Vatsal Sharan

Appointments

University of Southern California
Assistant Professor,
Department of Computer Science **Fall 2021 – present**

Simons Institute for Theory of Computing
Visiting Scientist,
Modern Paradigms of Generalization **Fall 2024**

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Norbert Weiner Postdoctoral Associate,
Institute for Data, Systems & Society **2020 – 2021**

Education

Stanford University
Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering **2014 – 2020**
Advisor: Gregory Valiant, Dept. of Computer Science

Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur
B.Tech. in Electrical Engineering **2010 – 2014**

Distinctions

- Okawa Foundation Research Grant 2025
- Google Research Scholar Award 2025
- Amazon Research Award 2024
- NSF CAREER Award 2023
- Amazon Research Award 2022
- Best Paper Award at 35th Conference on Learning Theory (COLT) 2022
- Norbert Wiener Postdoctoral Fellowship, MIT 2020
- Outstanding reviewer at ICML'19, NeurIPS'21
- Invited to China Theory Week, Tsinghua University 2018
- Director's Gold Medal for best all-round performance and leadership in graduating class, IIT Kanpur 2014
- Best Final Year Project in Electrical Engineering, IIT Kanpur 2014
- Honda Young Engineer and Scientist Award 2013

Selected Publications

(most papers in theory venues have alphabetical author ordering)

1. **An External Fairness Evaluation of LinkedIn Talent Search**
   Tina Behzad, Siddartha Devic, Aleksandra Korolova, David Kempe, Vatsal Sharan
   Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI) 2026
   (Oral in AI for Social Impacts track)

2. **Auditability and the Landscape of Distance to Multicalibration**
   Nathan Derhake, Siddartha Devic, Dutch Hansen, Kuan Liu, Vatsal Sharan
   Innovations in Theoretical Computer Science (ITCS) 2026

3. **Improved Bounds for Swap Multicalibration and Swap Omniprediction**
   Haipeng Luo, Spandan Senapati, Vatsal Sharan
   Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2025 (Spotlight)

4. **Simultaneous Swap Regret Minimization via KL-Calibration**
   Haipeng Luo, Spandan Senapati, Vatsal Sharan
   Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2025 (Spotlight)

5. **The Rich and the Simple: On the Implicit Bias of Adam and SGD**
   Bhavya Vasudeva, Jung Whan Lee, Vatsal Sharan, Mahdi Soltanolkotabi
   Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2025

6. **Discovering Data Structures: Nearest Neighbor Search and Beyond**
   Omar Salemohamed, Laurent Charlin, Shivam Garg, Vatsal Sharan, Gregory Valiant
   Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2025

7. **Transformers Learn Low Sensitivity Functions: Investigations & Implications**
   Bhavya Vasudeva, Deqing Fu, Tianyi Zhou, Elliott Kau, Youqi Huang, Vatsal Sharan
   International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR) 2025

8. **Proper Learnability and the Role of Unlabeled Data**
   Julian Asilis, Siddartha Devic, Shaddin Dughmi, Vatsal Sharan, Shang-Hua Teng
   Algorithmic Learning Theory (ALT) 2025

9. **On the Inherent Privacy of Two Point Zeroth Order Projected Gradient Descent**
   Devansh Gupta, Meisam Razaviyayn, Vatsal Sharan
   Artificial Intelligence & Statistics (AISTATS) 2025

10. **Transformers Learn Higher-Order Optimization Methods for In-Context Learning: A Study with Linear Models**
    Deqing Fu, Tian-Qi Chen, Robin Jia, Vatsal Sharan
    Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2024
    Best Paper Award at SoCal NLP Symposium 2023

11. **Pre-trained Large Language Models Use Fourier Features to Compute Addition**
    Tianyi Zhou, Deqing Fu, Vatsal Sharan, Robin Jia
    Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2024

12. **When is Multicalibration Post-Processing Necessary?**
    Dutch Hansen, Siddartha Devic, Preetum Nakkiran, Vatsal Sharan
    Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2024

13. **Optimal Multiclass U-Calibration Error and Beyond**
    Haipeng Luo, Spandan Senapati, Vatsal Sharan
    Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2024

