

Noah Zipin

Engineering Portfolio

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INTRODUCTION

Hello! My name is Noah Zipin and I am currently a junior mechanical engineering student at the University of Maryland, College Park. During the pandemic, I took on several projects to learn new skills and solidify information from my courses. This portfolio outlines a few of these projects and is designed to demonstrate my practical experience in engineering. It is my hope that this will allow you to better assess how my skills can be applied to your company. Thank you for your time and consideration!

ABOUT ME

At my core, I am a creator. I create things to understand how processes work, to express my new ideas, and to leave a mark on the world. I'm pursuing engineering because I love creating at the cutting edge of technology. I'm attracted to high-pace, interesting work. I'm a self-starter, and I'm most efficient when I'm given a clear project goal and a certain degree of autonomy.

Body-Powered Prosthetic Finger

Traumatic injury to the fingers and hands is a common reason for emergency room visits. According to [research published in the Annals of Emergency Medicine](#), an estimated 45,000 patients for partial hand amputation are seen annually. This is a sad truth, considering that finger loss not only comes with a functional impairment but also many psychological impacts associated with the injury, as cited [in the Journal of Hand Surgery](#) in 2008.

Currently there are several solutions to accommodate partial finger loss due to traumatic injury. One of the most functionally advantageous designs is the body-powered prosthetic finger. This works by utilizing what's left of the amputation to drive a mechanism that restores ordinary motion of the finger. It responds quickly to the user and feels natural.

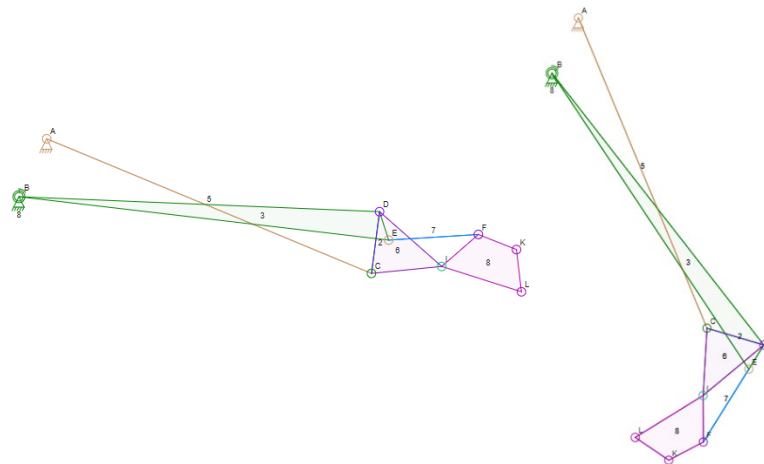
Unfortunately, only a few prosthetics companies manufacture body-driven prosthetic fingers, and are often made of expensive materials offered at inflated prices. A single finger can cost thousands of dollars, and are not an option for amputees without health insurance and/or other complications. A low-cost alternative is desperately needed.

The goal of this project is to design a low-cost body-powered finger prosthetic that restores finger motion and function to the user. The design should be light, durable, low-friction, and integrate off-the-shelf parts with 3D-printed components.

I started this project because I wanted to help a relative, who unfortunately experienced a traumatic accident that resulted in the loss of his middle and distal phalanges of the middle finger.

I began by designing a mechanical linkage that mimics the bending motion of a finger when driven at the base. Its premise is based on one of the most basic linkages – the planar 4 bar. By allowing two of the linkages to cross each other, it creates a bending motion. By cascading

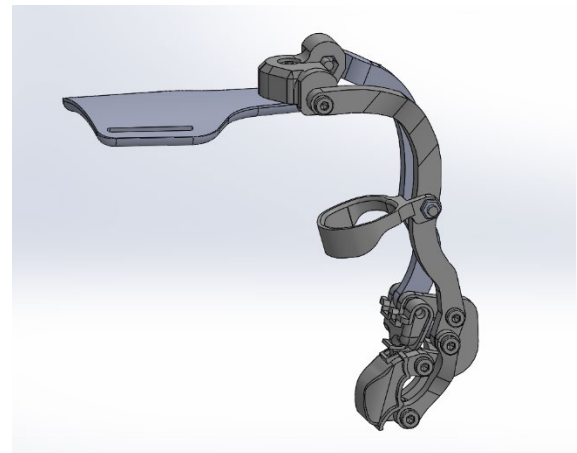
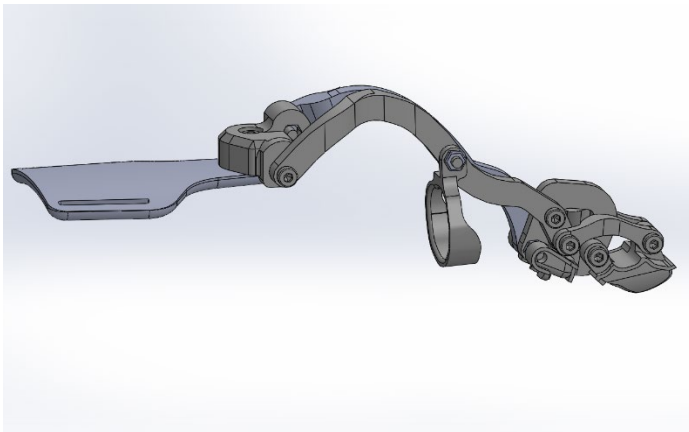
two of these crossing 4-bar linkages onto one another, it creates a 2 stage bend that mimics the natural motion of the the middle and distal phalanges. To analyze the behavior of this mechanism I used the software, Linkage. Images from the prototyped mechanism can be seen above.



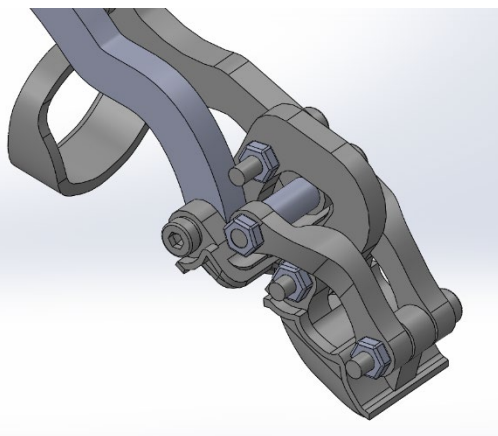


To ensure a good fit, I made an alginate mold of the user's hand. The hand was cast in plaster and was used throughout multiple iterations of the design.

