

ALEX LU

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Senior Researcher

Microsoft Research New England

RESEARCH INTERESTS

I create machine learning methods that use big biological data to discover mechanisms in fundamental biology and disease. To do this, my research addresses the practical context of biological data.

My specific research interests include:

- Unsupervised methods for rapid and unbiased exploration of data without labels or prior knowledge
- Robust methods that can cope with novel phenotypes and conditions not seen during training
- Methods for biological images, which are understudied compared to other modalities

My research website and projects can be found at alexluresearch.com

PUBLICATIONS

First Author Publications

- **Lu AX**, Lu AXP, Pritisanac I, Zarin T, Forman-Kay JD, Moses AM. Discovering molecular features of intrinsically disordered regions by using evolution for contrastive learning. *PLOS Computational Biology*. 2022 Jun 29.
- **Lu AX**, Lu AXP, Schormann W, Andrews DW, Moses AM. The Cells Out of Sample (COOS) dataset and benchmarks for measuring out-of-sample generalization of image classifiers. *NeurIPS 2019*. 2019 December.
- **Lu AX**, Kraus OZ, Cooper S, Moses AM. Learning unsupervised feature representations for single cell microscopy images with paired cell inpainting. *PLOS Computational Biology*. 2019 Sept 3;15(9):e1007348.
- **Lu AX**, Zarin T, Hsu IS, Moses AM. YeastSpotter: accurate and parameter-free web segmentation for microscopy images of yeast cells. *Bioinformatics*. 2019 May 16.
- **Lu AX**, Chong YT, Hsu IS, Strome B, Handfield LF, Kraus O, Andrews BJ, Moses AM. Integrating images from multiple microscopy screens reveals diverse patterns of change in the subcellular localization of proteins. *Elife*. 2018 Apr 5;7:e31872.
- **Lu AX**, Handfield LF, Moses A. Extracting and integrating protein localization changes from multiple image screens of yeast cells. *Bio-Protocol*. 2018 Apr;8(18).
- **Lu AX**, Moses AM. An unsupervised kNN method to systematically detect changes in protein localization in high-throughput microscopy images. *PloS one*. 2016 Jul 21;11(7):e0158712.

Co-Authored Publications

- Yang KK, **Lu AX**, Fusi N. Convolutions are competitive with transformers for protein sequence pretraining. *MLDD at ICLR 2022*.
- Hua SB, **Lu AX***, Moses AM*. CytoImageNet: A large-scale pretraining dataset for bioimage transfer learning. *LMRL at NeurIPS 2021*. (*Co-senior author)

- Yang K, Goldman S, Jin W, **Lu A**, Barzilay R, Jaakkola T, Uhler C. Improved Conditional Flow Models for Molecule to Image Synthesis. CVPR 2021.
- Lu AXP, **Lu AX**, Moses, AM. Evolution Is All You Need: Phylogenetic Augmentation for Contrastive Learning. MLCB 2020.
- Huisman E, **Lu AX**, Jamil S, Mousavizadeh R, McCormack R, Roberts C, Scott A. Influence of repetitive mechanical loading on MMP2 activity in tendon fibroblasts. Journal of Orthopaedic Research. 2016 Nov;34(11):1991-2000.
- Mousavizadeh R, Scott A, **Lu AX**, Ardekani GS, Behzad H, Lundgreen K, Ghaffari M, McCormack RG, Duronio V. Angiopoietin-like 4 promotes angiogenesis in the tendon and is increased in cyclically loaded tendon fibroblasts. The Journal of physiology. 2016 Jun 1;594(11):2971-83.
- Grewal N, Thornton GM, Behzad H, Sharma A, **Lu AX**, Zhang P, Reid WD, Granville DJ, Scott A. Accumulation of oxidized LDL in the tendon tissues of C57BL/6 or apolipoprotein E knock-out mice that consume a high fat diet: potential impact on tendon health. PLoS One. 2014 Dec 12;9(12):e114214.
- Huisman E, **Lu AX**, McCormack RG, Scott A. Enhanced collagen type I synthesis by human tenocytes subjected to periodic in vitro mechanical stimulation. BMC musculoskeletal disorders. 2014 Dec;15(1):386.
- Debruin EJ, Hughes MR, Sina C, **Lu AX**, Cait J, Jian Z, Lopez M, Lo B, Abraham T, McNagny KM. Podocalyxin regulates murine lung vascular permeability by altering endothelial cell adhesion. PloS one. 2014 Oct 10;9(10):e108881.
- Behzad H, Sharma A, Mousavizadeh R, **Lu AX**, Scott A. Mast cells exert pro-inflammatory effects of relevance to the pathophysiology of tendinopathy. Arthritis research & therapy. 2013 Dec;15(6):R184.

