

# Up Close and Personal: Panel Discussion with Grad Alumni in Industry



Wednesday, Oct 21, 5:30-7:00pm

What you always wanted to know but didn't know whom to ask

**Laura Freeman** is a research associate professor of statistics and director of the Intelligent Systems Lab at VT's Hume Center. Her research leverages experimental methods at the intersections of cyber-physical systems, data science, artificial intelligence, and machine learning to address critical challenges in national security. Previously, Dr. Freeman was assistant director of the Operational Evaluation Division at the Institute for Defense Analyses. She established and developed an interdisciplinary team of statisticians, psychologists, and engineers to advance scientific approaches to DoD test and evaluation. In 2018, Dr. Freeman served as the senior technical advisor for Director Operational Test and Evaluation. In that role she provided leadership, advice, and counsel on technical aspects of testing military systems; she reviewed strategies, plans, and reports for numerous systems. Dr. Freeman has a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering, a M.S. in Statistics and a Ph.D. in Statistics (2010), all from Virginia Tech.

**Arnab Gupta** is a senior research and development engineer at X-wave Innovations, based in Gaithersburg, MD. Arnab leads research projects to develop next generation diagnosis and detection technology. His work combines modern multi-modal sensing technology (such as ultrasound, thermal imaging) with signal processing and analysis algorithms to detect flaws, characterize materials, and predict future behavior. Arnab received his Ph.D. in engineering mechanics from Virginia Tech (2017), and has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Jadavpur University, India. His dissertation research focused on using ultrasonic acoustics for damage evolution and failure prediction in composite materials. While at Virginia Tech, he was also involved with automotive safety research at Virginia Tech Transportation Institute. Outside of work, Arnab is a photographer and enjoys cricket (the sport). On the internet, he can be found at [arnabocean.com](http://arnabocean.com), and as [@arnabhokie](https://twitter.com/arnabhokie) on Twitter.

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**Alex Hyler** is from Lawrence, Kansas where she earned her bachelor's degree with honors in chemical engineering from the University of Kansas in 2013. She earned a PhD in biomedical engineering from the Virginia Tech-Wake Forest School of Biomedical Engineering and Sciences in 2018. While at VT, Alex received a Fulbright scholarship to conduct some of her doctoral research in Denmark, and she was named Outstanding Graduate Student of the Year for her scholarship and community outreach work. She has expertise in ovarian cancer biology, microfluidics, and device engineering. Alex is currently the head research scientist for CytoRecovery, a dynamic startup working to commercialize new cell separation and recovery technologies. She manages to company's research and technology commercialization portfolios. When not working, Alex enjoys traveling, watching sports, and spoiling her two dogs.

**Pardha Pyla** serves as the VP of Product Solutions & Design at Fungible. He is responsible for designing and developing The Fungible Datacenter Orchestration Platform. He is an award-winning designer and product strategist with deep expertise in envisioning and delivering industry-leading products and platforms. He is the founding member of multiple thriving product and design (UX) practices that were responsible for producing successful enterprise software solutions in use across many industries. He is co-author of the award-winning and comprehensive product design textbook—The UX Book 2: Agile UX Design for a Quality User Experience—adopted by many top universities and industry practitioners around the world. Pardha holds two masters degrees (in computer engineering and computer science) and a doctorate in computer science from Virginia Tech (2008).

**Richard Rodrigues** received his Ph.D. in Genetics, Bioinformatics, and Computational Biology (GBCB) in 2016, then did a postdoc at Oregon State University. Currently he is employed as a bioinformatician at Leidos Biomedical Research Inc. As part of his position, he collaborates with researchers at the Frederick National Laboratory for Cancer Research and the National Institutes of Health to investigate the role of microbiota in progression and treatment of cancers, metabolic disorders, and other diseases. During his academic time he was actively involved in associations geared towards the scholarly and social development of peers. At Virginia Tech, he served as the treasurer for the Graduate Student Assembly; during his postdoc, he served as a Web administrator and Public Relations Coordinator for the Postdoctoral Association at Oregon State University. These volunteer activities helped hone his soft skills, which, along with his technical expertise, help in his current job when working with several scientists.

**Kristen Tetreault** is pursuing a doctoral degree in engineering mechanics while working full-time as a support scientist at NASA's Research and Education Support Services. Her PhD research focused on mitigating hazards due to orbital space debris. Her current role bridges the gap between aerospace research and educational outreach through strong science communication skills. As a support scientist, Kristen oversees NASA's Space Technology Mission Directorate (STMD) solicitation cycle and works with both directorate reviewers and executives as well as solicitation proposers. Kristen can speak to questions about overlapping graduate work, job search and full-time employment, and more.