



AI Institute for Advances in Optimization

The AI4OPT Newsletter | September 2025



The start of a new academic year always brings fresh energy, new people, new initiatives, and new ideas. It was great to see so many of you at the AI4OPT open house and social, including several new Ph.D. students joining the Institute. Looking ahead, we'll have plenty of opportunities to connect and collaborate, including a dedicated AI career fair at Georgia Tech in November that we encourage both students and partners to take part in.

While our summers focus heavily on education, fall is all about research. AI4OPT continues to push the frontiers of AI for engineering, from specialized conferences such as CPAIOR, where speakers from Georgia Tech, UC Berkeley, and USC will share their latest contributions at the intersection of AI and optimization, to the INFORMS Annual Meeting, one of the largest optimization conferences in the world. I am honored to have been invited as a plenary speaker at INFORMS and look forward to highlighting AI4OPT's work to the broader community. At INFORMS, several members of AI4OPT will attend a breakfast organized by the Seth Bonder Foundation celebrating achievements across the spectrum of education.

Our research also extends well beyond academic audiences. Recently, we hosted a bipartisan group of U.S. congressional staffers on campus, and we released a new

podcast episode exploring the rise of autonomous vehicles. You can read more about both in this newsletter.

This issue also shines a light on one of the quiet forces behind AI4OPT's success. Our financial manager, Lisa Salter, was the first staff member to join the Institute, and her dedication and positivity have shaped so much of what we have built. As she prepares for retirement, I want to express my deep gratitude for Lisa's talent, dedication, smile, and ability to deliver under tight deadlines. These attributes were so important to the success of AI4OPT. I know she will enjoy the next adventure filled chapter of her life. Thank you, Lisa, from all of us.

- Pascal Van Hentenryck

AI4OPT Member Spotlight



"Hello! I am Mehdi, a postdoctoral fellow at AI4OPT. I earned a Ph.D. in applied mathematics from Polytechnique Montreal in 2024. During my program, I was a visiting scholar at KU Leuven in 2024 and at Griffith University in 2023. Before pursuing my doctorate, I earned an MBA from the International University of Japan in 2019. I also completed a master's in industrial and systems engineering in Morocco in 2016."

Blending Math, Business and AI Research

With both my mathematical curriculum and business experience, I am an applied mathematician by training. I enjoy combining math and business concepts to tackle theoretical and practical large-scale optimization problems. By doing so, I try to push the research boundaries while supporting organizations in enhancing their capabilities.

Advancing Optimization at AI4OPT

I got involved with AI4OPT through some of my great friends from my previous lab, the Group for Research in Decision Analysis (GERAD), who put me in touch with Kevin Dalmeijer. After meeting with Pascal and Kevin, I joined AI4OPT as a Postdoctoral Fellow.

My key responsibilities include research, industry, teaching, and service. Research involves designing methodologies, supervising students, and publishing papers. Industry stretches from visiting partners and designing statements of work to transferring the technology. Teaching includes students from high school to graduate school. Service includes popularizing science and mentoring students.



Interests Beyond Research

Outside of work, I enjoy long-term stock investing, playing football (the real football known as soccer in the U.S.), exploring wildlife (a huge passion that took me to Australia), and snowboarding during the winter season (such as in Niigata, Japan). I also love traveling, especially when a research component, like visiting scholar or conference, is included. I prefer when these trips is longer, the food is delicious, and the weather is sunny.

Words of Inspiration

After experiencing many ways of life, I confirmed that I find satisfaction and joy in research under various forms (lab, trips, interactions, nature, etc.). This is the only thing that keeps my brain active and sustains my quest for knowledge.





"I'm Lisa Salter, a sponsored research consultant/financial manager with AI4OPT. I've been full-time at GT for 22 years, following two separate part-time positions with the institute. In 2003 I began as an administrative professional in GTRI. From there I moved to ECE then ME. In 2017 I moved from an administrative role and joined ISyE as a financial administrator. And in all that time I've never had my picture made with Buzz!"

The Road to AI4OPT

I supported more than 20 faculty as a financial administrator in ISyE. After Pascal received the AI Research grant from NSF I was hired as the financial manager for the AI4OPT institute. The rest is history!

Behind the Numbers

I am responsible for preparing financial and administrative items required for submitting proposals. Once those proposals become grants I work with the sponsored research office to bring in the funds, and manage the expenses including salary, subawards, and other costs. I allocate funds here and there to spend them in a timely manner. Together with other management staff, we coordinate student salaries, internships, fellowships and anything else involving money. I enjoy working with our graduate students, postdocs and other staff, and try to help them however I can. If someone doesn't get paid they come to me first!

