



THE MINKA MONTHLY

Official Newsletter for the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well



MINKA MOMENTUM

By Thomas Engels, Intern

Back in the fall of 2017, Dr. Bill Thomas first came to USI to speak at the Mid-America Institute on Aging and Wellness conference, and returning in November on his Changing Aging Tour. At this time Dr. Thomas was working closely with AARP and looking for a university to partner to explore innovative concepts of aging-in-place. He began to brainstorm ideas with students, community members and USI faculty, including Dr. Katie Ehlman, Professor of Gerontology. As a part of this initiative, students, community members and retirees discussed different ideas about inclusive communities and aging in a USI special topics course.

The Minka house was officially built and had a ribbon cutting ceremony on October 24, 2018. Katie loved the building process because the Minka was built by different arms and influences from multiple disciplines on campus. In December of 2018, Katie Ehlman worked with a USI faculty team along with community partners to apply for a \$3.7 million Geriatrics Workplace Enhancement Program (GWEP) grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Later in 2019, the grant was approved. An Advisory Board was established in the Fall of 2019 to help brainstorm new ideas for the Minka. Over the course of the next year, the Minka was stagnant due to COVID-19 and hiring.

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EDITOR CORNER

EXPERIENCE BRILLIANCE

By Thomas Engels, Intern



Last year I was a junior, and I felt like I was constantly being asked the same question repeatedly. My mom would always ask, “When are you going to get an internship?” After searching, I stumbled upon an internship with the Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) for the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well in my email from Career Services. At the time, I had no idea what the Minka was, but I am extremely thankful to have applied and accepted the position.

Being an intern at the GWEP is more comparable to being in the working world. The Project Coordinator treats every intern as if we have already graduated and provides us with guidance and insight. Being treated this way is amazing because I have been able to understand what life might be like when I graduate. I have learned more than I could have ever imagined. The work that I have done for the Minka has helped expand my knowledge, gain real life experiences and learn from mistakes. This internship program also helps the Minka grow and transform. Interns research technology, start marketing initiatives, expand the Advisory Board and participate in class simulations.

Knowing that I have helped make a difference in both the Evansville and USI communities through the Minka is an incredible feeling. I would strongly encourage any student to apply for any internship that the GWEP offers because this, so far, has been a journey that I will never forget.

This month’s newsletter contains articles about Minka momentum including AI, new technology, the Advisory Board and ageism. Enjoy!

If interested in contributing to this newsletter, please contact Thomas Engels at teengels@eagles.usi.edu

UPCOMING EVENTS

USI Community Virtual Meeting:

1 p.m. CT Wednesday, September 8 - USI Community Informational Meeting
4 p.m. CT Wednesday, September 22 - USI Community Informational Meeting
To learn more, email Lisa Fournier at lfournier@usi.edu.

USI Student Support Group:

5 p.m. CT Thursday, September 9 - USI Student Support Group Meeting
To learn more, email Maddie Moore at mcmoore1@eagles.usi.edu.

Contact Thomas Engels at teengels@eagles.usi.edu for more information.

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AI AND THE FUTURE OF HEALTHCARE FOR OLDER ADULTS

By Ty Seddon, CEO of CogniVista

A fascinating evolution in Artificial Intelligence (AI) is occurring in a very unlikely place: health care for older adults. The resulting changes will dramatically improve the way we all interact with technology in the future. Virtual assistants based on conversations, such as Siri and Alexa, have become mainstream technologies. However, their design is biased toward younger and tech savvy users. Dialogues with virtual assistants are simplistic and don't feel like a natural conversation. As the design of this technology becomes more inclusive of people with different abilities, the interactions will grow more sophisticated and feel more like a natural conversation.

One subject of research the Minka Learning Lab is focused on how virtual assistants can better serve people who are choosing to live-in-place. These residents may have physical challenges or may be in cognitive decline. In this situation, a virtual assistant needs to be far more than a simple voice interfacing to a computer. A virtual assistant requires some degree of emotional awareness as it interacts with the resident.

