

ALEJANDRO ESCONTRELA

mail@escontrela.me | escontrela.me

Ph.D. Artificial Intelligence and Robotics, University of California, Berkeley

EDUCATION

University of California, Berkeley August 2021 - Present
Ph.D. in Artificial Intelligence and Robotics Berkeley
Advised by **Pieter Abbeel**

Georgia Institute of Technology January 2018 - May 2021
B.S. in Aerospace Engineering Atlanta
Major GPA: 4.0/4.0
Minor in Computer Science (Minor GPA: 4.0/4.0)
Advised by **Frank Dellaert**

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Ph.D. Student: UC Berkeley BAIR August 2021 - Present
Advisors: Pieter Abbeel Berkeley
Performing research on reinforcement learning, generative modeling, world models, and their applications to robotics.

Research Intern: Amazon Frontier AI & Robotics (FAR) August 2025 - Present
Advisor: Yan (Rocky) Duan San Francisco
Working on humanoid whole-body manipulation, simulation, and sample-efficient RL.

Student Researcher: Google DeepMind July 2024 - February 2025
Advisor: Thomas Kipf San Francisco
Worked on controllability of generative models to provide users with more ways to interact with generative models than just text. Current focus is on image generation models.

Student Researcher: Google Brain August 2020 - February 2023
Advisor: Atil Iscen New York City
Part-time researcher at Google Brain. Collaborating with the Google Brain Robotics team to push the boundaries of robot learning.

Research Intern: Google Brain May 2020 - August 2020
Advisor: Atil Iscen New York City
Worked with the Google Brain Robotics team to develop locomotion policies that allow legged robots to operate in unstructured, rugged terrains. This work has resulted in several publications listed below.

Undergraduate Researcher: Borglab @ Georgia Tech August 2019 - August 2021
Advisor: Frank Dellaert Atlanta
Conducted research on the optimal control of legged robots via graphical probabilistic models, such as Factor Graphs. My research aimed to bring forth controls algorithms capable of

navigating legged robots through complex, partially observable environments. Some of this work has culminated in publications listed below.

CONSULTING

AI Consultant: Phaidra

March 2024 - July 2024

Team: Research

Remote

Worked with team to apply advanced RL techniques to datacenter cooling models.

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

Software Engineering Intern: Google

May 2019 - August 2019

Team: Cloud (Colossus)

New York City

Worked with David Cohen at Google Cloud to develop DapperMC, a probabilistic programming library tailored to modeling Remote Procedure Calls (RPC). Google engineers now use DapperMC to obtain a statistical understanding of datacenter performance, detect anomalous machines, and benchmark the effects of software updates on RPC latency.

Software Engineering Intern: Northrop Grumman

May 2018 - August 2018

Team: Mission Systems

Orlando

Work performed under a security clearance. Worked on a network that provides joint forces with a capability to report, analyze, and disseminate warning information to accelerate the serviceperson's response to Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) attack. Reduced the time from incident observation to warning to less than two minutes.

OTHER EXPERIENCE

Software Team Lead: Georgia Tech RoboJackets

September 2018 - June 2019

Team: Intelligent Ground Vehicle Competition

Atlanta

Worked alongside mechanical and electrical team leads to coordinate the development of autonomous outdoor navigation software for the Intelligent Ground Vehicle Competition. Coordinated a team of eight software engineers to implement various state-of-the-art robotics and planning algorithms, including Factor Graph SLAM, Field D*, and the Elastic Bands path planning algorithm. *Won 1st place in the design competition, and 3rd place overall out of more than 30 international teams competing in the event, making school history.*

GitHub: <https://bit.ly/3iTEHmV>. Autonomous Nav. Demo: <https://bit.ly/34Jvmmi>

PUBLICATIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS

- **"GaussGym: An open-source real-to-sim framework for learning locomotion from pixels"**
Alejandro Escontrela, Justin Kerr, Arthur Allshire, Jonas Frey, Rocky Duan, Carmelo Sferrazza, Pieter Abbeel.
In submission, ICLR 2026 escontrela.me/qauss_gym
- **"Neural USD: An object-centric framework for iterative editing and control"**
Alejandro Escontrela, Shrinu Kushagra, Sjoerd van Steenkiste, Yulia Rubanova, Aleksander

Holyński, Kelsey Allen, Kevin Murphy, Thomas Kipf.
In submission, ICLR 2026 escontrela.me/neural_usd

