johansson, Fabian Pedregosa, Matthew J. Curry, Andy R. Terrel, Štěpán Roučka, Ashutosh Saboo, Isuru Fernando, Sumith Kulal, Robert Cimrman, and Anthony Scopatz. SymPy: Symbolic computing in Python. *PeerJ Computer Science*, 3(e103), January 2017.
- [17] J. K. Moore, J. D. G. Kooijman, and A. L. Schwab. Rider motion identification during normal bicycling by means of principal component analysis. In K. Arczewski and M. Wojtyra J. Frączek, editors, *Proceedings of Multibody Dynamics 2009, ECCOMAS Thematic Conference*, Warsaw, Poland, June 2009.
- [18] Jason Moore and Mont Hubbard. Parametric Study of Bicycle Stability. In Margaret Estivalet and Pierre Brisson, editors, *The Engineering of Sport 7*, volume 2. Springer, 2008.
- [19] Jason K. Moore. HumanControl: Human control of a bicycle. University of California, Davis, May 2011.
- [20] Jason K. Moore. *Human Control of a Bicycle*. Doctor of Philosophy, University of California, Davis, CA, August 2012.

- [21] Jason K. Moore, P. D. L. de Lange, and Yumiko Henneberry. BicycleDAQ: Data acquisition application for an instrumented bicycle. University of California, Davis, October 2010.
- [22] Jason K. Moore, P. D. L. de Lange, and Stefen Yin. BicycleDataProcessor: Data storage and processing library for an instrumented bicycle. University of California, Davis, February 2011.
- [23] Jason K. Moore, Chris Dembia, and Oliver Lee. BicycleParameters: A Python library for bicycle parameter estimation and analysis, April 2011.
- [24] Jason K. Moore, Chris Dembia, and Oliver Lee. DynamicistToolKit: A Python library for dynamics and controls, June 2011.
- [25] Jason K. Moore, Tarun Gaba, Oliver Lee, Sahil Shekhawat, Dale L. Peterson, Chris Dembia, Yashu Seth, Nikhil Pappu, Gilbert Gede, James Crist, Brandon James Milam, Frédéric Bastien, Pranjali Mittal, Robert McMurphy, Varun Joshi, Ivan Angelov, and Nikolay Mayorov. PyDy: A multi-body dynamics analysis package written in Python. PyDy, October 2011.
- [26] Jason K. Moore, Sandra K. Hnat, Obinna Nwanna, Michael Overmeyer, and Antonie J. van den Bogert. GaitAnalysisToolKit: A Python Library for Gait Analysis, December 2013.
- [27] Jason K. Moore, Sandra K. Hnat, and Antonie J. van den Bogert. Identification of human control during perturbed walking. In *Midwest American Society of Biomechanics Regional Meeting*, Akron, Ohio, USA, March 2014.
- [28] Jason K. Moore, Sandra K. Hnat, and Antonie J. van den Bogert. Identification of human control during perturbed walking. Zurich, Switzerland, June 2014.
- [29] Jason K. Moore, Sandra K. Hnat, and Antonie J. van den Bogert. An elaborate data set on human gait and the effect of mechanical perturbations. *PeerJ*, 3(e918), April 2015.
- [30] Jason K. Moore and Mont Hubbard. Methods for elimination of crosstalk and inertial effects in bicycle and motorcycle steer torque estimation. In *Proceedings of Bicycle and Motorcycle Dynamics: Symposium on the Dynamics and Control of Single Track Vehicles*, Narashino, Chiba, Japan, November 2013.
- [31] Jason K. Moore and Mont Hubbard. Skijumpdesign: A Ski Jump Design Tool for Specified Equivalent Fall Height. *The Journal of Open Source Software*, 3(28):818, August 2018.
- [32] Jason K. Moore, J. D. G. Kooijman, A. L. Schwab, and Mont Hubbard. Rider motion identification during normal bicycling by means of principal component analysis. *Multibody System Dynamics*, 25(2):225–244, February 2011.
- [33] Jason K. Moore and Kenneth Lyons. Resonance: A Python package for mechanical vibration analysis. University of California, Davis, July 2017.