Future virtual assistants will incorporate Emotional AI which detects and reacts to a person's emotional state. Detecting emotional state may involve analyzing the sentiment of words spoken, analyzing stress in the speaker's voice, reading facial expressions and reading body language. A virtual assistant then uses this information to tailor its responses and actions to be emotionally appropriate.

For example, when the virtual assistant detects a person is becoming frustrated with a dialogue, the virtual assistant could slow down its speech, rephrase its statement or suggest different options. A virtual assistant may also proactively monitor the smart home environment and detect the resident appears sad, so the virtual assistant could open the blinds, adjust the lights or play some music. Such emotionally intelligent assistants will focus on the overall well-being of the resident, thereby playing a meaningful role in caregiving and care partnering.

Emotional AI will eventually be incorporated into products such as Siri and Alexa, resulting in more natural conversations and truly helpful and proactive assistants.

Ty Seddon, a contributing writer, is the CEO of CogniVista, a technology company developing AI solutions to address healthcare and environmental challenges.



"Future virtual assistants will incorporate Emotional AI, which detects and reacts to a person's emotional state." —Ty Seddon, CEO of CogniVista

Continuation from page 1: Fast forward to the fall of 2020 where a new GWEP Project Coordinator was hired. Lisa Fournier was thrilled to start working with the Minka because she felt like this project aligns with her passions of social innovation and well-being. This past year Lisa, Katie and the GWEP interns, along with many others, have been working at full force to bring the Minka back to life, including a new name: Minka Learning Lab for Living Well. Many baseline smart home technology infrastructure projects have been established. The purpose of the Minka Learning Lab is to create an adaptable living and learning space that grows around community needs. Lisa envisions the Minka Learning Lab be a place on campus that helps people learn about living-in-place with smart home technology and healthy lifestyles. After reflecting on this past year, Katie described the Minka as "a place where people can stretch their minds with the work that can be done."

For the future, the Minka Learning Lab will evolve as a showcase home for people to see how they can live a quality life with the use of technology. Lisa hopes that multiple disciplines on campus will take part in simulations, programs and research. Topics such as dementia, living-in-place, transitioning to home health and nutrition are examples of what can be explored in the Minka. One of the most important parts of the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well is that faculty have to opportunity to have learning moments with students. As Katie said, "The sky is the limit." We hope to see you joining us with Minka momentum this fall!

GERO 101

KITCHEN REWIND

By Thomas Engels, Intern

Dr. Bill Thomas is a nationally-renowned aging expert who has been working in partnership with the Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) since 2017. Dr. Thomas designed the Minka house that was built in the Fall of 2018. Recently, Dr. Thomas came up with an idea to redesign kitchens for people who are older or might have dementia. As a geriatrician, he has learned that kitchens are a source of independence and danger. In today's modern kitchen designs, they typically do not have the older population in mind. Most kitchens have high cabinets with closed doors. The idea behind these designs is to hide everything to make kitchens look cleaner, but the problem is that everything is hidden. People who are living with dementia and have a modern kitchen might have problems with locating what they need.

If we rewind about 100 years ago, we would see a different style of kitchens. Most of them have glass panels on cabinets so people can see inside, and people stored pots and other kitchen devices on open shelves. A great rule of thumb is to not hide things if you do not have to. Many people also say high storage areas are not useful, so if a person can not access high storage, then it should not exist. Kitchens need to adapt and be fitted for the person who is using the space.

Another issue in most kitchens is lighting. "I remember when I was young, my grandmother would tell me I would strain my eyes if I kept reading in the dark. The thing was it wasn't dark for me—it was dark for her," Dr. Thomas says. "People in their 60s need three times more ambient light for comfortable reading than those in their 20s."

He explained that lighting in kitchens needs to be adjusted to the person using the kitchen and the layout. As a gold standard of adjustability, Dr. Thomas suggests using theater lighting in a kitchen. Although this is just the beginning of his kitchen ideas, Dr. Thomas is curious to continue his research and testing ideas at the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well.