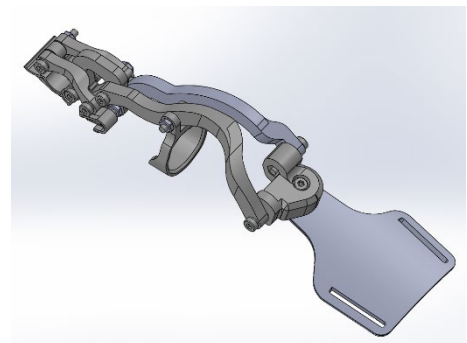
After getting the general motion and dimensions of the linkage mechanism right, I moved into SolidWorks to recreate the design using a top-down modeling approach.



Above is the full finger assembly. It consists of 10 unique 3D printed parts and is held together only with M3 screws and nylock nuts. Other parts include the velcro strap, molded silicone interface for the backplate/finger grip. The full cost of materials is well under \$10.



At left are some of the more intricate parts that mimic the middle and distal phalanges of the finger. It is designed with simplicity and durability in mind. Almost every linkage is in double shear to withstand torsional load about multiple axes, and tolerances are designed for both low-friction and high rigidity. At right is an aerial view of the mechanism. The

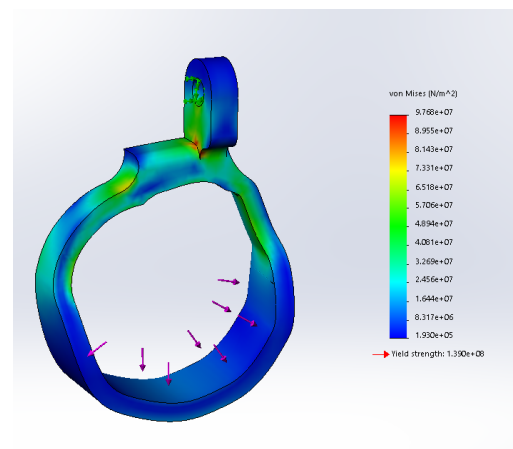
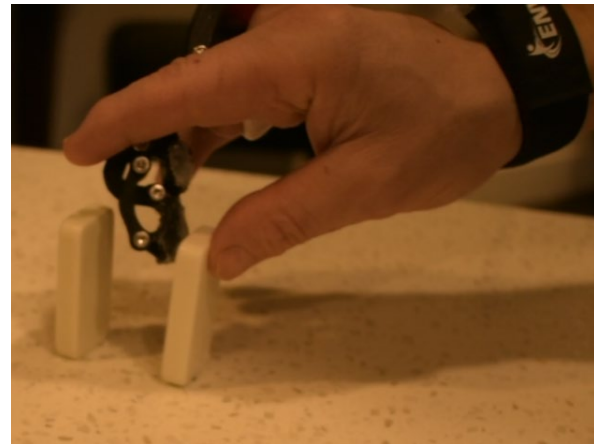


finger length, from the metacarpal joint, is just under 9 cm.



After the prosthetic finger fit the alginate-mold hand well, it was time for testing.

Results: The finger restored both the fine motor skills of the middle finger as well as increased grip strength of the hand. The finger tip is designed to be compliant so that doing things that require delicate precision, like stacking dominoes, can be achieved. The middle phalanx is completely rigid and allows for increased grip strength for lifting heavy objects. The user was immediately able to use the device because of its highly responsive and natural motion.



Tasks that were once tedious due to an unbalanced grip, like holding tools, cutting food in the kitchen, and opening doors are now much easier. Friction is enhanced on the finger with a silicone coating that mimics that characteristics of human skin.

A quick finite element analysis in SolidWorks shows that the ring can likely support a static load of about 25 lbs. Although, this could be drastically increased by a design change that eliminates the stress concentration at the top of the ring.

Click here to watch a YouTube video that details the design: <https://youtu.be/AiMHWqdtiuA>

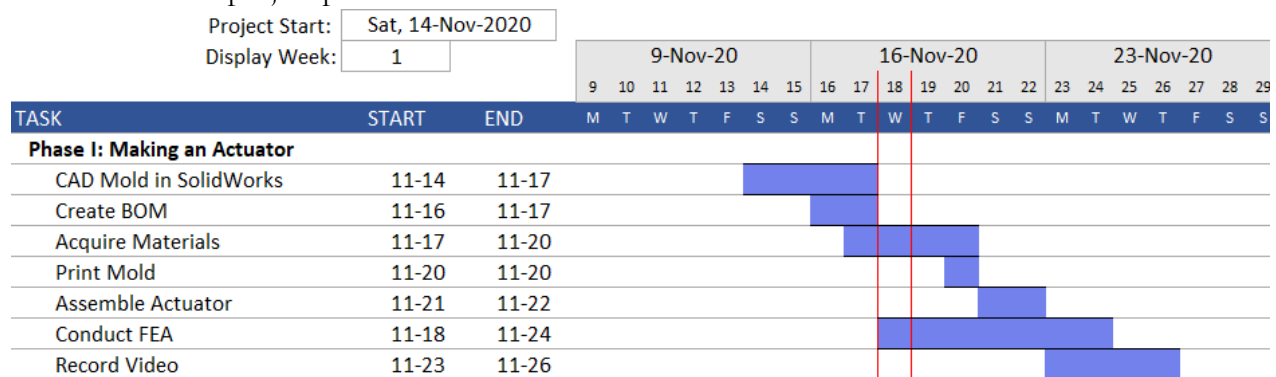


Soft Robotic Gripper

After taking courses like Mechanics of Materials and Materials Science in the A. James Clark School of Engineering this semester, I became highly interested in the nonlinear elastic behavior of cross-linked polymers, like rubber or silicone.