- [34] Jason K. Moore, Dale L. Peterson, and Mont Hubbard. Influence of rider dynamics on the Whipple bicycle model. In *Proceedings of the 11th International Symposium on Computer Simulation in Biomechanics*, Tainan, Taiwan, June 2007.
- [35] Jason K. Moore and Antonie van den Bogert. Opty: Software for trajectory optimization and parameter identification using direct collocation. *Journal of Open Source Software*, 3(21):300, January 2018.
- [36] Jason K. Moore and Antonie J. van den Bogert. Direct Identification of Human Gait Control. In preparation, August 2013.
- [37] Jason K. Moore and Antonie J. van den Bogert. Perturbed Standing Controller Parameter Identification: A comparison of Methods. In preparation, August 2014.
- [38] Jason K. Moore and Antonie J. van den Bogert. Quiet Standing Control Parameter Identification with Direct Collocation. In *XV International Symposium on Computer Simulation in Biomechanics*, Edinburgh, UK, July 2015.

- [39] Igor Mordatch, Jack M. Wang, Emanuel Todorov, and Vladlen Koltun. Animating human lower limbs using contact-invariant optimization. *ACM Transactions on Graphics*, 32(6):1–8, November 2013.
- [40] OpenAI, Marcin Andrychowicz, Bowen Baker, Maciek Chociej, Rafal Jozefowicz, Bob McGrew, Jakub Pachocki, Arthur Petron, Matthias Plappert, Glenn Powell, Alex Ray, Jonas Schneider, Szymon Sidor, Josh Tobin, Peter Welinder, Lilian Weng, and Wojciech Zaremba. Learning Dexterous In-Hand Manipulation. *arXiv:1808.00177 [cs, stat]*, August 2018.
- [41] A. L. Schwab, P. D. L. de Lange, R. Happee, and Jason K. Moore. Rider control identification in bicycling, parameter estimation of a linear model using lateral force perturbation tests. In *Proceedings of the IMSD2012 - The 2nd Joint International Conference on Multibody System Dynamics*, Stuttgart, Germany., May 2012.
- [42] A. L. Schwab, P. D. L. de Lange, R. Happee, and Jason K. Moore. Rider control identification in bicycling using lateral force perturbation tests. *Proceedings of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Part K: Journal of Multi-body Dynamics*, 227(4):390–406, August 2013. 2013 SAGE Best Paper Award.
- [43] Arend Schwab, Peter de Lange, and Jason K. Moore. Rider Optimal Control Identification in Bicycling. In *Proceedings of the 5th Annual Dynamic Systems and Control Conference and 11th Annual Motion and Vibration Conference*, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA, October 2012. ASME.
- [44] SymPy Development Team. SymPy: Python library for symbolic mathematics, 2006.
- [45] Jie Tan, Yuting Gu, C. Karen Liu, and Greg Turk. Learning Bicycle Stunts. *ACM Trans. Graph.*, 33(4):50:1–50:12, July 2014.
- [46] Thomas K. Uchida, Ajay Seth, Soha Pouya, Christopher L. Dembia, Jennifer L. Hicks, and Scott L. Delp. Simulating Ideal Assistive Devices to Reduce the Metabolic Cost of Running. *PLOS ONE*, 11(9):e0163417, September 2016.
- [47] Antonie J. van den Bogert, Dimitra Blana, and Dieter Heinrich. Implicit methods for efficient musculoskeletal simulation and optimal control. *Procedia IUTAM*, 2:297–316, 2011.
- [48] Jack M. Wang, Samuel R. Hamner, Scott L. Delp, and Vladlen Koltun. Optimizing locomotion controllers using biologically-based actuators and objectives. *ACM Transactions on Graphics (TOG)*, 31(4):25, 2012.
- [49] Juanjuan Zhang, Pieter Fiers, Kirby A. Witte, Rachel W. Jackson, Katherine L. Poggensee, Christopher G. Atkeson, and Steven H. Collins. Human-in-the-loop optimization of exoskeleton assistance during walking. *Science*, 356(6344):1280–1284, June 2017.