

Meet the New Student Activities Committee Executive Team

By Cara M. Nunez

Welcome back to the “Student’s Corner” column. So far, 2020 has been a pretty wild and crazy year. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the entire robotics community has been both challenged and inspired by workplace shutdowns and social distancing regulations. Specifically, it has forced roboticists to think about how we conduct and share research. Many conferences, including the IEEE International Conference for Robotics and Automation (ICRA), were forced to make last-minute decisions regarding how they would handle these typically large, in-person events. We, the IEEE Robotics and Automation Society (RAS) Student Activities Committee (SAC), are thankful that the ICRA organizers decided to host a virtual conference with low registration fees. This provided the opportunity for many more participants worldwide, especially students, to attend the conference.

Normally at ICRA, the RAS SAC hosts several in-person event opportunities for students during the conference. We were able to adapt some of these events and brainstorm several others that we could run virtually, including a meet with the leaders session, a robot trivia quiz, a video competition, and a competition to design the new SAC logo. We are extremely excited about the success we had in hosting these events and happy that we were able to connect with a more diverse group of students. We hope to build on

the feedback we received from these events so we can host virtual events throughout the year, not just in conjunction with conferences, as well as other virtual events such as student debates and professional development workshops.

We would like to use this column to introduce the team responsible for hosting these events. We, the new SAC executive team, are extremely committed to continue growing and advancing the SAC to meet the diverse needs of students in the robotics community, specifically by representing students in RAS initiatives and providing students with opportunities for professional development and networking with industry and academic professionals as well as the resources to further their careers and advance the field of robotics. We strongly encourage you to contact us if you have feedback or suggestions on events or programs that you would like to see us organize and in which you would enjoy participating.

Cara M. Nunez, SAC Chair



Cara M. Nunez

Cara M. Nunez (nunezc@stanford.edu) is a Ph.D. degree student at Stanford University, California, in the Collaborative Haptics and Robotics in Medicine Lab. She was a DAAD Graduate Research Fellow in the Haptic Intelligence Department at the Max Planck Institute for Intelligent Systems, Stuttgart, Germany, in 2019–2020. She received her M.S. degree in mechanical

engineering from Stanford University in 2018 and her B.S. degree in biomedical engineering and B.A. degree in Spanish as a part of the International Engineering Program at the University of Rhode Island, Kingston, in 2016. Her research interests include haptics and robotics, with a specific focus on haptic perception, cutaneous force feedback techniques, and wearable devices for medical applications; human–robot interaction; virtual reality; and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education.

Nunez is extremely passionate about international collaboration and creating an inclusive educational environment. She is excited to serve as SAC chair and work with her co-chairs to develop and maintain international, interdisciplinary dialogs that encourage the advancement of the robotics field and develop the next generation of diverse leaders.

Geoff Nagy, SAC Senior Chair



Geoff Nagy

Geoff Nagy (gnagy@sfu.ca) is a Ph.D. degree student at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada, where he is studying biologically inspired drone behaviors. Previously, he led a small robotics team for the virtual reality startup Architact. In his free time, he enjoys developing video games and practicing martial arts.

Nagy previously served as SAC chair and is looking forward to his new advisory role as senior chair. He would like

to thank all of the previous cochair for their excellent work in the development and execution of several successful student initiatives and is excited to help advise the new executive team as they continue to advance the SAC.

Achref Selmi, SAC Cochair, RSR Coordinator



Achref Selmi

Achref Selmi (selmii.achref@gmail.com) is an engineering student in communications and networking at the National Engineering School of Gabes (ENIG), Tunisia. He has been an active member within the IEEE ENIG Student Branch Chapter, serving as its webmaster in 2018 and as an ambassador for events such as IEEE Day and IEEEExtreme. In 2019, Selmi was elected chair of the Student Branch, and, for the first time, the group was awarded the honor of organizing the eighth edition of the Tunisian Students and Young Professionals Congress. He was cofounder and president of the first edition of the international congress, Tunisia Innovation Meeting 2019. He is also the campus director of the Hult Prize Foundation and an active volunteer in several international associations. Selmi is excited and honored to serve as cochair of the Regional Student Representatives (RSR), which allows him to encourage students to be more active with the RAS.

Marwa ElDiwiny, SAC Cochair and IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine Coordinator



Marwa ElDiwiny

Marwa ElDiwiny (marwaeldiwiny1991@gmail.com) is a Ph.D. degree student at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium, and is working on designing self-healing soft robotics. She has focused on soft robotics modeling and simulation since 2017 and hosts the IEEE RAS Soft Robotics podcast. ElDiwiny is very passionate about con-

necting people from different backgrounds and cultures who may have different thoughts and ideas. She strives to help create a robotics community that is inclusive and provides equal opportunities to participate and be heard. She is humbled to have been selected as the 2020 Chair of Inclusion at the Robotics: Science and Systems conference and will work to create a safe space for and highlight the voices of marginalized communities. In her free time, she is an artist and a crazy cat lover.

ElDiwiny is thrilled to serve as the SAC cochair for *IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine*. She hopes to implement interactive ideas to connect robotics students with the field to allow them to express their thoughts in new ways.

Blake Hament, SAC Cochair, Conference Events



Blake Hament

Blake Hament (blakehament@gmail.com) is a Ph.D. degree student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and is working on R&D of field applications for mobile robots across construction and agriculture. He was named a 2019 U.S. Department of Transportation Outstanding Student of the Year for his work with the Inspecting and Preserving Infrastructure Through Robotic Exploration research consortium. The year prior, he received a U.S. Congressional Commendation for his work as a research mentor with the Army Educational Outreach Program and Research Experiences for Teachers. Hament is a member of the Tesla's Robots in Construction group, developing novel applications and payloads for Boston Dynamics' Spot robot. Currently, he also works with Lockheed Martin Space to develop robotic plant-tending technologies for extra-terrestrial gardening. As the conferences cochair for SAC, Hament looks forward to connecting industry stakeholders and academics to develop conference experiences that prepare students for bright futures in the field of robotics.

Aakriti Upadhyay, SAC Cochair, Social Media



Aakriti Upadhyay

Aakriti Upadhyay (aupadhyay@albany.edu) is a Ph.D. degree student at the State University of New York, Albany, researching the topological path planning of autonomous robots. She has served in various leadership roles with her university's IEEE and Association for Computing Machinery student councils. Upadhyay became interested in robotics at a young age as she imagined building a robot to help her mother with household activities. She has also gained experience working with industrial robots programmed to help people with disabilities. Her enthusiasm to build robots for the advancement of society has given her the opportunity to work with other roboticists and learn from them. Taking on her role as social media cochair, Upadhyay is looking forward to serving and helping in the growth of the RAS.

Jiahao Chen, SAC Cochair, Social Media (China)



Jiahao Chen

Jiahao Chen (chenjiahao2016@ia.ac.cn) received his B.S. degree from China Agricultural University, Beijing, in 2016. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. degree at the Institute of Automation, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing. His research interests include musculoskeletal robots, neuromuscular control, and brain-inspired algorithms. Chen is fascinated by neuroscience, especially as it pertains to how humans perceive, make decisions, and execute movements. With the inspiration of neural mechanisms, he hopes to build robots with human-like intelligence. In his spare time, Chen likes to sing, read novels, run, and travel.

Chen is very honored to join the RAS SAC as its social media (China) cochair. He hopes to promote RAS activities and encourage more excellent young professionals to communicate and cooperate in the RAS. 