



Jake Welde

Assistant Professor
Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering
Cornell University

124 Hoy Rd, Ithaca, NY 14850
jakewelde@cornell.edu 
www.jakewelde.com 


RESEARCH FOCUS

I develop geometric abstractions for efficient and explainable control of complex robotic systems. Using applied mathematics, optimization, and machine learning, my work exploits structural characteristics like symmetry, compositionality, and mechanical structure to design and certify algorithms that scale gracefully with system complexity. Such methods transcend individual morphologies and inform mechanism and controller design, leading towards robots that more faithfully echo the incredible example of Nature.

EMPLOYMENT

Assistant Professor, Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering
Cornell University 2025 - present
Ithaca, NY

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy, Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics 2025
University of Pennsylvania, General Robotics, Automation, Sensing, and Perception (GRASP) Laboratory *Philadelphia, PA*
Advisor: Vijay Kumar **Thesis Committee:** Daniel Koditschek, Michael Posa, Muruhan Rathinam, and Jim Ostrowski
Thesis: “Geometric Methods for Efficient and Explainable Control of Underactuated Robotic Systems” 

Master of Science in Engineering, Robotics 2020
University of Pennsylvania *Philadelphia, PA*

Bachelor of Science in Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics, magna cum laude 2019
University of Pennsylvania *Philadelphia, PA*
Minor in French and Francophone Studies

HONORS AND AWARDS

RSS Pioneers Cohort Member, Robotics: Science and Systems 2024
Selected as 1 of 30 of the “world’s top early-career researchers” in robotics for an intensive career workshop (15% acceptance rate).

John A. Goff Prize, Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics, *University of Pennsylvania* 2024
This prize is “awarded annually to a graduate student in the Department of Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics who has been selected by the faculty on the basis of criteria of scholarship, resourcefulness, and leadership” (1-2 PhD students per year).

Best Contribution, Neuroscience & Interpretability Track, NeurReps Workshop @ NeurIPS 2024 2024
Winner of a best paper award (3/58 contributions) at the Workshop on Symmetry and Geometry in Neural Representations @ NeurIPS.

Student Travel Support Award, IEEE Conference on Decision and Control (CDC) 2024

Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award, Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics, *University of Pennsylvania* 2021
“This award is given to the Mechanical Engineering graduate student whose teaching assistant service has been exemplary... because of their initiative, reliability, commitment to the students, and their overall contribution to the teaching mission” (1-2 TA’s per semester).

Finalist for Best Paper in Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation (ICRA) 2021

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (three years of research funding, totaling \$138,000) 2019

Second Place, School of Engineering Senior Design Competition, University of Pennsylvania 2019

Couloucoundis Prize for Best Presentation, Mechanical Engineering Senior Design, University of Pennsylvania 2019

Student Travel Grant Award, IEEE International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS) 2017

PUBLICATIONS

JOURNAL ARTICLES

1. “Almost Global Asymptotic Trajectory Tracking for Fully-Actuated Mechanical Systems on Homogeneous Riemannian Manifolds”,
Jake Welde and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE Control Systems Letters, 2024.
2. “A Compositional Approach to Certifying Almost Global Asymptotic Stability of Cascade Systems”,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE Control Systems Letters, 2023.
3. “Dynamically Feasible Task Space Planning for Underactuated Aerial Manipulators”,
Jake Welde, James Paulos, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters, 2021.
Finalist for “Best Paper in Unmanned Aerial Vehicles” at ICRA 2021.
4. “Autonomous Flight for Detection, Localization, and Tracking of Moving Targets With a Small Quadrotor”,
Justin Thomas, Jake Welde, Giuseppe Loianno, Kostas Daniilidis, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters, 2017.

REFEREED CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

1. “Learning Flatness-Preserving Residuals for Pure-Feedback Systems”,
Fengjun Yang, Jake Welde, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE Conference on Decision and Control (Accepted), 2025.
2. “Leveling the Playing Field: Carefully Comparing Classical and Learned Controllers for Quadrotor Trajectory Tracking”,
Pratik Kunapuli, Jake Welde, Dinesh Jayaraman, and Vijay Kumar.
Robotics: Science and Systems, 2025.
3. “Leveraging Symmetry to Accelerate Learning of Trajectory Tracking Controllers for Free-Flying Robotic Systems”,
Jake Welde*, Nishanth Rao*, Pratik Kunapuli*, Dinesh Jayaraman, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2025.
* equal contribution.
4. “The Role of Symmetry in Constructing Geometric Flat Outputs for Free-Flying Robotic Systems”,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2023.
5. “Trajectory Planning for the Bidirectional Quadrotor as a Differentially Flat Hybrid System”,
Katherine Mao, Jake Welde, M. Ani Hsieh, and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2023.
6. “Coordinate-Free Dynamics and Differential Flatness of a Class of 6DOF Aerial Manipulators”,
Jake Welde and Vijay Kumar.
IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2020.

