

MAP 2026 - Geopolitics and AI: Using RL to Simulate Real World Dynamics, and Untraining Predictability in the Face of GenAI systems

In this MAP cycle, Dr. Elliott expects to recruit eight students, four per project. Unlike previous years, this cycle will incorporate Geopolitics (see section 2). “What motivated you to add Geopolitics”? Elliott uses geopolitics in a broad, infrastructural sense, as illustrated in the article: “[AI geopolitics and data centers in the age of technological rivalry](#)”.

The two projects are listed below, along with preferred prerequisites (students without the prerequisites are also encouraged to apply).

1. **The RL and Simulating Geopolitical Decision-Making project.**
 - a. Four students. Pre-req: successfully concluded CSC207 before the Summer of 2026. Having taken CSC261 in the spring of 2026 is not a requirement but is highly encouraged.
2. **The Cognitive Robustness Research Studio: Untraining Predictability in the Face of GenAI systems** (First-year students are highly encouraged to apply)
 - a. Four students:
 - Three students: you are either a first-year student or a student majoring in Humanities or Social Studies (having taken CSC151 is preferable).
 - One student will be the project leader. Ideally, you are a third-year student who has completed CSC151 and has a strong background in the Humanities or Social Studies.

*Note that the actual number of students invited to join each project will vary according to the number of applications on each project (and on MAP funding).

Below, I describe the ELBICA lab's previous work, followed by an overview of the two projects offered in this MAP cycle.

1. ELBICA Lab in a Nutshell (Previous Work)

In previous work [1 – 3], Elliott successfully designed and developed a computational architecture that models moral reasoning and empathy in multi-agent tasks. **In 2021**, Elliott began my efforts to enhance and expand the architecture. Then, the 2021 MAP research guided the ELBICA lab to reflect on the differences between moral reasoning and moral intuition, as well as their influence on a group’s reputation and moral behavior [4, 5]. **In 2022**, Elliott was named a Scialog fellow for the “Molecular Basis of Cognition” group, demonstrating the relevance of ELBICA lab’s cognitively inspired work; then, for 2022’s MAP research, we investigated how to test and model moral reasoning and moral intuition our cognitively inspired computational architecture, called EDA (Empathy-Driven Architecture) [5]. The ELBICA lab: 1) investigated the differences between moral reasoning and moral intuition, and the importance of emotions and feelings, such as empathy, as an attentional mechanism to facilitate decision-making; 2) Searched for clues of moral intuition, semantic meaning, and common sense in different images, inspiring the creation of 3-D scenes and a dataset, and 3) Used robot simulators to investigate what robot tasks are the most appropriate to test and assess EDA in the future, as well as the distinction between coordination and cooperation. Additionally, Elliott’s first-year



Tutorial course inspired us to investigate how anthropomorphism affects the way we interact with machines [6]. ELBICA lab's efforts got Elliott intrigued about a dichotomy: cooperation vs. coordination. **In 2023**, outcomes from our 3-D project [7] led us to tools for people with print disabilities. Additionally, the ELBICA lab developed MAS approaches that implement classic RL techniques to drive insights into the distinction cooperation/cooperation; our testbeds included networked agents [8] and the Smart Surface benchmark [9]. **In 2024**, we continued investigating tools for individuals with a humor comprehension deficit and began exploring the applicability of the cockroach's scape system for robotic tasks, as well as the role of concepts in the design and explainability of AI systems. AI's ubiquity highlights the importance of a well-thought-out use of concepts, which should be held even for systems that are too simple or not intended for human interaction. For instance, in the MAS literature, it is common to see a comparison of agents' performances across different settings. However, it is not as common a reflection on the meaning of applied concepts, along with how/if meanings still hold in the experimental results, and this is a gap that the ELBICA lab has been working to address, particularly in terms of coordination versus cooperation [10]. Finally, Elliott was able to compile outcomes from our 3D project, along with writing a big multidisciplinary literature review, and submit it to a journal [11], to which we got invited as a result of our best paper award [7]. **In 2025**, the ELBICA lab continued to explore the distinction between cooperation and coordination in MAS, identifying the relevance of sacrificial cooperation, and we submitted a pre-print version of this work.

These experiences have sharpened Dr. Elliott's research interest in how emerging AI systems interact with human cultural and cognitive complexity, especially in educational contexts. They also inform her design of tools that help students reason about alignment, safety, and ethics while doing real technical work.

