Thomas R Groechel

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Research Interests

Computational Modeling for Human-Machine Interaction, Virtual and Augmented Reality, Socially Assistive Robotics, Computer Science Education

Technical

Languages: C#, C++, Python, Javascript, R, Bash
Tools: Unity, Robot Operating System (ROS), RosSharp, Mixed Reality Toolkit (MRTK), Jupyterlab (pandas, seaborn, sklearn)

Education

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA *July 2018 - Present*
– Ph.D. Computer Science: *Expected May 2023*
– Masters Computer Science: *Completed May 2020*
– Research Advisor: Professor Maja J. Matarić

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI *Sep 2014 - May 2018*
– B.S.E. Computer Science: *Completed May 2018*
– Undergraduate Research Advisor: Professor Odest C. Jenkins

Experience

Robotics Software Intern, iRobot, Pasadena, CA *May 2021 - Present*
– Placeholder until end of internship

Ph.D. Researcher, USC Interaction Lab, Los Angeles, CA *July 2018 - Present*
– Created mixed reality robot tutor aiming to teach K-12 students coding through modeling student kinesthetic learning processes
– Developed and deployed telepresence robots in schools for home-bound students
– Supported month-long in-home deployments of robot tutor for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

UG Researcher, UofM 4Progress Lab, Ann Arbor, MI *May 2016 - May 2018*
– Developed 2D SLAM algorithm using Iterative Closest Point visualization
– Implemented Stochastic Gradient Descent for loop closure based on *Fast Iterative Alignment of Pose Graphs with Poor Initial Estimates* (Olson et al.) using the Fetch

Staff Development Czar and TA, UofM, Ann Arbor, MI *Sep 2016 - May 2018*
– Created Staff Development program for teaching staff of 30 graduate and undergraduate TAs to improve teaching skills of new and returning staff members
– Structured 35-student lab session to review and teach concepts in a specialized alternative to traditional lecture, tailoring for active learning
– Produced class-specific help and tip videos to give students an extra resource to common issues in a newer format

Robotics Software Intern at TRACLabs, Houston, TX *Summer 2017*
– Adapted local mapping and navigation to move TRACBot, a mobile-manipulator, to maneuver dynamically through obstacles such as doors and people in order to reach/use items in Affordance Template library
– Refitted and rebuilt action server nodes into custom system to perform dynamic re-planning based on real time observations

Student Research Mentoring

Current Students

- Chloe Kuo — Merit Research Fellow, USC Computer Science
- Julia Cordero — Merit Research Fellow, USC Computer Science
- Haemin Lee — USC Computer Science
- Nisha Chatwani — Merit Research Fellow, USC Computer Science
- Adam Wathieu — Northwestern University Computer Science
- İpek Göktan — Viterbi Fellow, USC SHINE Program, USC Computer Science
- Karen Ly — Merit Research Fellow, USC Computer Science

Previous Students

- Radhika Agrawal — Merit Research Fellow, USC Computer Science
- Kartik Mahajan — Merit Research Fellow, USC Computer Science
- Roddur Dasgupta — USC Computer Science
- Annika Modi — USC SHINE Program, High School Student
- Jacob Zhi — USC SHINE Program, High School Student
- Roxanna Pakkar — Merit Research Fellow, USC Electrical Engineering
- Zhonghao Shi — USC Computer Science
- Mena Hassan — USC SHINE Program, High School Student
- Adnan Karim — SURE Student, University of Calgary Computer Science
- Ryan Stevenson — USC Computer Science Games
- Ashley Perez — USC SHINE Program, High School Student
- Bryan Pyo — USC SHINE Program, High School Student

Contributions to Grant Proposals

NSF NRI 2.0 - Communicate, Share, Adapt: A Mixed Reality Framework for Facilitating Robot Integration and Customization

- Contributed significant ideas and content to proposal based upon ongoing Ph.D. work in Mixed Reality SAR
- Research grant awarded in fall 2019

K-12 Educational Outreach

Virtual, Augmented, and Mixed Reality for Human-Robot Interaction
USC Robotics Ed Week via Zoom — *10 Apr 2020*

What is a Socially Assistive Robotics Ph.D.?
Temple City High School Robotics Team Talk via Zoom — *15 Nov 2020*

Microsoft TEALS Teaching Volunteer
Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles, CA — *July 2019 - June 2020*

Live Mixed Reality Demo and How it Applies to Socially Assistive Robotics
USC Remote Robotics Open House via Zoom — *19 May 2020*

USC Robotics Academy Judge
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA — *Dec 2018 & 2019, Apr 2019*

Robotics Family Night
Monterey Hills Elementary, Los Angeles, CA — *May 2019, Nov 2019*

The Help Group STEM^3 Academy Visit
STEM^3 Academy, Los Angeles, CA — *June 2019*

Mixed Reality and the Kuri Robot
USC Robotics Open House — *10 Apr 2019*

VEX Robotics Team Leader
Clifford Street Elementary, Los Angeles, CA — *Oct 2018 - Feb 2019*

Honors and Awards

USC Viterbi Undergraduate Research Mentoring Award — *May 2020 & 2021*
USC CSCI Best Research Assistant — *May 2020*
USC Robotics George Bekey Service Award — *May 2019*

Publications

[1] Zhonghao Shi, Manwei Cao, Sophia Pei, Xiaoyang Qiao, **Thomas R. Groechel** and Maja J. Matarić. "Personalized Affect-Aware Socially Assistive Robot Tutors Aimed at Fostering Social Grit in Children with Autism", *Refereed Workshop ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human Robot Interaction (HRI) Workshop on Child-Robot Interaction and Child's Fundamental Rights.*, Mar-2021.