"I remember when I was young, my grandmother would tell me I would strain my eyes if I kept reading in the dark. The thing was it wasn't dark for me—it was dark for her." —Dr. Bill Thomas

TECH & U

MINKA AND THE AGING EXPERIENCE

By Becca Neel, Assistant Director for Resource Management & User Experience, David L. Rice Library

In the realm of Library and Information Science, the development of a positive and productive **user experience (UX)** is an ongoing endeavor. The overall goal in the Rice Library's (and others') UX efforts is to design and situate services, spaces and resources in a manner that is equitable, intuitive, meaningful, useful and accessible to all library users, regardless of ability, identity or location. In short, UX is about more than simple functionality or usability (i.e., Does the thing work?). Instead, UX is about creating a multidimensional, technology-mediated, person-centered experience that takes into account human elements such as emotions, preferences and even general well-being. With this complex environment of productive interactions between people, spaces and technology in mind, the Minka Learning Lab and its integrated, smart home technologies are the embodiment of UX—or perhaps, AX: aging experience—ideals.

The Minka incorporates the state-of-the-art AI technologies with voice and touch activation not simply because they function, but because a person can minimize their fall risk by telling **Alexa** to turn off the kitchen faucet or by telling **Josh** to lower their bedroom shades without having to leave the living room. Preserving a person's own health and function, however, is not the singular focus of this holistic aging experience. A person who chooses to live-in-place can also maintain their social well-being by keeping their smart home clean, comfortable and inviting to their friends and family with voice- and app-controlled air-purifiers, robotic vacuum cleaners and lighting and environmental settings. These tools and scenarios, though, are the tip of the iceberg in terms of the ways in which the Minka Learning Lab can facilitate a healthy, happy and socially engaging aging experience.

Take the opportunity to visit the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well and test out the various features and technologies! I encourage you to drop by and contribute your ideas and insights!



"Instead, UX is about creating a multidimensional, technology-mediated, person-centered experience that takes into account human elements such as emotions, preferences and even general well-being." —Becca Neel, Assistant Director for Resource Management & User Experience, David L. Rice Library

WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT...?

TESTING SMART HOME TECH!

By Madeline Menke, Intern

This summer, I spent my time implementing the smart home technology. The technology was first assessed by the Minka Learning Lab Advisory Board Members. This guided the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) team in our decision in which technologies to purchase. After implementing various integrated smart home technologies, we invited the Advisory Board Members to the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well to test everything out. It was great getting to meet some of the Advisory Board Members and to have them test out the technology in-person. They provided us with insightful feedback that we can now keep in mind for future technologies and new ways to implement our technology already in use at the Minka Learning Lab. The Advisory Board Members were also able to see an overview of the Minka as a smart home for living-in-place and hear about future plans for smarthome technology, specifically integrating Josh with more technology and appliances within the home.

We had our first pilot scenario run with Deaconess Geriatric Fellows on August 10. The scenario was based on "Ruth," a person living-in-place by herself who was feeling a bit lonely. With the use of multiple technologies, such as family memories on a smart board and adjustable lighting, we were able to showcase what is possible for living in place. If you would like to join the Minka Advisory Board to test technologies and provide insights about the future of healthcare, well-being and living-in-place, we would love to have you be a part. Please fill out the interest form:

Interest
Form

LET'S TALK ABOUT DEMENTIA JOURNEY WITH JOI

By Dr. Lisa Fournier, DSL, MPM,
Project Coordinator, Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program

The Minka Learning Lab for Living Well is more than a smart home showcase for living-in-place. As the name indicates, the "Learning Lab" also focuses on applied research. Our aim is to create and test applications in a home environment based off of community research. We hope to provide ideas from the learning for use in products and services.