PRESENTATIONS

TALKS

1. “Almost Global Asymptotic Trajectory Tracking for Mechanical Systems on Homogeneous Spaces”,
Vijay Kumar and Jake Welde (speaker).
Contributed Talk, *Joint Mathematics Meetings*, 2025.
2. “Geometric Abstractions for Efficient and Explainable Control of Complex Aerial Robots”,
Jake Welde.

Invited Seminar Talk, 2025.

- University of Texas at Dallas, *Department of Systems Engineering*
 - Arizona State University, *School of Manufacturing Systems and Networks*
 - Villanova University, *Department of Mechanical Engineering*
 - Boston University, *Department of Mechanical Engineering*
 - Cornell University, *Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering*
 - North Carolina State University, *Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering*
 - University of Minnesota, *Department of Aerospace Engineering and Mechanics*
 - Colorado State University, *Department of Mechanical Engineering*
 - Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science*
 - Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *Department of Mechanical Engineering*
3. **“Geometric Abstractions for Efficient and Explainable Control of Complex Robotic Systems”**,
Jake Welde.
Invited Talk, *Safe Autonomous Systems Lab (Sylvia Herbert)*, UC San Diego, 2025.
 4. **“Lie Group Symmetries and Continuous MDP Homomorphisms in Optimal Tracking Control Problems”**,
Vijay Kumar, Pratik Kunapuli*, Nishanth Rao*, and Jake Welde* (speaker).
Contributed Talk, *Joint Mathematics Meetings*, 2025.
 5. **“Differential Flatness and Geometric Hierarchy in Underactuated Mechanical Systems with Symmetry”**,
Vijay Kumar, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Jake Welde (speaker).
Invited Talk, *Joint Mathematics Meetings*, 2024.
 6. **“Geometric Tracking Control on Homogeneous Riemannian Manifolds”**,
Jake Welde and Vijay Kumar.
Contributed Talk, *Northeast Systems and Controls Workshop*, 2024.
 7. **“Plenty of Room in the Middle: Towards Efficient and Explainable Control of Complex Robotic Systems via Symmetry, Abstraction, and Learning”**,
Jake Welde.
Invited Talk, *Robotics and Optimization for Analysis of Human Motion Lab (Ram Vasudevan)*, University of Michigan, 2024.
 8. **“A Compositional Approach to Certifying Almost Global Asymptotic Stability of Cascade Systems”**,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
Contributed Talk, *Compositional Robotics Workshop*, International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2023.
 9. **“A Geometric Perspective on Differential Flatness of Mechanical Systems with Symmetry”**,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
Contributed Lecture, *SIAM Conference on Control and Its Applications*, 2023.
 10. **“A Principal Bundle Perspective on Differential Flatness in Complex Robotic and Biological Systems”**,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
Contributed Talk, *Robophysics Focus Session*, APS March Meeting, 2023.
 11. **“Geometric Control of Underactuated Robotic Systems: Flatness, Hierarchy, and Control-Aware Design”**,
Jake Welde.
Invited Talk, *Nikolai Matni Group*, University of Pennsylvania, 2023.
 12. **“Hierarchical Methods for Geometric Control of Underactuated, Free-Flying Robotic Systems”**,
Jake Welde.
Departmental Research Seminar, *Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics*, University of Pennsylvania, 2023.
 13. **“The Role of Symmetry in Constructing Geometric Flat Outputs for Free-Flying Robotic Systems”**,
Jake Welde, Matthew D. Kvalheim, and Vijay Kumar.
Invited Talk, *Kostas Daniilidis Group*, University of Pennsylvania, 2022.

