

OANA IGNAT

Passionate about multimodal, diversity, and social good impact.

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Ann Arbor, MI, USA



ACADEMIC WORK

Postdoctoral Fellow Computer Science

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA

02/2023 - Ongoing

- ◇ Multimodal research (language & vision), focus on building **inclusive multimodal AI datasets and models for social good impact**
- ◇ Member Language and Information Technologies (LIT) Lab
- ◇ CO-PI Global Health Equity Grant
- ◇ Mentor Undergraduate, Masters and Ph.D. students
- ◇ Organizer of the “Launch your Confidence” workshops for CSE students
- ◇ Co-organizer of the “ACL Year Round Mentorship” global panel sessions
- ◇ Co-organizer of AI exhibition at Michigan Science Center in Detroit
- ◇ Panelist in “Discover CS” and “Explore CS Research”

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Computer Science

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA

09/2017 - 08/2022

- ◇ Ph.D. Thesis: *Towards Human Action Understanding in Social Media Videos using Multimodal Models*, <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/174613>
- ◇ Multimodal research (language & vision), with focus on **human action understanding** through social media vlogs
- ◇ Advised by Rada Mihalcea
- ◇ Member Language and Information Technologies (LIT) Lab
- ◇ Member Center for Research on Learning and Teaching in Engineering (CRLT-ENGIN)
- ◇ Primary Teaching Instructor
- ◇ Mentor for high school, undergraduate, and master’s students
- ◇ Organizer of the NLP Reading Group

B.S. Computer Science

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj Napoca, Romania

10/2013 – 07/2016

- ◇ Collaborated with Robert-Bosch for my **undergraduate thesis** on real-time, automatic road detection using depth information from a stereo camera, which won multiple prizes and was successfully applied in the real world
- ◇ Won the **Best Thesis award in Artificial Intelligence** for the entire class of 2016 undergraduate and graduate students

AWARDS

- ◇ **Best Poster award** in Eastern European Machine Learning Summer School (2019 EEML)
- ◇ **Fulbright Student award** Finalist 2017
- ◇ **Best Thesis award in Artificial Intelligence** for the entire class of 2016 undergraduate and graduate students at the “Babes-Bolyai” University. Awarded by the **Romanian Institute of Science and Technology**
- ◇ “Scientific Communication Sessions for Students”, for the entire class of 2016 undergraduate and graduate students – 2nd place for presenting my undergraduate thesis
- ◇ 2016 Jane Street “Women in STEM” Finalist, selected from 300+ participants across Europe
- ◇ Over the years, I took part in **over 60 Mathematics competitions**, such as:
 - ◇ National competition in Mathematics “Euclid” 2013 – 1st prize
 - ◇ National Olympiad in Mathematics 2012
 - ◇ Regional Mathematics Olympiad 2012 – 1st place
 - ◇ Regional Mathematics Olympiad 2011 – 2nd place
 - ◇ National competition in Mathematics “Euclid” 2011 – 2nd prize
 - ◇ Regional Mathematics Olympiad 2010 – mention
 - ◇ Regional Mathematics Olympiad 2009 – 2nd place

INVITED TALKS

- ◇ Cohere for AI, *Has It All Been Solved? Open NLP Research Questions Not Solved by Large Language Models*, Guest Online presentation, August 2024.
- ◇ MIT University, *Towards Inclusive Representations in Language-Vision Models*, Guest Lecture presentation, July 2024.
- ◇ ETH Zurich, *Towards Language-Vision Models for Positive Societal Impact*, Guest Lecture presentation, February 2024.
- ◇ Villanova University, *Bridging the Digital Divide: Performance Variation across Socio-Economic Factors in Vision-Language Models*, CS for Good Guest Lecture presentation, February 2024.
- ◇ University of Michigan, *Towards Language-Vision Models for Positive Societal Impact*, Guest Lecture presentation, January 2024.
- ◇ University of Michigan CSE DEI Discussions, *Launch your Confidence, a biweekly workshop for CSE students*, Michigan, October 2023.
- ◇ University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, *OCR improves Machine Translation performance for low-resource languages*, OCR Research Brownbag discussions, October 2023.
- ◇ Oakland University, *Human actions understanding using language and visual information*, NLP Guest Lecture presentation, March 2023.
- ◇ NLP Meetup in Ann Arbor, *Human actions understanding from social media videos*, March 2019.

GRANT PROPOSALS

Co-PI

Global Health Equity

3/2023 - Ongoing

- ◇ Increasing Access to Healthcare Information with Multilingual Question Answering in collaboration with University professors and medical staff from Nigeria.