14. **Transductive Sample Complexities Are Compact**
    Julian Asilis, Siddartha Devic, Shaddin Dughmi, Vatsal Sharan, Shang-Hua Teng
    Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2024

15. **On the Statistical Complexity of Sample Amplification**
    Brian Axelrod, Shivam Garg, Yanjun Han, Vatsal Sharan, Gregory Valiant
    Annals of Statistics, 2024

16. **Regularization and Optimal Multiclass Learning**
    Julian Asilis, Siddartha Devic, Shaddin Dughmi, Vatsal Sharan, Shang-Hua Teng
    Conference on Learning Theory (COLT) 2024

17. **Stability and Group Fairness in Ranking with Uncertain Predictions**
    Siddartha Devic, Aleksandra Korolova, David Kempe, Vatsal Sharan
    International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML) 2024
    Non-archival at Symposium on Foundations of Responsible Computing (FORC 2024)

18. **Mitigating Simplicity Bias in Deep Learning for Improved OOD Generalization and Robustness**
    Bhavya Vasudeva, Kameron Shahabi, Vatsal Sharan
    Transactions on Machine Learning Research (TMLR) 2024

19. **Fairness in Matching under Uncertainty**
    Siddartha Devic, David Kempe, Vatsal Sharan, Aleksandra Korolova
    International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML) 2023
    ACM Conference on Equity & Access in Algorithms, Mechanisms, & Optimization (EAAMO'23)

20. **NeuroSketch: A Neural Network Method for Fast and Approximate Evaluation of Range Aggregate Queries**
Sepanta Zeighami, Vatsal Sharan, Cyrus Shahabi
ACM Special Interest Group on Management of Data Conference (SIGMOD) 2023

21. **Efficient Convex Optimization Requires Superlinear Memory**
Annie Marsden, Vatsal Sharan, Aaron Sidford, Gregory Valiant
Conference on Learning Theory (COLT), 2022 ***(Best Paper Award)***
Invited to IJCAI 2023 Sister Conference Notable Paper Track
Journal of the ACM (JACM), 2024

22. **Efficient Gradient Methods for Objectives with Multiple Scales**
Jon Kelner, Annie Marsden, Vatsal Sharan, Aaron Sidford, Gregory Valiant, Honglin Yuan
Conference on Learning Theory (COLT) 2022

23. **Multicalibrated Partitions for Importance Weights**
Parikshit Gopalan, Omer Reingold, Vatsal Sharan, Udi Wieder
Algorithmic Learning Theory (ALT) 2022

24. **Omnipredictors**
Parikshit Gopalan, Adam Tauman Kalai, Omer Reingold, Vatsal Sharan, Udi Wieder
Innovations in Theoretical Computer Science (ITCS) 2022

25. **Modular versus Monolithic Task Formulations in Neural Networks Learning**
Atish Agarwala, Abhimanyu Das, Brendan Juba, Rina Panigrahy, Vatsal Sharan, Xin Wang, Qiuyi Zhang
International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR) 2021

26. **Sample Amplification: Increasing Dataset Size even when Learning is Impossible**
Brian Axelrod, Shivam Garg, Vatsal Sharan, Gregory Valiant
International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML) 2020

27. **PIDForest: Anomaly detection via Partial Identification**
Parikshit Gopalan, Vatsal Sharan, Udi Wieder
Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2019 (Spotlight presentation)

28. **Fast and Accurate Low-Rank Factorization of Compressively-Sensed Data**
Vatsal Sharan, Kai Sheng Tai, Peter Bailis, Gregory Valiant
International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML) 2019

29. **Memory-sample Tradeoffs for Linear Regression with Small Error**
Vatsal Sharan, Aaron Sidford, Gregory Valiant
Symposium on the Theory of Computing (STOC) 2019

30. **Recovery Guarantees for Quadratic Tensors with Limited Observations**
Hongyang Zhang, Vatsal Sharan, Moses Charikar and Yingyu Liang
Artificial Intelligence & Statistics (AISTATS) 2019

31. **A Spectral View of Adversarially Robust Features**
Shivam Garg, Vatsal Sharan, Brian Zhang, Gregory Valiant
Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2018 (Spotlight presentation)