Life Outside the Office

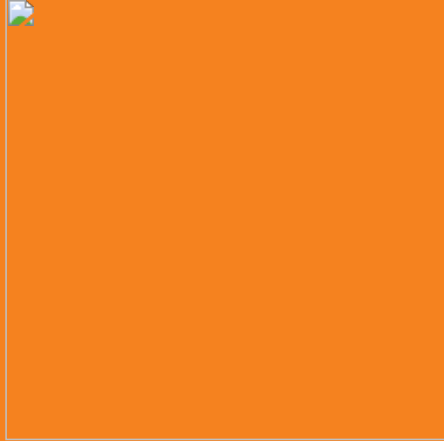
Outside of work I like to play! That involves swimming (floating), camping, hiking and anything else outdoors. I have a greenhouse full of succulents and a house full of houseplants. I love to read books of all kinds, and when I'm not reading I usually have music playing. I like it all, but I mostly listen to rock 'n' roll because after all I grew up in the '70's! I am a big Braves, Falcons, and Yellow Jackets fan and I watch as many games as I can. I love cooking and entertaining and spending time with friends and my large, blended family. My husband and I have four grandchildren who wear us out but are



so fun! I love to travel anywhere I haven't been before and plan to do that exclusively when I retire. We plan to sell our house and travel the country full-time in our RV with our two Great Pyrenees, visiting small towns, big cities, museums, roadside

attractions, national parks and anything else we can find. I've lived in Georgia my whole life and now I'm ready to GO!

Words of Inspiration

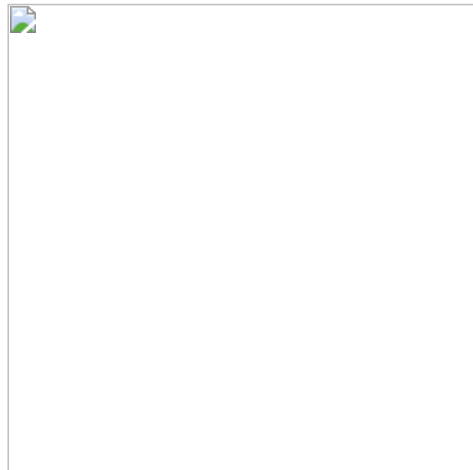


I am super positive, and I believe life is too short to whine, complain and be grumpy! I try to show love and respect to everyone I meet and hope to be an inspiration to anyone who knows me. And if I can make you laugh that is a plus!

News and Highlights



[U.S. Congressional Staffers Visit AI4OPT to Explore AI Powered Research](#)

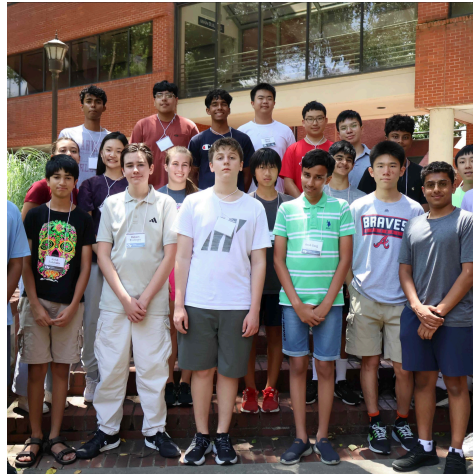


Podcast: AI Driving the Future of Mobility.

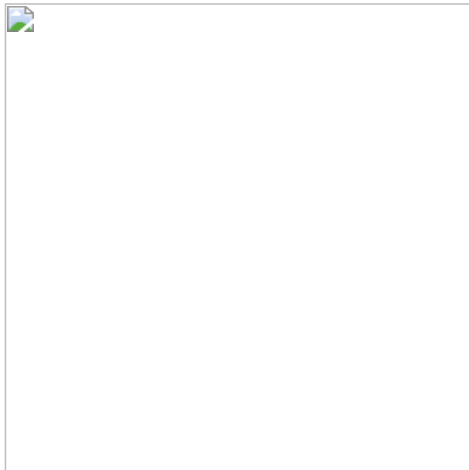
Pascal Van Hentenryck to Deliver Plenary Talk at INFORMS 2025



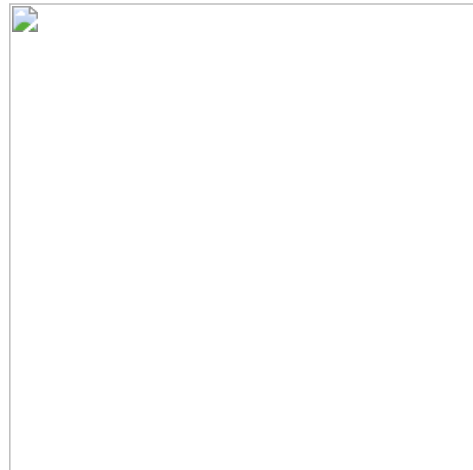
Tinghan (Joe) Ye Explores Large Scale Decision Making Under Uncertainty.



Seth Bonder Summer Camps Level Up AI Learning For High School Students



AI4OPT and Tech AI Host Open House and Social



Faculty Training Program Making A Worldwide Impact On Research

Upcoming Events



Summit for AI Institutes Leadership



2025 INFORMS Annual Meeting

CPAIOR
Conference
Series



AI
CAREER
FAIR



[AI4OPT Members at CPAIOR](#)

[Tech AI Career Fair](#)

Publications

AI4OPT publications available on [Google Scholar](#).

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