2. ELBICA Lab Projects: Summer of 2026

This MAP cycle will, as usual in the ELBICA lab, immerse you in a heavy literature review on cognitive science, AI and RL, affective computing, and biologically inspired computational approaches. However, uniquely this year, we will add [geopolitical](#) topics and considerations: through a game application on project 1, and through implications and analyzed topics on project 2.

2.1 The RL and Geopolitical Decision-Making project (4 students)

Project Details. In previous work, Dr. Elliott identified a game that the machine learning community has not explored for simulating dynamic, continuous decision-making. That is likely due to the very challenging task of modeling it. Thus, your goal will be to help Dr. Elliott model the game using classic RL techniques. (The game will be disclosed once we start the research.)

This project is heavy on technical reading and implementing computational solutions to a problem. Given the challenging game dynamics, it will require intense abstract thinking, creativity, and the ability to handle open-ended tasks. Java is likely to be our primary programming language.

2.2.2. The Cognitive Robustness Research Studio: Untraining Predictability in the Face of GenAI systems (4 students)



Project Details. This is a pilot, and its main focus will be on developing your skills as a meta GenAI user. You will have different milestones and tasks each week, followed by a thorough reflection on your practice and skill development. Milestones will be open-ended and conceptual, focusing on your liberal arts education rather than on computing; thus, no coding involved. The research studio will require significant analytical thinking, self-reflection, and introspection as you run experiments with GenAI tools. Finally, this research studio emphasizes communication skills, as you will document your progress and communicate with your peers and Dr. Elliott.

Since the research studio is being launched this summer, you will have the unique opportunity to shape its design and development. Elliott expects to keep improving and offering it to help build a resilient interdisciplinary AI workforce that is resilient to uncertainty, cognitive overload, and manipulation.

- **The team leader will help Dr. Elliott** design and shape the project, lead the team, and decide on a venue to submit our work for peer-reviewed evaluation.

REFERENCES

- [1] Elliott, F., and Ribeiro, C. Emergence of cooperation through simulation of moral behavior. *HAIS 2015*. Springer International Pub., 2015.
- [2] Elliott, F., and Ribeiro, C. Moral behavior and empathy modeling through the premise of reciprocity. In *Procs. of the 1st International Conference on Human and Social Analytics*. St. Julians, Malta: Huso, 2015.
- [3] Elliott, F., and Ribeiro, C. A computational model for simulation of moral behavior. In *Procs. of the I. Conf. on Neural Computation Theory and Applications (NCTA-2014)*. SCITEPRESS (Science and Technology Publications), 2014.
- [4] He, M., Gao, M., Gao, Y., Elliott, F., Cascading Failures and the Robustness of Cooperation in a Unified Scale-Free Network Model. Booktitle: International Conference on Complex Networks and Their Applications, Springer Verlag, 2021.
- [5] Yu, X., Morri, R. and Elliott, F. EDA, An Empathy-Driven Computational Architecture. 9th Workshop on Goal Reasoning, ACS 2021.
- [6] Swaim, E. and Elliott, F. Complex Behavior Vs. Design - Interpreting AI: Reminders from Synthetic Psychology. The Ninth International Conference on Human and Social Analytics HUSO 2023, Barcelona, Spain.
- [7] Awarded as a top paper. Chen, Ji. and Berman, E. and Noda, M. and Shermak, K. and Ye, Z. and Rothfusz, D. and Elliott, F. How do Abstraction and Emotions Travel Different Spaces? Proc. of The Tenth International Conference on Human and Social Analytics HUSO 2024.
- [8] Xu, Z. and Chen, J. and Elliott, F. Networked Independent Reinforcement Learners Playing an Evolutionary Game. In: Quintián, H., et al. Hybrid Artificial Intelligent Systems. HAIS 2024. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol 14858. Springer, Cham.
- [9] Awarded best paper: Situated Learners in a Sequential Decision-Making Setting. Kasimov, T. and Takei, S. and Lu, H. and Lee, M. and Elliott, F. The Fourteenth International Conference on Intelligent Systems and Applications INTELLI 2025.
- [10] Shayak, N. and Elliott, F. Cooperation as Black Box: Conceptual Fluctuation and Diagnostic Tools for Misalignment in MAS, 2025.



[11] Berman, and Noda, and Shermak, and Ye, and Rothfusz, and Chen, and Leungpathomaram, and Shibue, and Liu, and Eliott. [Connotation and 3D Modeling from Limited, Raw Textual Descriptions](#). International Journal On Advances in Life Sciences, v 16 n 3&4 2024.