I created this project so that I could investigate the material properties of soft materials and to see if I could simulate complex behaviors such as the visco-elastic effect using finite element analysis.

The goal of the project is to design a soft robotic pneumatically actuated gripper that is capable of grasping objects with complex geometries that would be difficult for traditional “hard” robotic manipulators to deal with (examples include pencil, water bottle, glasses, etc). I’d like to be able to finish the project prior to the start of 2021.



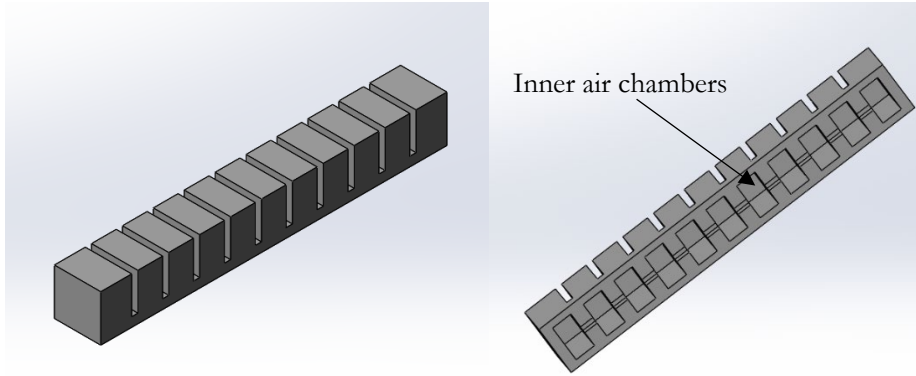
Above is a dynamic Gantt chart I made in Excel to be able to adhere to a timeline. The project is designed to have two phases:

Goal - To create a single soft actuator made of ECOFLEX 00-35 platinum cure silicone rubber. Here, I’ll be utilizing resources from the [soft robotics toolkit](#) to create a PneuNets bending actuator, and simulating its deflection as a function of pressure using the Abaqus software suite.

The PneuNets actuator was originally developed by the [Whitesides Research Group](#) at Harvard University. It operates by inflating an elastomer with inner air chambers. The elastomer will expand in areas that are the thinnest, and deflection will compound to create a bending motion.



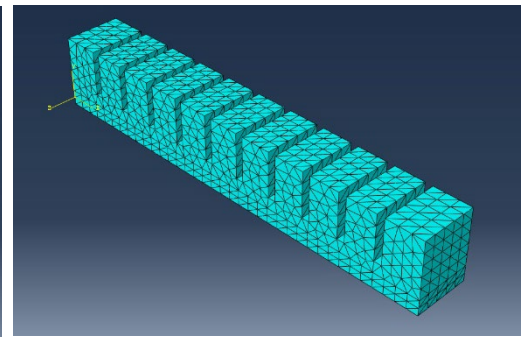
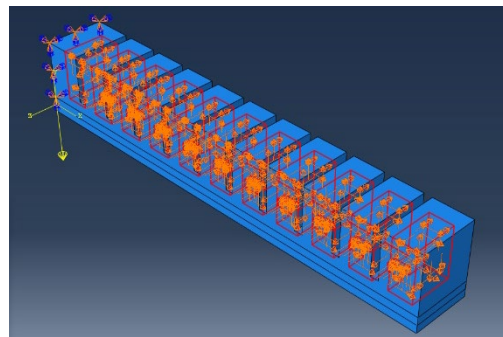
This concept can be seen in the cross section of an inflated PneuNets actuator at left. Here the thinnest walls of the elastomer expand which results in a net bending motion.



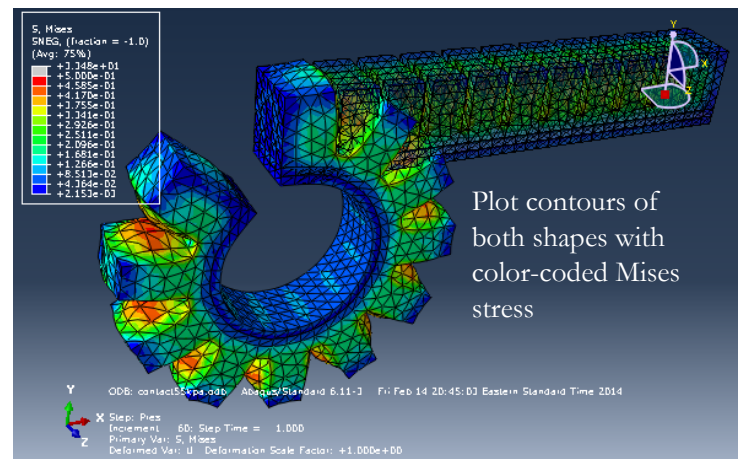
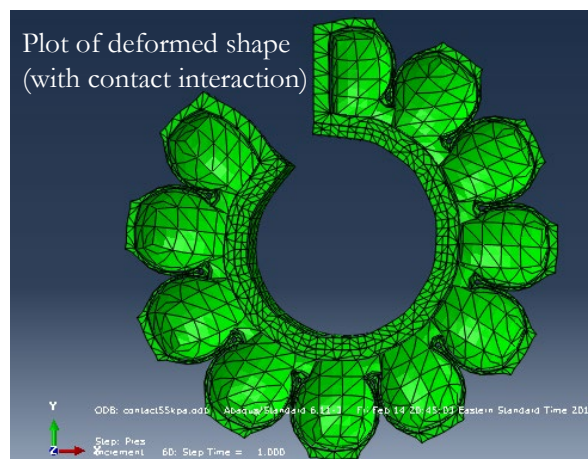
I started by creating simple geometries for a soft actuator with dimensions suggested by the soft robotics toolkit in SolidWorks. Section views of the internal air chambers can be seen in the images at left.

I then used Abaqus CAE to conduct finite element analysis (FEA) to see the actuator deflection with pressure and gravitational loads. It is important to simulate these actuators to see their behavior before fabrication so there's less of a need to make multiple prototypes. However, simulating the non-linear elastic behavior of the EcoFlex silicone is quite difficult, and is the main reason I'm doing this project. I've only ever conducted FEA on rigid components, so I'm excited to learn this new skill.