PUBLICATIONS

1. **Oana Ignat**, Santiago Castro, Weiji Li[&], and Rada Mihalcea, *Human Action Co-occurrence in Lifestyle Vlogs using Graph Link Prediction*, 7th Workshop on Graph-based Natural Language Processing (TextGraphs 2024), <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2309.06219.pdf>.
2. **Oana Ignat**, *Towards Human Action Understanding in Social Media Videos using Multimodal Models*, **Ph.D. Thesis**, August 2022, <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/174613>.
3. **Oana Ignat**, Longju Bai[&], Joan Nwatu[&], and Rada Mihalcea, *Annotations on a Budget: Leveraging Geo-Data Similarity to Balance Model Performance and Annotation Cost*, The 2024 Joint International Conference on Computational Linguistics, Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC-COLING 2024), May 2024, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2403.07687.pdf>¹.
4. **Oana Ignat**^{*}, Zhijing Jin^{*}, Artem Abzaliev, Laura Biester, Santiago Castro, Naihao Deng, Xinyi Gao, Aylin Gunal, Jacky He, Ashkan Kazemi, Muhammad Khalifa, Namho Koh, Andrew Lee, Siyang Liu, Do June Min, Shinka Mori[&], Joan Nwatu[&], Verónica Pérez-Rosas, Siqi Shen, Zekun Wang, Winston Wu, Rada Mihalcea, *Has It All Been Solved? Open NLP Research Questions Not Solved by Large Language Models*, The 2024 Joint International Conference on Computational Linguistics, Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC-COLING 2024), May 2024, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2305.12544.pdf>.
5. Shinka Mori[&], **Oana Ignat**, Andrew Lee, and Rada Mihalcea, *Towards Algorithmic Fidelity: Mental Health Representation across Demographics in GPT-generated vs. Human-generated Data*, The 2024 Joint International Conference on Computational Linguistics, Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC-COLING 2024), May 2024, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2403.16909.pdf>.
6. **Oana Ignat**, Jingru Yi, Burak Uzkent, and Linda Liu, *Augment the Pairs: Semantics-Preserving Image-Caption Pair Augmentation for Grounding-Based Vision and Language Models*, IEEE/CVF Winter Conference on Applications of Computer Vision Workshops (WACV 2024), October 2023, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2311.02536.pdf>.
7. Joan Nwatu^{*&}, **Oana Ignat**^{*} and Rada Mihalcea, *Bridging the Digital Divide: Performance Variation across Socio-Economic Factors in Vision-Language Models*, The 2023 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing (EMNLP 2023), October 2023, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2311.05746.pdf>.
8. Santiago Castro^{*}, **Oana Ignat**^{*} and Rada Mihalcea, *Scalable Performance Analysis for Vision-Language Models*, Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (*SEM 2023), July 2023, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2305.18786.pdf>.
9. Santiago Castro, Ruoyao Wang, Pingxuan Huang, Ian Stewart, **Oana Ignat**, Nan Liu, Jonathan C. Stroud, and Rada Mihalcea, *FIBER: Fill-in-the-Blanks as a Challenging Video Understanding Evaluation Framework*, Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (ACL 2022), October 2022, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2104.04182.pdf>.
10. **Oana Ignat**, Jean Maillard, Vishrav Chaudhary and Francisco Guzmán, *OCR Improves Machine Translation for Low-Resource Languages*, Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (ACL 2022), October 2022, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2202.13274.pdf>.

¹* – equal contribution, & – my mentee

11. **Oana Ignat**, Santiago Castro, Hanwen Miao[&], Weiji Li[&], and Rada Mihalcea, *WhyAct: Identifying Action Reasons in Lifestyle Vlogs*, The 2021 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing (EMNLP 2021), <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2109.02747.pdf>.
12. **Oana Ignat**, Santiago Castro, Yuhang Zhou[&], Jiajun Bao[&], Dandan Shan, and Rada Mihalcea, *When did it happen? Duration-informed Temporal Localization of Narrated Actions in Vlogs*, ACM Transactions on Multimedia Computing, Communications, and Applications (TOMM 2021), October 2021, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2202.00813.pdf>.
13. **Oana Ignat**, Y-Lan Boureau, Jane A. Yu, and Alon Halevy, *Detecting Inspiring Content on Social Media*, 9th International Conference on Affective Computing and Intelligent Interaction (ACII 2021), August 2021, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2109.02734.pdf>.
14. **Oana Ignat**, Laura Burdick, Jia Deng, and Rada Mihalcea, *Identifying Visible Actions in Lifestyle Vlogs*, Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (ACL 2019), July 2019, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1906.04236.pdf>.
15. Laura Burdick, **Oana Ignat**, Yiming Zhang, Mingzhe Wang, Steve Wilson, Yumou Wei, Jia Deng, and Rada Mihalcea, *Building a Flexible Knowledge Graph to Capture Real-World Events*, Text Analysis Conference (TAC 2019), November 2019, https://tac.nist.gov/publications/2019/participant_papers/TAC2019.michigan.proceedings.pdf.
16. **Oana Ignat** and Cosmin Lazar, *Disparity image segmentation for free-space detection*, IEEE 12th International Conference on Intelligent Communication Processing (ICCP 2016), August 2016, <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/7737150/>.