POSTERS

1. **“Learning Flatness-Preserving Residuals for Pure-Feedback Systems”**,
Fengjun Yang, Jake Welde (presenter), and Vijay Kumar.
Structured Learning Workshop, International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2025.
2. **“Geometric Methods of Systematic Controller Synthesis for Underactuated Robotic Systems”**,
Jake Welde.
RSS Pioneers Workshop, Robotics: Science and Systems, 2024.
3. **“Integrated Hardware and Software Codesign for Controlling Underactuated Aerial Robots”**,
Jack Campanella (presenter), Jake Welde, and Vijay Kumar.
Northeast Systems and Control Workshop, 2024.
4. **“Leveraging Symmetry to Accelerate Learning of Trajectory Tracking Controllers for Free-Flying Robotic Systems”**,
Jake Welde*, Nishanth Rao* (presenter), Pratik Kunapuli* (presenter), Dinesh Jayaraman, and Vijay Kumar.
Symmetry and Geometry in Neural Representations Workshop, Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems, 2024.
Oral Presentation (9/58 \approx 16%). **“Best Contribution, Neuroscience & Interpretability Track”**. *equal contribution.
5. **“Towards a Lightweight Fully-Actuated Aerial Vehicle: Thrust Vectoring and Control Allocation Under Redundancy”**,
Saibernard Yogendran (presenter), Jake Welde, and Vijay Kumar.
Northeast Systems and Control Workshop, 2024.
6. **“Towards Automatic Identification of Globally Valid Geometric Flat Outputs via Numerical Optimization”**,
Jake Welde and Vijay Kumar.
Geometric Representations Workshop, International Conference on Robotics and Automation, 2023.
7. **“Some Aerial Manipulators Can Exactly Track Arbitrary Smooth End-Effector Trajectories in 6 Degrees of Freedom”**,
Jake Welde and Vijay Kumar.
Northeast Robotics Colloquium, 2019.

MEDIA

- “Robots in the Reading Room: GRASP Lab Brings Hands-On STEM to Roxborough Library” [🔗](#), *Penn Engineering Today* 2025
- “MEAM 520 Class Breakdown” [🔗](#), *GRASP Lab Presents* 2022
- “Virtual Robots: Taking Risks in an Online Classroom” [🔗](#), *Penn Engineering Today* 2021
- “Game of Drones” [🔗](#), *National Geographic’s “Breakthrough”* 2017
- “Penn Students Create Gingerbread Replica of Fisher Fine Arts Library” [🔗](#), *34th Street Magazine* 2017

TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE

- SharpShooter: an Invisible Tripod via Reaction Wheels** 2018 - 2019
Senior Design Project, Mechanical Engineering at the University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia, PA
Development of a novel reaction wheel stabilizer for ergonomic, handheld long-exposure still photography with team of five peers
- Developed nonlinear system identification pipeline to enable precise application of corrective torques at any motor velocity
 - Implemented gyroscope bias observer to enable accurate and precise attitude estimation during exposures
 - Quantitative stabilization performance exceeded all other commercially-available handheld stabilizers
- Exyn Technologies** Summer 2018
Robotics: Software and Algorithms Intern Philadelphia, PA
Software engineering at aerial robotics startup delivering trustworthy autonomy in challenging environments
- Evaluated and integrated range of technologies for barcode decoding and localization for autonomous warehouse inventory
 - Contributed mission-critical modules to integrate low-level sensors with high-level flight software stack
 - Developed and implemented novel algorithm for extrinsic calibration of any number of rigidly connected inertial measurement units, cameras, and LIDARs using only a single physical calibration target accomodating all sensing modalities

TEACHING

PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING

Certificate in College and University Teaching, Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Innovation 2023
Multipart teaching preparation and credential for university instruction University of Pennsylvania

Preparation consists of participation in teaching seminars held by current faculty, expert observation of a teaching demonstration, and exploration and development of personal teaching philosophy through interaction with expert teachers and scholars.

Course in College Teaching, Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Innovation Fall 2022
Semester-long seminar covering course design, active learning, and engaging teaching practices University of Pennsylvania

Inclusive and Equitable Teaching Mini-Course, Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Innovation Spring 2023
One-month seminar on scholarly research and primary sources in inclusive and equitable instruction University of Pennsylvania

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

MEAM 520 / CIT 520: Introduction to Robotics Fall 2020 / Spring 2021 / Fall 2021
Head Teaching Assistant for Professors Cynthia Sung, Vijay Kumar, and M. Ani Hsieh University of Pennsylvania

Led development of written and laboratory assignments to achieve key pedagogical objectives across theory and practice, covering forward and inverse kinematics, motion planning, rigorous testing, and simulation-to-reality workflow. Worked closely with students in office hours, recitations, and hands-on lab sessions. Led the creation and introduction of a final capstone competition in which students implement a complete manipulation solution on industrial robot hardware. Recognized with the **Outstanding TA Award**.

MEAM 211: Engineering Mechanics, Dynamics Spring 2021
Head Teaching Assistant for Professor Michael Posa University of Pennsylvania

Conducted interactive problem-solving recitations with undergraduates. Developed new computational assignments for the course, in which students implement a multibody dynamics simulator via step-by-step weekly modules, putting concepts into practice.

MENTORING

I have been either a close mentor or a direct supervisor to each of the following students during their work on the indicated project.