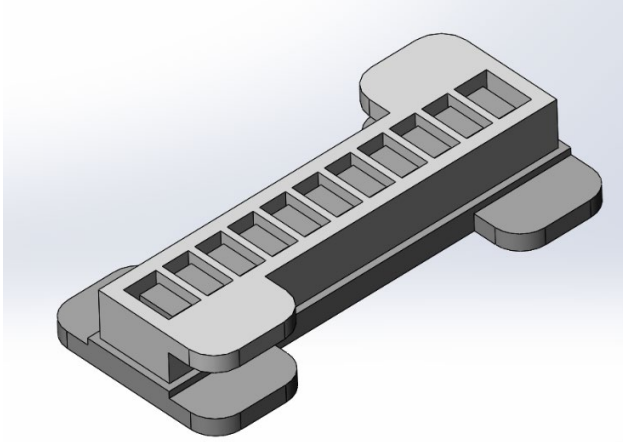
I created boundary conditions and applied loads. The left end of the beam is fixed. Uniform pressure (8 psi) acts on all surfaces of the internal chamber.



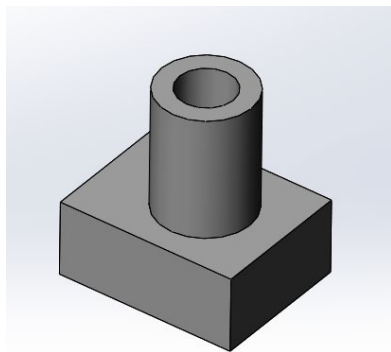
Since the actuator acts in the vertical plane, I've also included gravity as a force that acts on the actuator. I created the mesh (right, above) and ran the analysis:



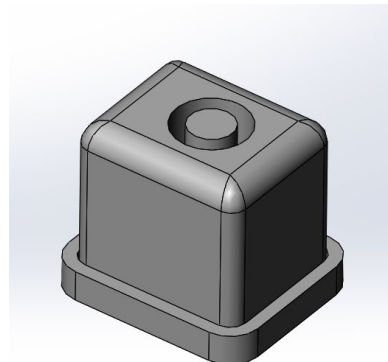
Above are the results of the simulation. It is worth noting that I included a strain-limiting layer (in this case, paper) to ensure uniform bending. I will include a paper layer in the actual model.



Since I was happy with the geometry and morphology of the current model, I moved forward and created molds in SolidWorks, which can be seen above. This is based on the original actuator with slightly more complex geometry so that the silicone can more easily bond with itself in the casting process.



Adapter for air source



Mold

To attach the soft robotic actuator to an air source, I designed a part in SolidWorks to be cast out of silicone that would snugly fit the 6 mm outer diameter tubing.

Below are the results of the completion of Phase I of the project:



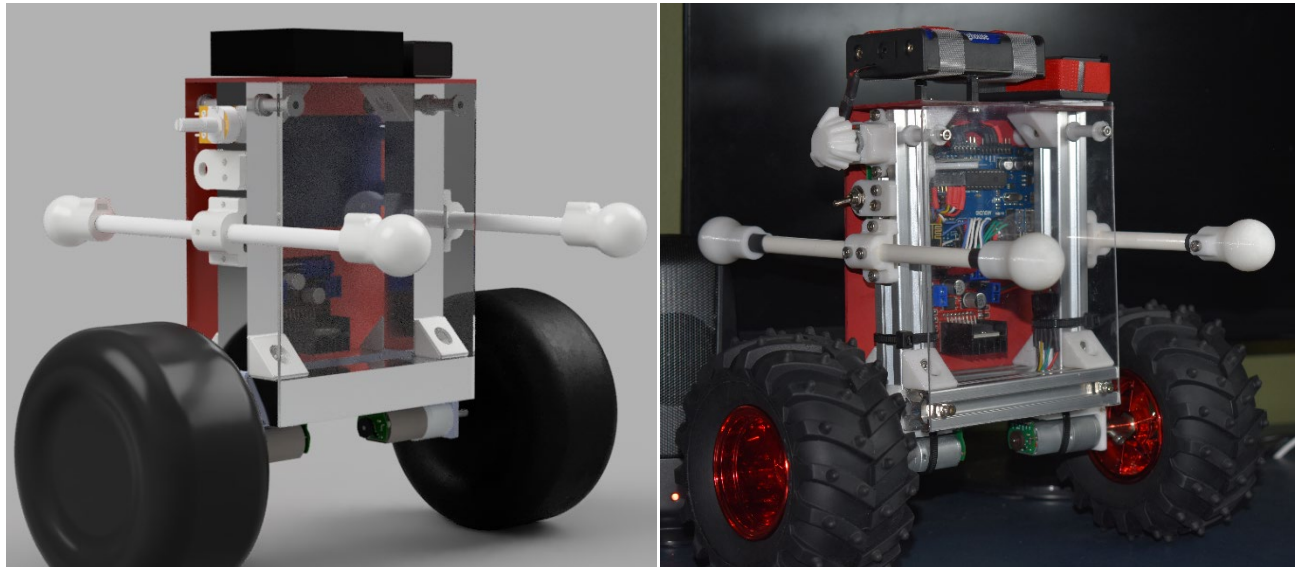
Due to casting difficulties with ECOFLEX 00-35 silicone, I had to reduce the total number of sections from 11 to 8. But deflection is the same with increased pressure.