[2] **Thomas R. Groechel**, Roxanna Pakkar, Roddur Dasgupta, Chloe Kuo, Haemin Lee, Julia Cordero, Kartik Mahajan, and Maja J. Matarić "Kinesthetic Curiosity: Towards Personalized Embodied Learning with a Robot Tutor Teaching Programming in Mixed Reality", In *17th International Symposium on Experimental Robotics (ISER)*, Virtual, Mar 2021.

[3] Eric Rosen, **Thomas R. Groechel**, Micahel Walker, Christine T. Chang, Jessica Zosa Forde "Virtual, Augmented, and Mixed Reality for Human-Robot Interaction (VAM-HRI)", In *Companion of the 2021 ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human-Robot Interaction (Companion-HRI '21)*, Virtual, Mar-2021.

[4] Kartik Mahajan*, **Thomas R. Groechel***, Roxanna Pakkar, Julia Cordero, Haemin Lee, Maja J. Matarić "Adapting Usability Metrics for a Socially Assistive, Kinesthetic, Mixed Reality Robot Tutoring Environment", In *Proceedings of 2020 International Conference on Social Robotics (ICSR '20)*, Colorado, USA, Nov 2020.
Best Paper Award Finalist (5 nominated out of 113)

[5] Naomi T. Fitter, Luke M. Rush, Elizabeth Cha, **Thomas R. Groechel**, Maja J. Matarić, and Leila Takayama "Closeness is Key over Long Distances: Effects of Interpersonal Closeness on Telepresence Experience", In *Proceedings of 2020 ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human Robot Interaction (HRI '20)*, Cambridge, UK, Mar 2020.

[6] Tom Williams, Daniel Szafir, Tathagata Chakraborti, Ong Soh Khim, Eric Rosen, Serena Booth, **Thomas R. Groechel**, "Virtual, Augmented, and Mixed Reality for Human-Robot Interaction (VAM-HRI)", In *Companion of the 2020 ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human-Robot Interaction (Companion-HRI '20)*, Cambridge, UK, Mar 2020.

[7] Matthew Rueben, **Thomas R. Groechel**, Yulun Zhang, Gisele Ragusa, Maja J. Matarić "Increasing Telepresence Robot Operator Awareness of Speaking Volume Appropriateness: Initial Model Development", In *Companion of the 2020 ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human-Robot Interaction (Companion-HRI '20)*, Cambridge, UK, Mar 2020.

[8] **Thomas R. Groechel**, Zhonghao Shi, Roxanna Pakkar, and Maja J. Matarić "Using Socially Expressive Mixed Reality Arms for Enhancing Low-Expressivity Robots", In *2019 IEEE International Symposium on Robot and Human Interactive Communication (RO-MAN '19)*, New Delhi, India, Oct 2019.
Robotics Society of Japan and Korean Robotics Society Distinguished Interdisciplinary Research Award Finalist (3 nominated out of 206)

Talks, Demos, and Presentations

Communicate, Share, Adapt: A Mixed Reality Framework for Facilitation Robot Integration and Customization Virtual Poster Presentation
NSF NRI 2.0 PI Meeting via Hopin *10 Mar 2021*

Guest Lecture: Online Features and Measures for K-12 Robot Computer Science Tutoring Through Mixed Reality Modalities
CSCI 699: Computational Human-Robot Interaction via Zoom *8 Mar 2021*

Robot Operating System (ROS) Tutorial and Demo
USC Makers Club via Zoom *4 Mar 2021*

Planning A Successful Summer Research Experience
USC Summer Research Program Talks via Zoom *1 June 2020*
Communicate, Share, Adapt: A Mixed Reality Framework for Facilitation Robot Integration and Customization Poster Presentation
NSF NRI 2.0 PI Meeting, Arlington, VA *27 Feb 2020*
Human-Robot Interaction & Socially Assistive Robots
Laguna Woods Village, Laguna Woods, CA *19 Feb 2020*
USC Robotics Visions & Voices: Emotionally Intelligent Robots Demo
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA *24 Oct 2019*
SAR Through Augmented Reality Extensions Demo and Discussion
Public Affairs Council, Laguna Beach, CA *8-9 Jan 2019*

Professional Service

Workshop Organizer
- "The Fourth International Workshop on Virtual, Augmented, and Mixed Reality for Human-Robot Interaction (VAM-HRI)", In *2021 ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human Robot Interaction (HRI '21)*
- "The Third International Workshop on Virtual, Augmented, and Mixed Reality for Human-Robot Interaction (VAM-HRI)", In *2020 ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human Robot Interaction (HRI '20)*

Reviewer
- International Conference on Development and Learning 2021
- International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems 2021
- Transactions on Human-Robot Interaction 2021
- Virtual, Augmented, and Mixed Reality for Human-Robot Interaction Workshop at HRI 2020 & 2021
- International Conference on Robotics and Automation 2021
- International Conference on Human Robot Interaction 2021
- International Conference on Social Robotics 2020
- Applied Sciences 2020
- Science Robotics 2018

Women in US Academic Research in Robotics Website *July 2019 - Present*
- Designed and implemented, under Prof. Matarić's supervision, an actively curated and monitored list of current women in US academic robotics research
- Link: `us-women-in-robotics-research.github.io`

Certification

USC Center for Excellence in Teaching's Future Faculty Teaching Institute
USC, Los Angeles, CA *Jan 2020 - May 2020*