PAPERS UNDER SUBMISSION

13. **Oana Ignat**, Phoebe Xu[&], Verónica Pérez-Rosas, Artem Abzaliev, and Rada Mihalcea, *Multilingual Deception Detection of GPT-generated Hotel Reviews*, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2404.12938>.
14. **Oana Ignat**^{*}, Gayathri GI^{*&}, Rada Mihalcea, *Detecting Inspiring content on Social Media across Cultures*, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2404.12933>
15. David Romero^{*}, Chenyang Lyu^{*}, Haryo Akbarianto Wibowo^{*}, ..., **Oana Ignat**, Joan Nwatu[&], Rada Mihalcea, Thamar Solorio, Alham Fikri Aji, *CVQA: Culturally-diverse Multilingual Visual Question Answering Benchmark*, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2406.05967>

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Primary Instructor

Discover CS (EECS 198)

09/2021 - 12/2021

- ◊ Taught an intro to CS course **designed for underrepresented minorities** in CS.

Engineering Teaching Consultant

Center for Research on Learning and Teaching in Engineering (CRLT-Engin)

09/2020 - 05/2021

- ◊ Helped other GSIs/IAs to **improve their teaching** through one-on-one consultations where we discussed challenges they faced during teaching. I also collected feedback from students of the GSIs/IAs and discussed it with the student instructor.

Graduate Student Instructor

Data Structures and Algorithms (EECS 281)

09/2020 - 12/2020

- ◇ 1000+ students, 3 GSIs, 3 professors
- ◇ Coordinated with the other GSIs for office hours, grading, and proctoring exams.

Data Mining (EECS 476)

01/2020 - 05/2020

- ◇ 50+ students, 3 GSIs, 1 professor
- ◇ Designed assignments and exams, taught discussion sessions, held office hours, graded and proctored exams.

Instructor: NLP for Social Good

Artificial Intelligence for All (AI4All) Summer School

07/2019

- ◇ Introduced **underrepresented minority high school students** to AI by teaching them how to code in Python and implement an **NLP project related to social good**: work with HappyDB dataset to predict what makes people happy.

SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERING

Mentor

University of Michigan

09/2020 - Ongoing

- ◇ Mentored and published research papers with 10 undergraduate, Master, and Ph.D. students.

Undergraduate:

- ◇ Phoebe Xu (2023 - Present) (currently applying for a Ph.D. in NLP)
- ◇ Gayathri GI (2023 - Present) (currently applying for a Ph.D. in NLP)
- ◇ Weiji Li (2021 - 2022) (currently ML Engineer at Tesla)
- ◇ Jiajun Bao (2020 - 2021) (currently ML Engineer at Apple)
- ◇ Yuhang Zhou (2020 - 2021) (currently Ph.D. candidate at University of Maryland)

Master's:

- ◇ Shinka Mori (2023 - Present)
- ◇ Longju Bai (2023 - Present) (currently applying for a Ph.D. in multimodal)
- ◇ Aylin Gunal (2023 - Present)
- ◇ Hanwen Miao (2021 - 2022)

Ph.D.:

- ◇ Joan Nwatu (2023 - Present)

Michigan Islamic Academy's Senior Project

09/2019 - 11/2019

- ◇ Biweekly meetings with a senior student to guide her through her final NLP project, a project about **increasing diversity representation in mental health**.

Organizer

University of Michigan: Confidence Workshops

05/2023 - Ongoing

- ◇ Organize “Launch your Confidence”, a bi-weekly workshop with activities inspired by Improv Theater and Toastmasters, on **reducing perfectionism, tackling impostor syndrome, and improving public speaking skills**. The workshop succeeded in popularity and involvement, with 10-15 Ph.D. and Masters student attendees biweekly, mainly from CS minority groups.

University of Michigan: NLP Reading Group

08/2019 - 08/2022

- ◇ Weekly NLP reading groups for the University of Michigan students from the CSE, EECS and School of Information (SI).