Pre-prints

- Kaczarmzyk JR, Janizek JD, **Lu AX**, Saltz JH, Koo PK. Quantifying the effect size of image features on predictions of black box models.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND INVITED TALKS

Invited Talks

- **Understanding big biological data with self-supervised machine learning**
EWSC Initiative, Broad Institute
Broad Institute, Cambridge, MA, March 17th, 2022
- **Understanding big biological data with self-supervised machine learning**
University of Rochester
Virtual Seminar, March 10th, 2022
- **Understanding biomedical images with self-supervised machine learning**
Spring Discovery
Virtual Seminar, October 13th, 2021
- **Learning biology through puzzle-solving: unbiased automatic understanding of microscopy images through self-supervised learning**

Microscopy & Microanalysis 2020
Virtual Conference, August 4th, 2020

- **Learning unsupervised feature representations for single cell microscopy images with paired cell inpainting**
Cell Painting Group, Broad Institute
Virtual Seminar, April 6th, 2020

Contributed Oral Presentations

- **Learning unsupervised feature representations for single cell microscopy images with paired cell inpainting**
MLCB 2019
Vancouver, Canada, December 14th, 2019
- **Learning unsupervised feature representations for single cell microscopy images with paired cell inpainting**
Biological Data Science 2018
Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Long Island, New York, November 10th, 2018
- **An unsupervised kNN method to systematically detect changes in protein localization in high-throughput microscopy images**
GLBIO/CCBC 2016
Toronto, Canada, May 16th, 2016

Poster Presentations

- **Transfer Learning vs. Batch Effects: what can we expect from neural networks in computational biology?**
MLCB 2019
Vancouver, Canada, December 14th, 2019
- **The Cells Out of Sample (COOS) dataset and benchmarks for measuring out-of-sample generalization of image classifiers.**
NeurIPS 2019
Vancouver, Canada, December 11th, 2019
- **Learning representations of biology with small and homogeneous training datasets**
NeurIPS 2019 (Learning Meaningful Representations of Life Workshop)
Vancouver, Canada December 13th, 2019
- **Paired cell inpainting: self-supervised multiple-instance learning for bioimage analysis**
ICML 2019 (Self-Supervised Learning Workshop)
Long Beach, California, June 16th, 2019

Campus Talks

- **Exploring big image data with self-supervised deep learning**
OICR Seminar Series
Toronto, Canada, November 11th, 2019
- **Learning unsupervised feature representations for single cell microscopy images with paired cell inpainting**
TorBUG Seminar Series
Toronto, Canada, November 28th, 2018

- **Discovering biological insights from large-scale microscopy datasets with unsupervised deep learning**

Sunnybrook Research Institute

Toronto, Canada, November 26th, 2018

EDUCATION

PhD (Computer Science)

2017 - 2021

University of Toronto

Thesis: Unsupervised machine learning for hypothesis discovery and representation learning in biological image and sequence analysis.

MSc (Computer Science)

2016 - 2017

University of Toronto

Thesis: An unsupervised kNN method to systematically detect changes in protein localization in high-throughput microscopy images.

BSc (Honors Specialization in Bioinformatics)

2010 - 2015

University of Western Ontario

Thesis: Observations in extracting and parsing subcellular relations using natural language processing systems in biomedical publications.