This semester, the Lab is getting ready to start a journey with "Joi." Joi is an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Virtual Assistant to improve emotional well-being and independence for people living with dementia, especially those living-in-place. A positive emotional atmosphere is important for those with dementia to thrive and age well. This can be facilitated by creating a joyful environment. According to Dr. Allen Power, being joyous is a durable strength that can help people with dementia grow and rise above the challenges of cognitive disabilities by providing meaning, positivity, happiness, contentment, pleasure and resilience. Joi, the AI Virtual Assistant being designed at the Learning Lab, creates personalized "joy pops" for the person living with dementia within a smart-home living environment. The "joy pops" by Joi are triggered based on input from sensors in the smart home, including motion, sound, temperature and light.

To start designing Joi, the Lab must first gain an understanding about how a person lives within their home environment. This includes the types of technologies they interact with as well as how they interact with others to thrive. Without gathering this type of information, artificial intelligence cannot start machine learning. Machine learning involves computers learning from data discovered to carry out certain tasks without being programmed to do so. Gathering data from actual users, not secondary research, allows for a higher quality design of a Virtual Assistant.

We need your help! If you or anyone you know has dementia or you are the care partner of a person with dementia, please take this confidential survey. The survey asks questions about the home environment. Participating in these types of research projects helps contribute to projects aimed at thriving and living more independently.

Diagnosed with dementia or caring for somebody with dementia. Click here to take this confidential survey:

Survey
Link



"It was great getting to meet some of the Advisory Board Members and to have them test out the technology in-person." —Madeline Menke, Intern



"A positive emotional atmosphere is important for those with dementia to thrive and age well. This can be facilitated by creating a joyful environment." —Lisa Fournier, DSL, MPM, Project Coordinator, Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

JOIN A PURPOSE

By Thomas Engels, Intern

As a new school year begins, most students look for different ways to be involved. The Minka Learning Lab Advisory Board is a fantastic way to be involved on campus and in the community! Currently, professors, health professionals and community members are part of the Minka Learning Lab Advisory Board. We would love for more students to join.

As a student who has been working with the Advisory Board, I have been able to meet many amazing people. For the past couple of years, members have recommended, selected and tested various technologies in the Minka Learning Lab as part of the smart home initiative. This process will continue for the next couple of years. The Advisory Board has also been involved with semester projects and other projects at the Minka Learning Lab, such as mentoring the GWEP interns, testing artificial intelligence scenarios for independent living and brainstorming for class projects.

During my time with the Minka Advisory Board, I have been able to learn about aging, dementia and the aging process from a different perspective. Everyone in life is aging every single day, and I have learned that it is important to understand the life course and how I am able to assist others with the aging process, as well as consider my own lifestyle. Working with different professors on campus has been one of my favorite parts about the Advisory Board because each person has a love and passion for the discipline they teach. As a marketing major, I have learned more about other areas on campus than I could have ever imagined. I would highly recommend other students join, especially since the commitment averages one to two hours per month and is open to all who would like to be involved. For more information, please stop by the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well in front of the Education Center or fill out the interest form:

Interest
Form



"Working with different professors on campus has been one of my favorite parts about the Advisory Board because each person has a love and passion for the discipline that they teach." —Thomas Engels, Intern

LIVING WELL THE BATTLE BETWEEN HABITS AND YOUR ROUTINE

By Lindi Newhard, USI '21 Graduate

Do you nervously tap your pen, promise yourself you'll go to the gym this week or push off decluttering your space? Whether good or bad, habits affect our schedules daily. Forming habits isn't as easy as you would think. By implementing new habits into your routine, you must expect it to require repetitive effort. You have to say hello to discomfort, after all that's where all growth starts. To develop changed behavior, you need to understand the difference between a habit and routine or else you might as well be driving with a blindfold on.

A routine is more like a regularly followed instinct, whereas a habit feels uncomfortable when we don't do it. This is oftentimes where people get confused between the two. If we don't stick with a routine, we don't necessarily feel guilty, but habits we've created make us feel uncomfortable when we prolong them. For instance, a habit you have is sticking to a budget, but you spend too much one weekend hanging out with friends. And you might not feel too great.

