

# NRI: FND: A Formal Methods Approach to Safe, Composable, and Distributed Reinforcement Learning for co-Robots.

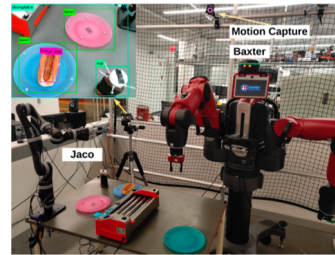
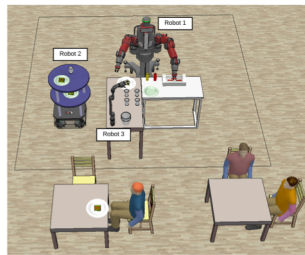
Award # 2024606, Award date: 10/01/20, Calin Belta, Boston University

## Challenge

Model-based (optimal) control not appropriate due to complex dynamics and large observation spaces. Reinforcement learning (RL) usually used for such problems. **In RL, it is difficult to**

- Incorporate **complex task** in objective functions,
- Ensure that the learned policy satisfies the **safety requirements**,
- **Transfer** learned policies to unseen tasks,
- Effectively **distribute** a complex task among a robot team that allows each member to learn in a decentralized fashion.

## Problem Formulation



**Given spec**, e.g., “Always prepare hotdogs and drinks. If a customer requests drinks or hotdogs, deliver whenever possible. If no customer is requesting or food / drinks are not available, then wait. Always avoid collisions.”

**Given robot action and sensing capabilities**, e.g., Robot 1 can make hotdogs, can place hotdogs on Robot2, can sense when a hotdog is ready, can sense when Robot2 is near, can sense obstacles, Robot 2 can deliver hotdogs and drinks, etc.

**Find robot control strategies** that satisfy the specs and are provably safe

## Solution: Technical Approach:

*Machine (reinforcement) learning + formal methods + optimal control*

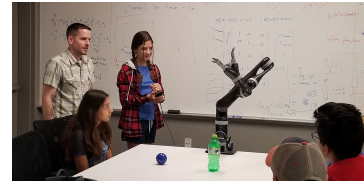
- Rich, easy-to-understand, **temporal logic (TL) specification language**; can specify prior knowledge; has a satisfaction metric that can be used to guide the learning process  
(always eventually MakeHotdog) and (always eventually PourDrinks) and (if IsNear(Robot2) and Ready(drink) then PlaceOnRobot2(drink)) and (if IsNear(Robot2) and Ready(hotdog) then PlaceOnRobot2(hotdog)) and (if CustomerRequest(drink) and OnRobot2(drink) then Deliver(drink) else TravelTo(Robot3) followed by Wait) and (if CustomerRequest(hotdog) and OnRobot2(hotdog) then Deliver(hotdog) else TravelTo(Robot1) followed by Wait) and always not Collision
- **Control Barrier Functions (CBF)** are used to ensure safety
- **Temporal logic guided policy composition method** where policies for new tasks can be constructed from a library of learned policies with little to no additional exploration
- Method that projects a **global specification to a set of local specifications** that each robot can learn to execute.

# NRI: FND: A Formal Methods Approach to Safe, Composable, and Distributed Reinforcement Learning for co-Robots.

Award # 2024606, Award date: 10/01/20, Calin Belta, Boston University

## Solution: Key Innovations

- **Safety specified as TL formulas and enforced using CBFs**, while minimizing interference with the RL
- **Automaton – guided reward generation for RL** in continuous and high-dimensional robotic applications
- Construction of **new skills as compositions of learned skills** without additional training
- **Fully decentralized learning** based on decomposition of global specs into local specs and distribution among agents



## Scientific Impact

Interpretable, provably safe, distributed RL algorithms developed in this projects are relevant to a wide range of **safety-critical CPS**, including autonomous driving, power networks, air traffic controllers, agriculture, military surveillance, search and rescue

Wenliang Liu, Noushin Mehdipour, Calin Belta, Recurrent Neural Network Controllers for Signal Temporal Logic Specifications Subject to Safety Constraints, IEEE Control Systems Letters (L-CSS), 2021 (in print)

Max Cohen and Calin Belta, Model-Based Reinforcement Learning for Approximate Optimal Control with Temporal Logic Specifications, 24th ACM International Conference on Hybrid Systems: Computation and Control (HSCC), 2021

## Broader Impact:

- Avoiding reward hacking, guaranteeing safety during learning and deployment, use of formal, unambiguous specification languages can potentially encode **robotic safety standards** (ISO)
- Interpretable nature of the formal language has the potential to promote **public trust** in robots
- **Education and outreach plans** include new courses and sections at the undergraduate and graduate level, and the involvement of the PI in Research Internships in Science and Engineering (RISE), Discovery Internships, the BU Upward Bound Math and Science (UBMS) program, and the Technology Innovation Scholars Program (TISP) at BU.

2021 NRI & FRR Principal Investigators' Meeting  
March 10-12, 2021