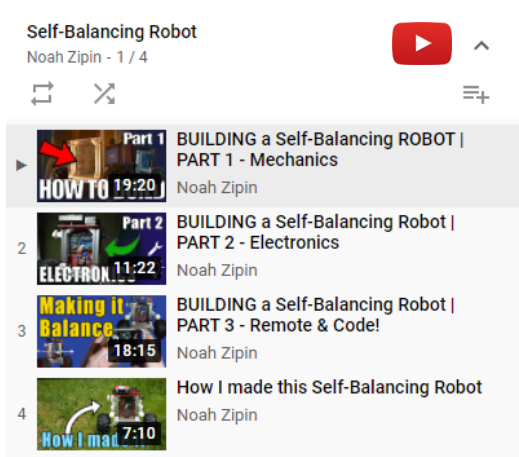
A **demonstration** of the single actuator working can be seen by clicking this link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8f4WjTySG0&ab_channel=NoahZipin

2 Wheeled Self-Balancing Robot



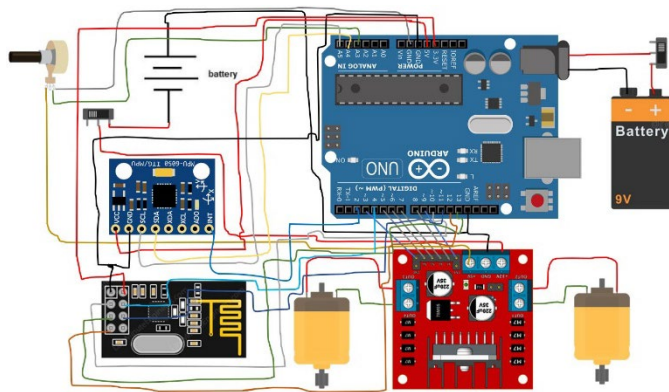
I chose to start this project to learn new skills during the extra time I had due to the pandemic. Here, I've designed, manufactured, and controlled 100% custom systems to make a robot that balances on two wheels. This was a highly multidisciplinary project, and I've learned so much about circuit design, control theory, dynamic systems theory, systems integration, and more. And, I've been able to improve on some of my other skills, like CAD modeling, project planning, and presentational speaking.



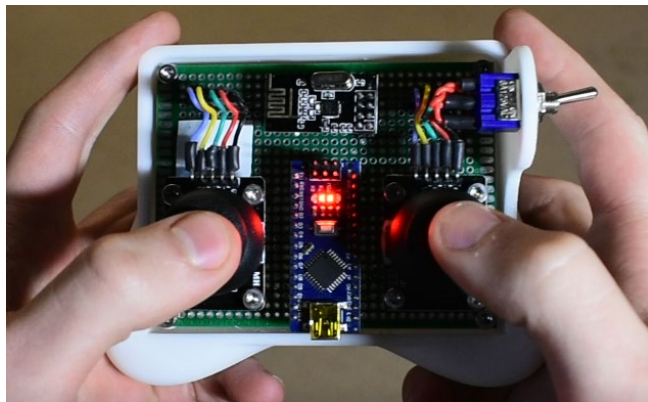
On top of making the robot, I've also made a full in-depth YouTube series that describes the entire process and explains all aspects of the design and theory. My latest video, which showcases the robot fully working, can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNKXGo_rAnBg&list=PLmEi2OoxXIQ88akwk1nRoXV6LqhXQp3kH&index=4

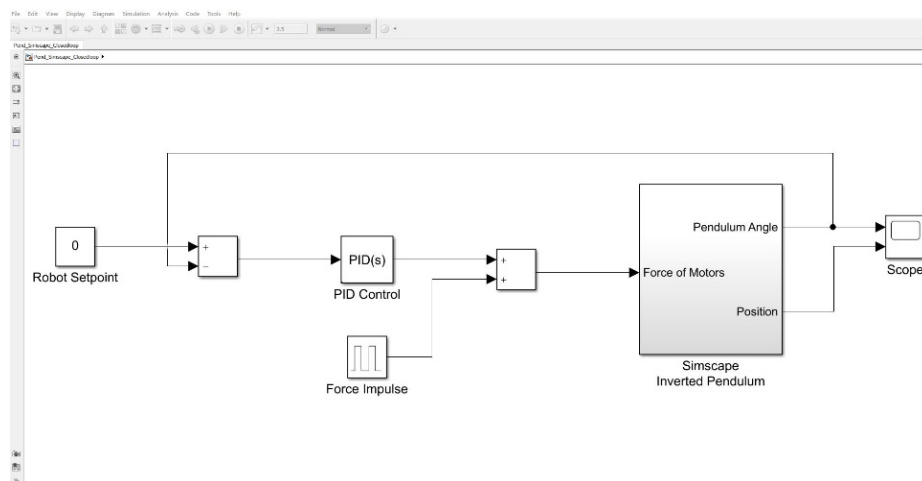
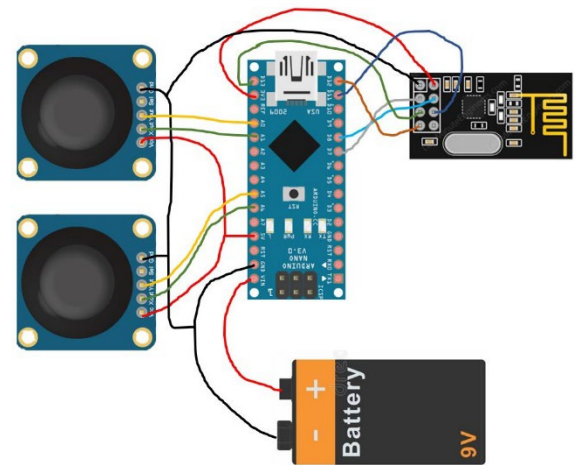
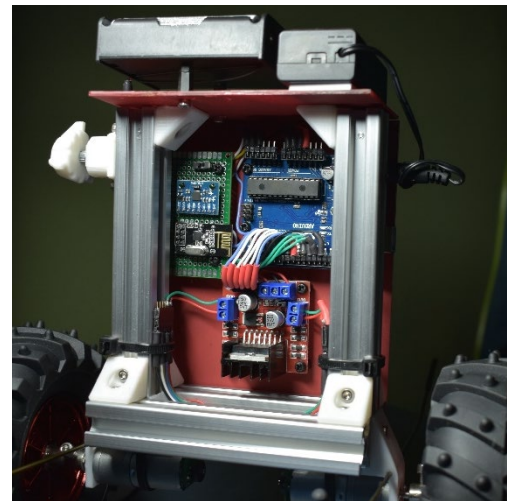
I've made also this project entirely open-source and posted all CAD, code, and circuit schematics on my GitHub: <https://github.com/nzipin>



Rudimentary wiring diagrams soon turned into a highly complex system that needed to be integrated with the existing mechanical design. I was able to learn about how each board worked, and how each communicated to the Arduino microcontroller.