ACADEMIC WORK EXPERIENCE

Senior Researcher

November 2021 - Present

Microsoft Research New England

Leads research program at the intersection of machine learning and big biological data.

Intern

Jan 2019 - May 2019

Phenomic AI, Toronto

Internship in a start-up. Research and development for deep learning methods for image segmentation.

Teaching Assistant

Sept 2015 - May 2016

Department of Computer Science, University of Toronto

Teaching assistant for upper year artificial intelligence and computational linguistic courses.

Bioinformatics Undergraduate Research Assistant

May 2015 - August 2015

Robert HN Ho Research Center, University of British Columbia

Undergraduate summer student funded by NSERC USRA. Investigated tendon pathology using computational analyses of immunohistochemistry images.

COMMUNITY ROLES

TorBUG Committee Member

June 2019 - Present

TorBUG, University of Toronto

Committee member for organizing monthly bioinformatics seminar series.

Board Director*October 2015 - January 2018*

Ontario Public Research Interest Group

Director for student levy group mandated to make research initiatives and policy action accessible to marginalized communities. Responsible for organizing annual student-led conference and coordinating for-credit research positions. Direct supervisor for three staff members.

Board Director*October 2013 - December 2016*

Frank Theatre Company

Board director for Vancouver-based queer arts and culture company. Directly managed accessibility details and performed outreach to disability communities.

Accessibility Director*October 2013 - August 2015*

BC Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf

Organized film screenings, panels, discussion groups, and arts and culture initiatives. Established partnerships with major non-profit organizations, including Vancouver Pride, the Vancouver Queer Arts Festival, PeerNetBC, and the Verses Festival of Words. Advocated for accessibility reforms, including writing, publication, and dissemination of accessibility manual for event organizers.

HONORS AND AWARDS

NSERC MSFSS*Dec 2019*

Award to fund visiting research position; \$6,000 for three months

Ray Reiter Graduate Award in Computer Science*Dec 2019*

Departmental award with value of \$1,000

MLCB Travel Award*Dec 2019*

Conference award at MLCB, awarded on basis of merit to five outstanding papers

NSERC CGS-D*May 2017*

National research fellowship: awarded \$35,000 per year over three years

*Ranked 1st of 192 applicants in cellular and molecular biology***Best Paper: GLBIO/CCBC 2017***May 2016*

Regional conference award for best full paper

NSERC CGS-M*(Declined)*

National research fellowship: awarded \$13,000. Declined due to institution choice.

NSERC URSA*May 2015*

National undergraduate research fellowship: awarded \$4,500 for summer research

Western Gold Medal for Bioinformatics*May 2015*

Institutional: Awarded to top graduating student from program

NSERC URSA*May 2013*

National undergraduate research fellowship: awarded \$4,500 for summer research

TEACHING AND SERVICE

Teaching

- **Genome Biology and Bioinformatics Program: Deep Learning for Biology Seminars**
November 2019 to January 2020
Designed and taught three-part talk series for the Genome Biology and Bioinformatics program at the University of Toronto.
- **Introduction to Deep Learning for Biologists**
September 17th and 24th, 2018

Designed and taught introductory workshops on building deep neural networks to graduate students in the Department of Cells and Systems Biology at the University of Toronto.

Service

- **Dean's Advisory Council for Arts and Science Faculty at University of Toronto**
April 2022 to present - advised Dean Melanie Woodin on academic programming.
- **Peer Review**
Peer reviewer for NeurIPS 2021, Nature Communications, PLOS Computational Biology, MLCB 2020, Bioinformatics, Cell Systems, CIBB 2019, IEEE TM, and BMC Supplements.
- **Community Engagement**
Speaker for Skype a Scientist for high school classes in Providence, RI and Englewood, NJ.
- **Conference Organizing**
Scientific committee for DAC2021.

Open-Source Software

- **YeastSpotter**
December 2018 to Present
Developer and maintainer of open-source segmentation web application YeastSpotter (<http://yeastspotter.csb.utoronto.ca>)