

UT professor to lead new Sony AI division



Peter Stone, a professor of computer science at the University of Texas at Austin will lead the American division of Sony's new AI organization, Sony AI.

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BY KARA CARLSON

KCARLSON@STATESMAN.COM

A University of Texas at Austin professor will head up the U.S. headquarters for a new division of Sony focused on artificial intelligence.

The electronics giant this week announced the creation of Sony AI, a division that will be headquartered in Japan.

The new organization will pursue advanced AI technology at research sites in Tokyo, Austin and Europe. The Austin operations will include an AI lab, which

is scheduled to open this year, the company said.

Peter Stone, a professor of computer science at UT with expertise in the AI field, will head up the U.S. arm of the new organization, Sony said. Stone will also continue teaching at UT, and will continue his roles with Texas Robotics and the university's Learning Agents Research Group in the Artificial Intelligence Lab.

Sony declined to give more details about the size and scope of the Austin division. Stone said his team will include about 13 AI researchers, but at least initially the other team members will be spread out across the country.

Sony AI will focus on three flagship projects in the areas of gaming, imaging and sensing and gastronomy, according to a statement from Sony.

The American team will focus on a type of AI called reinforcement learning, a type of machine learning focused on sequential decision making, or deciding on how to take actions over time.

"The team that will become Sony AI U.S. has world-class expertise in this area," Stone said, "We expect it to apply specifically to some of the focus topics for Sony, including gaming especially as a starting point."

Stone said Sony has long had a presence in artificial intelligence sector. He pointed to the Sony Aibo, an entertainment robot that debuted in 1999. The company recently issued a new version of the robot.

"Games are widely used as AI research benchmarks," said Lisa Gephardt, senior director of corporate communications for Sony Corp, of America. "From a business perspective, there are a wide variety of use cases that target use of AI in game development. These have the potential to offer groundbreaking, new game experiences."

The gastronomy division will focus on bringing Sony's mission to "fill the world with emotion, through the power of creativity and technology" to food, Gephardt said.

“We intend to harness AI and robotics from the perspective of “getting closer to creators,” with the aim of expanding the creative options/creativity of chefs,” Gephardt said. “Top-level chefs can gain inspiration for new recipes by interacting with AI, and we also want to help all of those who prepare food in their day to day lives to enjoy that process of creation even more.”