I researched and implemented I²C, UART, and SPI connections and used PWM on the dual H-bridge of the motor driver to control the motors. I was also able to practice different soldering techniques and learn about PCB design while assembling some components on dot prototyping board.



To design control systems for the robot, I utilized Simulink and created the block diagram seen at left. Luckily, the self-balancing robot mimics the inverted pendulum on a cart dynamic system, which is a classic control problem for stabilizing non-linear dynamics. I was able to use a controls plant provided through a collaboration between the

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and Carnegie Mellon University, which can be found [here](#).

I was able to use this plant to get a general sense of optimal PID values, and further tuned the system via trial and error.

Programming the robot was done using C++ (Arduino) to set motor velocity based on the angle of the robot via a PID control algorithm. Driving the robot manually is done by altering the setpoint value of the robot (see block diagram) and letting the robot “fall” forwards or backwards.

All code is available in the open source on my GitHub, but snippets can be seen below:

```

/***** PID *****/
#include <PID_v1.h>

double kP = 24;
double kI = 350;
double kD = 1.2;

double setpoint, input, output; // PID variables
PID pid(&input, &output, &setpoint, kP, kI, kD, DIRECT); // PID setup

/***** radio *****/
#include <nRF24L01.h>
#include <SPI.h>
#include <RF24.h>
#include <nRF24L01.h>

RF24 radio(10, 4); // CE, CSN
const byte address[6] = "00001";
float angleV = 0, turnV = 0; // values from remote
float controlValues[2]; // array to receive both data values

/***** L298N *****/
#include <L298N.h>

// Pin definition
const unsigned int EN_A = 3;
const unsigned int IN1_A = 5;
const unsigned int IN2_A = 6;

const unsigned int IN1_B = 7;
const unsigned int IN2_B = 8;
const unsigned int EN_B = 9;

// Create motor instances
L298N rightMotor(EN_A, IN1_A, IN2_A);

void loop() {
    int forwardValue = analogRead(A1);
    int turnValue = analogRead(A5);

    int mapVal1 = map(forwardValue, 0, 1023, -512, 512);
    float angleValue = (float) mapVal1/200;

    int mapVal2 = map(turnValue, 0, 1023, -512, 512);
    float turnAngleValue = (float) mapVal2/5;

    controlValues[0] = angleValue;
    controlValues[1] = turnAngleValue;

    radio.write(&controlValues, sizeof(controlValues));

    Serial.print("forward: ");
    Serial.print(angleValue);
    Serial.print(" turn: ");
    Serial.println(turnAngleValue);
}

void readAngles() {
    mpuIntStatus = mpu.getIntStatus();
    fifoCount = mpu.getFIFOCount();

    if ((mpuIntStatus & 0x10) || fifoCount == 1024) {
        // reset so we can continue cleanly
        mpu.resetFIFO();
        Serial.println(F("FIFO overflow!"));
    }

    else if (mpuIntStatus & 0x02) {
        // wait for correct available data length, should be a VERY short wait
        while (fifoCount < packetSize) fifoCount = mpu.getFIFOCount();

        // read a packet from FIFO
        mpu.getFIFOBytes(fifoBuffer, packetSize);

        // track FIFO count here in case there is > 1 packet available
        // (this lets us immediately read more without waiting for an interrupt)
        fifoCount -= packetSize;

        mpu.dmpGetQuaternion(&q, fifoBuffer);
        mpu.dmpGetGravity(&gravity, &q);
        mpu.dmpGetYawPitchRoll(ypr, &q, &gravity);

        IMUdataReady = 0;
        //count = count + 1;
    }
}

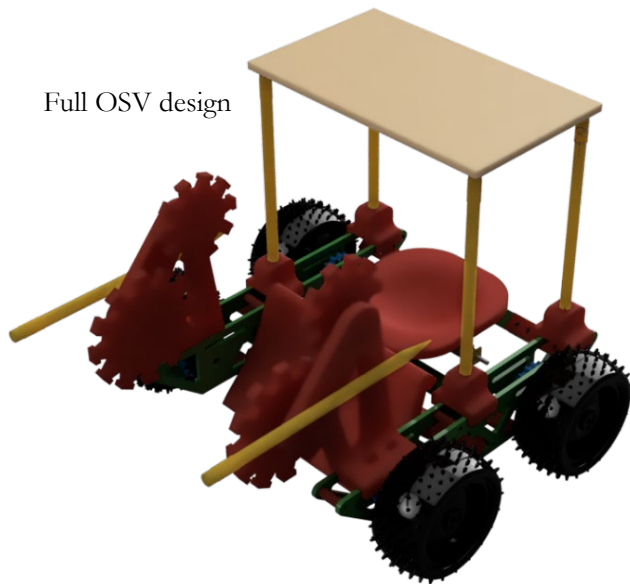
```

Above, the code uploaded to the remote control and data read via SPI connection.

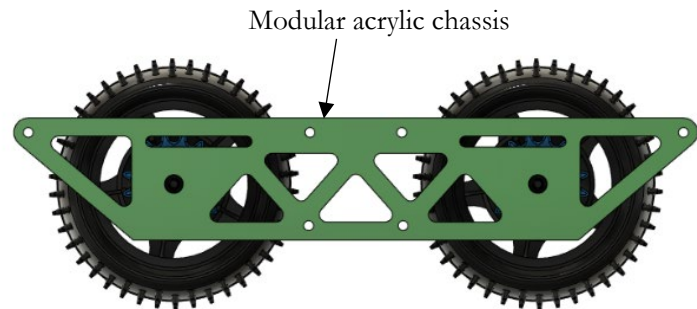
Above, the beginning of the code on the Arduino Uno, setting up PID control algorithms, radio interface, and motor instances

At right, the interrupt service routine to read accurate data from the 6DoF inertial measurement unit

OSV Design Project



Full OSV design



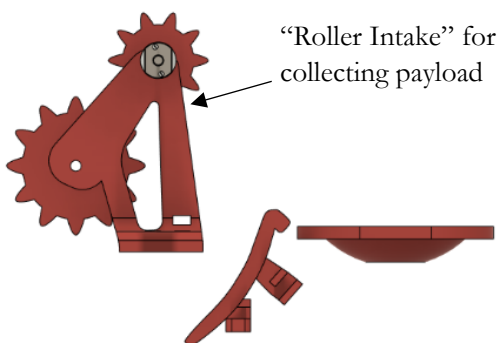
Modular acrylic chassis

This was an in-class project for *ENES100: Introduction to Engineering Design* that I did during the Spring 2020 semester. Due to the pandemic, we were unfortunately unable to fully realize the design, although we had everything ready for fabrication.