DOCTORAL STUDENTS

- Pratik Kunapuli, University of Pennsylvania, Computer and Information Science 2024
“Benchmarking Controllers for Agile Aerial Manipulators”
- Katie Mao, University of Pennsylvania, Mechanical Engineering 2022
“Trajectory Planning for the Bidirectional Quadrotor as a Differentially Flat Hybrid System”

MASTERS STUDENTS

- Nishanth Rao, University of Pennsylvania, Robotics (now a PhD student at Princeton) 2024 - 2025
“Exploring Symmetries and Equivariance in Robot Learning” (Masters Thesis in Robotics)
- Jack Campanella, University of Pennsylvania, Robotics (now at Vertiq) 2023 - 2025
“Integrated Hardware and Software Codesign for Controlling Underactuated Aerial Robots” (Masters Thesis in Robotics)
- Saibernard Yogendran, University of Pennsylvania, Robotics (now at ASML) 2022 - 2024
“Towards a Lightweight Fully-Actuated Aerial Vehicle: Thrust Vectoring and Control Allocation Under Redundancy”

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

- Eshan Singhal, University of Pennsylvania, Computer Engineering and Physics 2024 - 2025
“Control of an Agile Quadrotor Aerial Vehicle with Articulated Propellers”
- Nicole Luna, Cal Poly Pomona, Mechanical Engineering and Physics (now a PhD Student at CU Boulder) Summer 2021
“Aerial Manipulator Mechanical Design”
- Natasha Dilamani, University of Pennsylvania, Mechanical Engineering (now at Millenium) Summer 2020
“Dynamic Modeling of the Sphero, a Highly Nonholonomic System”

SERVICE

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Science Olympiad at the University of Pennsylvania

2017 - 2025

- **Event Supervisor**, *Penn Invitational Tournament*. Coordinating a team of student volunteers to run a yearly engineering challenge for high school students, with over 100 students competing.
- **Placement Leader**, *Urban Initiative*. Site supervisor for several student volunteers in affiliated outreach and mentoring program. Making weekly visits to a Philadelphia public high school to work directly with students exploring science and engineering topics.

“Fun with Robots” Outreach Programming, *Roxborough Library, Free Library of Philadelphia*

2024

- Ran workshop for elementary, middle, and high school students, exploring basic concepts in control and stability for robotics

DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

GRASP “Students, Faculty, and Industry” Seminar, Organizing Committee Member

2023 - 2025

Curating, inviting, and hosting speakers from peer institutions and industry connections to visit the GRASP research community.

Mechanical Engineering Graduate Association, Treasurer

2020 - 2021

Managed finances while planning and executing programming to support the professional, social, engagement, and inclusion needs of the graduate student community in our department.

WORKSHOP ORGANIZATION

“Equivariant Systems: Theory and Applications in State Estimation, Artificial Intelligence and Control”, Organizer

2025

Conference Workshop at *Robotics: Science and Systems (RSS)*

Organizers: Stephan Weiss, Jake Welde, Maani Ghaffari, and Robert Mahony

“RSS Pioneers”, Faculty Chair

2025

Early-Career Workshop at *Robotics: Science and Systems (RSS)*

Organizers: [link](#)  **Faculty Chairs:** Jake Welde, Frederike Dümbgen, and Yunlong Song

“Equivariant Robotics: The Role of Symmetry Across Perception, Estimation, and Control”, Lead Organizer

2024


Conference Workshop at the *IEEE International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS)*

Organizers: Jake Welde, Pieter van Goor, Yinshuang Xu, Rui Wang, Evangelos Chatzipantazis, Christine Allen-Blanchette, Kostas Daniilidis, and Vijay Kumar

REVIEW ACTIVITIES

- IFAC Automatica 2024
- IEEE/ASME Transactions on Mechatronics 2024
- IEEE Control Systems Letters 2023 - 2024
- Springer Autonomous Robots 2023
- IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters 2021 - 2023
- ASME Journal of Dynamic Systems, Measurement and Control 2022 - 2023
- IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation 2022 - 2023
- IEEE Transactions on Robotics 2021 - 2023
- Robotics: Science and Systems 2022
- IEEE Transactions on Automatic Control 2022
- IEEE International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems 2020 - 2021
- IEEE International Conference on Automation Science and Engineering 2020

FUN FACTS

My Erdős number  is at most 3 (Jake Welde \leftrightarrow Kostas Daniilidis \leftrightarrow Pavel Valtr \leftrightarrow Paul Erdős).

In my free time, I love spending time in Nature, cooking spicy food, and playing fetch with my very energetic dog Sprout.