When disregarding a routine, such as skipping breakfast or forgetting to brush your teeth, we often do it without thinking about it. How do we properly enforce habits into our routine? Unfortunately, not every repeated behavior will turn into a routine. Some habits will remain habits, they will always feel uncomfortable. That doesn't mean we can't obtain success with them.

It's important to pre-commit your habits that acquire a lot of effort. You can achieve this by timing out your schedule with your habits and finding someone to hold you accountable. Another way, you'll be more likely to commit is if you get rid of distractions, such as getting apps to limit phone time or limiting your Netflix time. Start small. You've got this! What's one thing you've been wanting to incorporate in your routine and schedule it in this week?



"It's important to pre-commit your habits that acquire a lot of effort."
—Lindi Newhard, '21

SPOTLIGHT

MOVING PAST AGEISM TO THE POSITIVE POTENTIAL OF OLDER ADULTS

By Joanne Artz, Assistant Director and Head of User Services Emerita, David L. Rice Library

Over 50 years ago, founding director of the National Institute on Aging and gerontologist Robert Butler coined the term ageism, defining it as a combination of three connected elements: prejudicial attitudes toward older people, the aging process and old age itself. Age-based discrimination serves a social and economic purpose: to legitimize and sustain inequalities between groups. It's not about how we look or act but how people in power assign meaning to this. Stereotyping of older adults is particularly concerning, because the older we get, the more different from one another we become. We're not born prejudiced, but attitudes about age—as well as race and gender—form in early childhood, hardening into a set of truths over time as “Just the way it is.” Unless we challenge ageist stereotypes—“Old people are incompetent. Wrinkles are unattractive. It's sad to be old,”—we risk not feeling empowered by the accomplishment of our own aging. That's internalized ageism.

A major implication of ageism is the stifling of older adults' potential. Our youth-centric standard of physical ability, beauty and performance leaves out many older adults. What would happen if all of us were valued for being ourselves, bringing our unique contributions to a common purpose? Consider what we could accomplish if older adults had opportunities to contribute to their community according to their fullest potential, no matter their age, interests or expertise. Conversely, how much talent and wisdom go untapped because many older people don't have easily accessible means through which to share knowledge and life experiences within our fast-paced, technology-driven environment? Lifting negative attitudes would encourage continued paid or unpaid work, community betterment through teaching, advising, mentoring and civic engagement; in short, harness the largely untapped human capital, creativity and experience older adults have to offer. This is why I serve on the Minka Learning Lab Advisory Board!



"Consider what we could accomplish if older adults had opportunities to contribute to their community according to their fullest potential, no matter their age, interests or expertise."
—Joanne Artz, Assistant Director and Head of User Services Emerita, David L. Rice Library

SOCIAL MEDIA



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To follow the Minka Instagram page, visit [instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com/minkalearninglab)

PAST NEWSLETTERS

Click [here](#) to view the Summer newsletter all about the Minka Advisory Board

Click [here](#) to view the May newsletter all about healthy living

Click [here](#) to view the April newsletter all about dementia

Click [here](#) to view the March newsletter all about the Minka

MINKA VISION STATEMENT

Aging well is personal. Each of us expects to live where we want and how we want as we go through life. Our homes are not always set-up for aging well. In addition, our communities may be stifled by issues with access to healthcare, crime and violence, food insecurity, inclusion, age discrimination and more. The Center for Healthy Aging and Wellness wants to transform southwest Indiana by creating a Learning Lab for Living Well housed in the Minka house at USI. The Learning Lab for Living Well offers an interdisciplinary focus to involve students, faculty and campus stakeholders in research, healthcare leadership development, and simulations that address challenges for living-in-place and open health profession career opportunities. In addition, the Learning Lab for Living Well provides everyone in the local community a place to learn about and to adapt home innovations for living-in-place. Home innovations designed to integrate smart home technology, health coaching and learning workshops for a personalized, adaptable approach to aging well. The Center for Healthy Aging and Wellness at USI looks to offer a blueprint for other rural communities to address social determinants of health.