The goal of the project was to design an over-sand vehicle (OSV) capable of autonomously navigating a randomized course to a specific site, and able to identify the weight and material of a payload (a sphere, in this case).

Acting as mechanical team lead, myself and 8 other students collaborated to design and manufacture a WIFI controlled robot for a competition between around 50 other groups within the university. Being one of two members on my team with previous CAD experience, a large part of my job was teaching other students about modeling in SolidWorks and Fusion 360.

I designed a modular chassis, seen above, in which components could be clipped and zip-tied on, making design iterations simple and efficient for rapid prototyping. It uses two direct-drive motors at the rear of the OSV and chain running between the parallel plates to drive the front wheels. Here I was able to provide .dxf files using Adobe Illustrator for fabrication on the laser cutter.



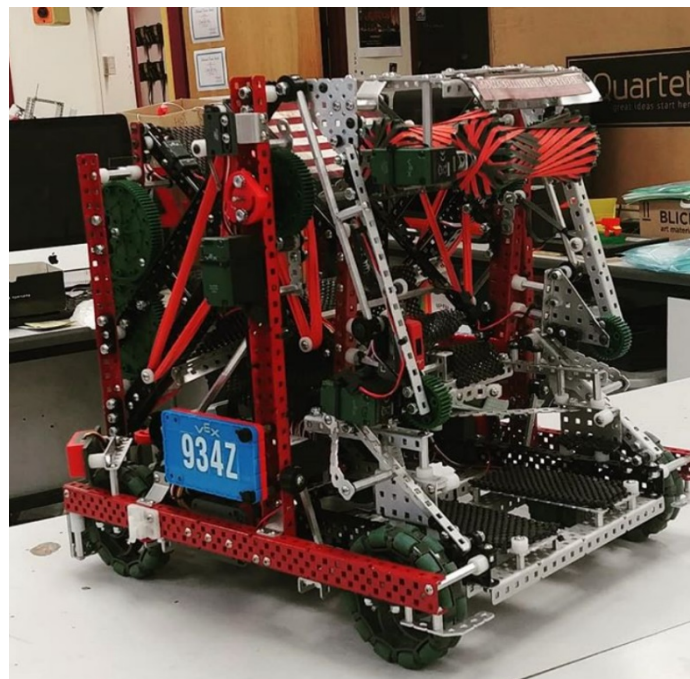
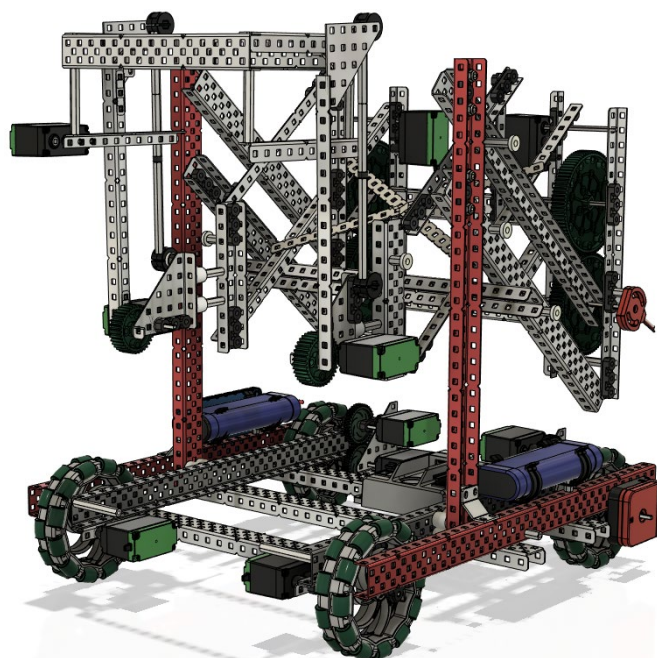
"Roller Intake" for collecting payload

Our team also designed a novel "roller intake," seen at left, which was used to collect the payload with high tolerance. All of these components are 3D printed and simply clipped to the modular acrylic chassis, making it easy to iterate the design.

Apart from the mechanical team, I also played an integral role in designing logic for autonomous navigation. I designed a pseudocode flowchart which describes a clever method of navigation, without using any on-board sensors.

Since our OSV's position can be determined using a Wi-Fi-enabled overhead computer vision system, we were able to determine if our OSV ran into an obstacle by calculating the OSV's current velocity and comparing it to the expected velocity of our OSV. If our current velocity was much less than our expected velocity, we knew we ran into an obstacle and acted accordingly.

VEX Robotics Competition Robot



The VEX Robotics competition is a high stakes tournament where robots compete in a point-based game against each other. Robots compete with a randomized opponent in several 2-minute matches throughout the tournament. The robot seen above is my team's VEX "In the Zone" robot. The objective of this game is to stack as many yellow cones as possible on "mobile goals" and place the mobile goals (with stacked cones on them) into your team's scoring zone.

I acted as the founder and president of the Towson Robotics program from mid-2015 – 2019. I performed most of the mechanical design and assembly of the robot seen above over the course of a competition season, which is about 8 months. I also acted as programming lead, where we coded in a variant of C called RobotC for both driver and autonomous modes.