32. **Efficient Anomaly Detection via Matrix Sketching**
Vatsal Sharan, Parikshit Gopalan, Udi Wieder
Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2018

33. **Prediction with a Short Memory**
Vatsal Sharan, Sham Kakade, Percy Liang, Gregory Valiant
Symposium on the Theory of Computing (STOC) 2018

34. **Sketching Linear Classifiers over Data Streams**
Kai Sheng Tai, Vatsal Sharan, Peter Bailis, Gregory Valiant
ACM SIGMOD Conference on Management of Data (SIGMOD) 2018

35. **Moment-Based Quantile Sketches for Efficient High Cardinality Aggregation Queries**
Edward Gan, Jialin Ding, Kai Sheng Tai, Vatsal Sharan, Peter Bailis
Conference on Very Large Data Bases (VLDB) 2018

36. **Learning Overcomplete HMMs**
Vatsal Sharan, Sham Kakade, Percy Liang, Gregory Valiant
Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2017

37. **Orthogonalized Alternating Least Squares: A Theoretically Principled Tensor Factorization Algorithm for Practical Use**
Vatsal Sharan, Gregory Valiant
International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML) 2017

Students

PhD students

Bhavya Vasudeva (started Fall'21)
Siddartha Devic (started Fall'21, NDSEG fellowship, co-advised with Aleksandra Korolova)
Julian Asilis (started Fall'22, NSF fellowship)
Deqing Fu (started Fall'22, co-advised with Robin Jia)
Devansh Gupta (started Fall'23, co-advised with Meisam Razaviyayn)
Spandan Senapati (started Fall'23, co-advised with Haipeng Luo)
Tianyi Zhou (started Fall'23, co-advised with Robin Jia)

Undergraduate and Masters students

Kuan Liu
Nathan Derhake
Woody Gan
Anish Jayant
Jung Whan Lee
You Qi Huang
Dutch Hansen (graduated 2025, now Ph.D. student at the University of Washington, CRA Outstanding Undergraduate Researcher Award Finalist)
Natalie Abreu (graduated 2023, now Ph.D. student at Harvard)
Aditya Prased (graduated 2024, now Ph.D. student at the University of Chicago)
Kameron Shahabi (graduated 2024, now Ph.D. student at the University of Washington)
Qilin Ye (graduated 2024, now M.S. student at Duke)
Devin Martin (SURE program intern in Summer'22, mentored by Bhavya Vasudeva)

Teaching at USC

Theory of Machine Learning: Fall'21, Fall'23
Machine Learning: Fall'22, Spring'24, Spring'26
Trustworthy Machine Learning: Fall'25
Computational Perspectives on the Frontiers of Learning: Spring'23

Professional Activities

Reviewing for Journals

IEEE BITS "Special Issue on Generative Models" 2025 *(co-editor)*
IEEE Transactions on Information Theory, 2023
Journal of Machine Learning Research (JMLR), 2021, 2022, 2025, 2026
SIAM Journal of Computing, 2020, 2021

Conference Program Committee/Reviewing

Conference on Learning Theory (COLT), 2019-2024, 2025 *(area chair)*
Algorithmic Learning Theory (ALT), 2022-2023, 2024-2026 *(area chair)*
International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR), 2021-2023, 2025-2026 *(area chair)*
International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML), 2019-2023, 2025-26 *(area chair)*
Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS), 2019-2021, 2023, 2025 *(area chair)*
International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Statistics (AISTATS), 2021
AAAI Conference on Aritificial Intelligence (AAAI), 2020
Foundations of Responsible Computing (FORC), 2025-26 *(PC member)*
Foundations of Computer Science (FOCS), 2020, 2023, 2024, 2025 *(PC member)*
Symposium on Theory of Computing (STOC), 2020-2022, 2024, 2025
Symposium on Discrete Algorithms (SODA), 2019, 2022, 2024, 2025, 2026 *(PC member)*
Innovations in Theoretical Computer Science (ITCS), 2020, 2023

Reviewing for Grants
National Science Foundation (NSF) Panelist, 2022, 2023
Swiss National Science Foundation Reviewer, 2024