- **"Learning Robotic Locomotion Affordances and Photorealistic Simulators from Human-Captured Data"**
Alejandro Escontrela, Justin Kerr, Kyle Stachowicz, Pieter Abbeel.
CoRL 2024 | *Code/paper/website available soon*
- **"Video Prediction Models as Rewards for Reinforcement Learning"**
Alejandro Escontrela, Ademi Adeniji, Wilson Yan, Ajay Jain, Xue Bin Peng, Ken Goldberg, Youngwoon Lee, Danijar Hafner, Pieter Abbeel.
NeurIPS 2023 escontrela.me/viper
- **"Learning a Diffusion Model Policy from Rewards via Q-Score Matching"**
Michael Psenka*, **Alejandro Escontrela***, Pieter Abbeel, Yi Ma.
ICML 2024 escontrela.me/qsm
- **"Barkour: Benchmarking animal-level agility with quadruped robots"**
Ken Caluwaerts, Atil Iscen, J. Chase Kew, Wenhao Yu, Tingnan Zhang, Daniel Freeman, Kuang-Huei Lee, Lisa Lee, Stefano Saliceti, Vincent Zhuang, Nathan Batchelor, Steven Bohez, Federico Casarini, Jose Enrique Chen, Omar Cortes, Erwin Coumans, Adil Dostmohamed, Gabriel Dulac-Arnold, **Alejandro Escontrela**, Erik Frey, Roland Hafner, Deepali Jain, Bauyrjan Jyenis, Yuheng Kuang, Edward Lee, Linda Luu, Ofir Nachum, Ken Oslund, Jason Powell, Diego Reyes, Francesco Romano, Feresteh Sadeghi, Ron Sloat, Baruch Tabanpour, Daniel Zheng, Michael Neunert, Raia Hadsell, Nicolas Heess, Francesco Nori, Jeff Seto, Carolina Parada, Vikas Sindhwani, Vincent Vanhoucke, Jie Tan.
IEEE Intelligent Robots and Systems 2024 (IROS) <https://bit.ly/3Smxquc>
- **"Visual-locomotion: Learning to walk on complex terrains with vision"**
Wenhao Yu, Deepali Jain, **Alejandro Escontrela**, Atil Iscen, Peng Xu, Erwin Coumans, Sehoon Ha, Jie Tan, Tingnan Zhang.
Conference on Robot Learning 2022 (CoRL) <http://bit.ly/3HvJvrW>
- **"Adversarial Motion Priors Make Good Substitutes for Complex Reward Functions"**
Alejandro Escontrela, Xue Bin Peng, Wenhao Yu, Tingnan Zhang, Atil Iscen, Ken Goldberg, Pieter Abbeel.
IEEE Intelligent Robots and Systems 2022 (IROS) escontrela.me/amp_in_real
Best Paper Award Nomination (11 nominations of >1700 papers)
- **"DayDreamer: World Models for Physical Robot Learning"**
Philipp Wu*, **Alejandro Escontrela***, Danijar Hafner*, Ken Goldberg, Pieter Abbeel.
(*=equal authors)
Conference on Robot Learning 2022 (CoRL) escontrela.me/daydreamer/
- **"Autonomously Untangling Long Cables"**
Vainavi Viswanath, Kaushik Shivakumar, Justin Kerr, Brijen Thananjeyan, Ellen Novoseller, Jeffrey Ichnowski, **Alejandro Escontrela**, Michael Laskey, Joseph E Gonzalez, Ken Goldberg.
Robots, Science, and Systems 2022 (RSS) escontrela.me/autonomous_untangling
Best Systems Paper Award
- **"Learning Visual-Locomotion Policies that Generalize to Diverse Environments"**
Alejandro Escontrela, George Yu, Peng Xu, Atil Iscen, Jie Tan.

NeurIPS 3rd Robot Learning Workshop, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3kvdzE0>

- **"Zero-Shot Terrain Generalization for Visual Locomotion Policies"**
Alejandro Escontrela, George Yu, Peng Xu, Atil Iscen, Jie Tan.
arXiv <https://arxiv.org/abs/2011.05513>
- **"A Factor-Graph Approach for Optimization Problems with Dynamics Constraints"**
Mandy Xie, Alejandro Escontrela, Frank Dellaert.
arXiv <https://arxiv.org/abs/2011.06194>
- **"Learning Agile Locomotion Skills with a Mentor"**
Atil Iscen, George Yu, Alejandro Escontrela, Jie Tan.
ICRA 2021. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2011.05541>
- **"Convolutional Neural Networks from the Ground Up"**
Alejandro Escontrela.
Medium Technical post. <https://bit.ly/3jTunWC>
Over 100,000 reads

PATENTS

- **Alejandro Escontrela**, Yulia Rubanova, Simon Jacob van Steenkiste, Aleksander Karim Holynski, Kelsey Rebecca Allen, Kevin Patrick Murphy, Thomas Norbert Kipf, Shrinu Kushagra (2025). "IMAGE PROCESSING USING NEURAL UNIVERSAL SCENE DESCRIPTIONS." US Application No. 63/751,732 (pending).

SERVICE

- **1st Learning for Agile Robotics Workshop @ CoRL 2022**
Co-organizer. *Auckland, New Zealand.* <https://www.agilerobotscorl2022.com/>
- **U.C. Berkeley Ph.D. Admissions Reviewer 2022**
- **CoRL reviewer 2024**
- **NeurIPS reviewer 2024**
- **ICLR reviewer 2025**
- **CoRL reviewer 2025**

NOTABLE AWARDS AND HONORS

- Best Paper Award Finalist (11 nominations from >1700 papers) IROS 2022
- Best Systems Paper Award RSS 2022
- National Science Foundation GRF 2021
- MIT Presidential Fellowship 2021
- UC Berkeley Chancellor's Fellowship 2021
- Stanford School of Engineering Fellowship 2021
- Lemelson MIT Student Prize Competition Finalists 2020
- Hispanic Scholarship Fund Award 2018, 2019, 2020
- Faculty Honors, Georgia Tech 2018, 2019, 2020
- Google Accessibility Hackathon NYC: 1st Place 2019
- Walt Disney World Design and Engineering Award 2017
- Pegasus Scholarship 2017

MEDIA COVERAGE

• Google AI Blog	2023
• Popular Science	2023
• Daily Mail	2022
• MIT Technology Review	2022
• TechCrunch (video)	2022
• Berkeley Engineering	2022
• India Times	2022
• New Scientist	2022
• Synced	2022
• Singularity Hub	2022
• ZME Science	2022
• Technology Org	2022
• Analytics India Magazine (AIM)	2022
• MarkTechPost	2022
• News7g	2022
• ActuIA	2022
• I Programmer	2022