The drive train is composed of six "VEX 393" motors mechanically linked together with 1:1 sprockets, chain, and gears. The drive train uses two hall effect quadrature encoders for positional control using PID algorithms. The frame has two ultrasonic distance sensors that are used during autonomous navigation to align with the perimeter of the field. The lifting mechanism is two reversed, cascaded parallel linkages that are capable of reaching a minimum height of 16 inches and a maximum height of 57 inches. The lift uses 2 potentiometers that utilize PID algorithms to achieve accurate preset heights that are useful when creating large stacks of cones.

A YouTube video showcasing the robot in action can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwU0mx70mjg&t=73s&ab_channel=NoahZipin



Above is the robot fully extended, which reaches a height of almost 5' tall. CAD vs. Reality

```
task forwardLeft_pid()
{
    SensorValue(leftDrive) = 0;
    while(true) // (SensorValue(leftDrive) < FLsetpoint)
    {
        errorFL = FLsetpoint - SensorValue(leftDrive); //calculate for error

        integralFL = integralFL + errorFL; //integral calculation
        if (errorFL == 0 || (FLsetpoint < SensorValue(leftDrive))) { // if error is 0 or you
            integralFL = 0;
        }
        if (errorFL > integralActiveZoneFL) //zone for which integral can accumulate error
            integralFL = 0;
    }

    derivativeFL = errorFL - prevErrorFL; //derivative calculation
    prevErrorFL = errorFL;

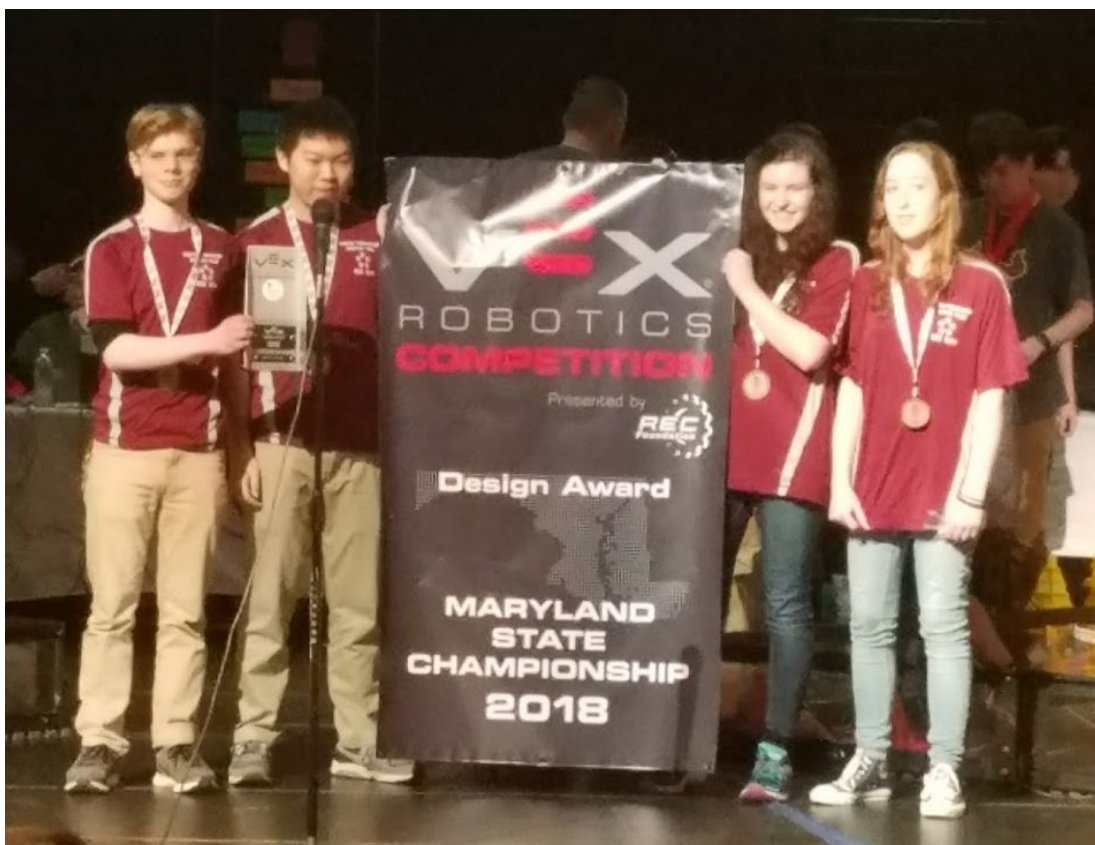
    speedFL = errorFL*kp + integralFL*ki + derivativeFL*kd; //power sent to motors
    motor[backLeft] = motor[frontLeft] = speedFL; //assign new motor value to motors
    wait1Msec(20); //time for each cycle
}
}
```

```
task whichOne() //auton switcher with Potentiometer
{
    if(SensorValue(LeftRight) <= 2047)
        Left = true;
    else if(SensorValue(LeftRight) > 2047)
        Right = true;

    if(SensorValue(TwTtSg) <= 1365)
        Twenty = true;
    else if(SensorValue(TwTtSg) > 1365 && SensorValue(TwTtSg) <= 2730)
        Ten = true;
    else if(SensorValue(TwTtSg) > 2730)
        Stationary = true;
}

void pre_auton()
{
    SensorValue(leftDrive) = 0;
    SensorValue(rightDrive) = 0;
    startTask(whichOne);
}
```

Here are two short code segments written in RobotC for our competition robot. The left image shows one of our PID algorithms that uses the hall effect positional sensor on the drive train so that we don't overshoot target distance values during autonomous operation. The right image shows a task that allows us to choose which autonomous routine to run without re-downloading the program, which helped us out a great deal for strategic purposes during tournaments.



Pictured above (myself, at left) is our victory at the Maryland VEX Robotics State Championship in 2018, where our team was awarded the “Design Award” for outstanding documentation of the engineering design process, excellent on-field performance, and quality code.

This was a proud moment, and is the highest award given to any team in the tournament. The award qualified our team to compete in the VEX Robotics World Championships, in which we competed in Louisville Convention center in head-to-head matches against over 50 other countries from around the world. We were proud to represent the state of Maryland.

Over the course of my VEX Robotics career, my team and I were able to compete in the VEX World Championships three times, in 2017, 2018, and 2019. It was a rewarding experience.