Outreach

Learning Theory Alliance (LeT-All), Workshop Committee
- Organized day-long virtual mentoring workshop on "Harnessing AI for Research, Learning, and Communicating" on November 20 2025, attended by around 300 students.
- Organized a social and mentorship event at Neurips 2024 on "Harnessing AI for Research, Learning, and Communicating", attended by around 100 participants.
- Organized day-long virtual mentoring workshop on "Day-to-day life of an ML/theory researcher" on June 4 2024, attended by around 300 students.
- Organized day-long virtual mentoring workshop on "Communicating your research" on October 26 2023, attended by around 200 students.

High-school students hosted in the summer (in collaboration with USC Viterbi K-12 Center)
Janna Audrey Doratan (Summer'24, mentored by Devansh Gupta)
Angela Zhuang (Summer'23, mentored by Julian Asilis)
Jayron Martinez (Summer'22, mentored by Siddartha Devic)
Luke Pratt (Summer'22, mentored by Bhavya Vasudeva)

Talks for high-school students

Fair & Robust Artificial Intelligence
- As part of USC SHINE program for high-schoolers, June 2022
- Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) CS speaker series, February 2023

Invited Talks & Seminars

Using Algorithms to Understand Transformers (and Using Transformers to Understand Algorithms)
- Harvard Univesity, October 2025
- Northeastern Univesity, October 2025
- Workshop on Theoretical Perspectives on LLMs, UCSD, March 2025
- Cornell Artificial Intelligence Seminar, February 2025
- University of British Columbia CAIDA Seminar, December 2024
- Google Research Mountain View, November 2024
- Simons Institute Workshop on Transformers as a Computational Model, September 2024

Limitations on Safe, Trusted, Artificial General Intelligence
- Stanford Theory Lunch, November 2025

Discovering Data Structures: Nearest Neighbor Search and Beyond
- Information Theory and Applications, San Diego, February 2025

Transformers Learn Higher-Order Optimization Methods for In-Context Learning
- USC Symposium on Frontiers of Generative AI in Science and Society, March 2024
- Information Theory and Applications, San Diego, February 2024

Memory as a Lens to Understand Efficient Learning and Optimization
- R. Narasimhan Workshop, TIFR Mumbai, January 2026
- MIT Algorithms & Combinatorics Seminar, October 2025
- UC Berkeley Theory Seminar, October 2024
- Workshop on Computational/Statistical Gaps in Learning & Optimization, UCLA, February 2024
- Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, December 2023
- University of Maryland, College Park, September 2023
- Microsoft Research, NYC, September 2023

A multigroup perspective to go beyond loss minimization in ML
- BIRS Workshop on New Directions in Machine Learning Theory, Banff, October 2024

From Anomaly Detection to Robust ML: Multicalibration as an Algorithmic Paradigm
- Amazon Research, Palo Alto, July 2023

Fairness in Matching under Uncertainty
- Information Theory and Applications, San Diego, February 2023

Sample Amplification: Increasing Dataset Size even when Learning is Impossible
- IISA Annual Meeting, December 2024
- Simons Institute Seminar, September 2024
- USC Probability Seminar, October 2023
- Learning Theory Alliance Mentoring Workshop, February 2021
- Simons Institute, Learning in High Dimensions Program, September 2020
- Neurips Machine Learning with Guarantees Workshop, December 2019

Memory-sample Tradeoffs for Continuous Optimization and Learning
- MIT Theory Lunch, October 2020
- NYU Theory Seminar, November 2019
- EPFL Theory Seminar, November 2019
- Northwestern Junior Theorists Workshop, November 2019
- University of Washington Theory Lunch, October 2019
- Cornell ORIE Young Researchers Workshop, October 2019
- Google Research, Mountain View, August 2019

Prediction with a Short Memory
- ETH Zurich Institute for Theoretical Studies, November 2019
- China Theory Week, Tsinghua University, September 2018
- Google Mountain View Algorithms TechTalk, March 2018

Orthogonalized ALS: Theoretically Principled Tensor Factorization for Practical Use
- SIAM Annual Meeting, Portland, July 2018