Co-organizer

ACL Year Round Mentorship

05/2023 - Ongoing

- ◇ Co-moderator for the “ACL Year Round Mentorship” global panel sessions, help reach out to mentors, answer question, and promote the events on social media platforms. Our mentorship sessions are recorded and open access and are well received by the global NLP community, with **the most popular videos reaching up to 2,500 views**.

Co-organizer

University NLP@Michigan Days

04/2023

- ◇ Co-Chair of the NLP@Michigan Symposium, 2023 (100+ attendees).

Michigan Science Center in Detroit

09/2023 - Ongoing

- ◇ Co-organize and create an AI museum exhibition to **demystify AI for a broad audience** by explaining what it is, its current capabilities, and the importance of data in AI models. We create engaging educational materials using games and puzzles that people of all ages can enjoy and aim to **inspire generations of underrepresented students to pursue careers in AI and CS**.

Panelist

University of Michigan: EECS 280

11/2023

- ◇ Answered questions from students in EECS 280 (1000+ undergrads) about my path in CS.

University of Michigan: Explore CS Research

02/2023

- ◇ Answered questions about research in AI from CS undergraduate and Master students. Inspired by this event, Phoebe Xu, an undergraduate student, decided to try research and work with me. After working together for a few months, she applied for a Ph.D. in NLP.

University of Michigan: Discover CS

03/2023

- ◇ Answered questions about working in CS, AI, and research from undergraduate students.

Area Chair

EMNLP, Area: *Large Language Models and the Future of NLP*

07/2023 - 09/2023

Reviewer

ACL Rolling Review

12/2021 - Ongoing

- ◇ Review research papers on multimodal (NLP and Computer Vision) and AI for social good.

Eastern European Machine Learning Summer School (EEML)

04/2023

- ◇ Reviewed research applications from 20 students applying to participate in the Eastern European Machine Learning Summer School (EEML).

Volunteer for planting trees

Robert-Bosch Green Week

06/2017

- ◇ Planted 30+ trees in a deforested region in Romania.

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

Research Intern

Amazon, Prime Video group

09/2022 - 12/2022

📍 Seattle

- ◇ Mentored by Jingru Yu and Burak Uzkent
- ◇ Significantly improved the performance of a state-of-the-art image-phrase grounding model using a novel, semantics-preserving data augmentation technique.

Meta, Fundamental AI Research (FAIR) group

05/2021 - 08/2021

📍 Remote

- ◇ Mentored by Paco Guzman
- ◇ Analyzed OCR errors for low-resource languages and their impact on MT performance and created an OCR benchmark for 60 low-resource languages.

Meta Fundamental AI Research (FAIR) group

05/2020 - 08/2020

📍 Remote

- ◇ Mentored by Alon Halevy and Y-Lan Boureau
- ◇ Detected Inspiring Content on Social Media (Reddit and Facebook posts).

Image Processing Engineer

Telenav Software

08/2016 - 08/2017

📍 Cluj Napoca, Romania

- ◇ 3D reconstruction of scenes using structure from motion.

Intern Image Processing Engineer

Robert-Bosch SRL

07/2015 – 08/2016

📍 Cluj Napoca, Romania

- ◊ Novel road detection algorithm using a stereo-camera.

CONFERENCES ATTENDED

ACL: Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics	📅 2019-2023
EMNLP: Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing	📅 2021
NAACL: North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics	📅 2019
COLING: International Conference on Computational Linguistics	📅 2018
EEML: Eastern European Machine Learning Summer School	📅 2019
MSLD: Midwest Speech and Language Days	📅 2017-2019

CRLT-ENGIN TEACHING WORKSHOPS

Designing and Facilitating Group Work in Remote Courses

It's Time for Action: Generating an Active Learning Plan

The Science of Learning

How Stereotype Threat, Impostor Syndrome, and Growth Mindset Affect Student Learning

Writing and Grading Multiple Choice Exams: An Online Workshop

UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COURSEWORK

ELI 621: Dissertation and Publication Writing

EECS 692: Advanced Artificial Intelligence

EECS 592: Foundations of Artificial Intelligence

EECS 551: Matrix Methods for Signal Processing

EECS 595: Natural Language Processing

EECS 542: Advanced Topics in Computer Vision

INDEPENDENT COURSEWORK

Good with Words: Speaking and Presenting

Prof. Patrick Barry, University of Michigan

Data Science Ethics

Prof. H.V. Jagadish, University of Michigan

The Science of Well-Being

Prof. Laurie Santos, Yale University

Machine Learning

Prof. Andrew Ng, Stanford University

Image and Video Processing

Prof. Guillermo Sapiro, Duke University

LANGUAGES

Fluent in spoken/written Romanian, English; Beginner: Spanish, French, German