

NEWS

Psychology professor says elderly drivers unfairly stereotyped

by michael schneweis

staff writer

Finding yourself in heavy traffic that is moving fast, suddenly you are confronted with hundreds of flashing brake lights, and smoke rolling off rubber. You get stopped and find a little old man doing 30 in the fast lane caused the excitement.

What makes some older drivers better than others? The answers could improve our ability to drive as we get older.

Dr. Lori Temple, Psychology, has submitted a proposal to the American Association of Retired Persons for funding to look for these answers. The study is an investigation of perceptual and cognitive factors that influence driving ability. The data from this and other studies could help young people's driving skills.

"A combination of effects make up the driving situation," Temple said, "she pointed out that a person driving may be sub-

jected to the radio, a conversation and changing traffic and weather conditions. Coping is done by a combination of factors that effect driving ability, perceptual skills, attention, reaction time, memory and the ability to adapt to changing situations.

As people age, perceptual skills, like sight, become weaker, and must be compensated for while driving.

"Memory and experience might make up for perceptual deterioration in driving," Temple speculated. It is evident that some older drivers can compensate better than others, she said. The adjustment might be a better memory, the ability to remember a situation and how it was solved.

The cognitive skills might become more pronounced to make up for the perceptual. A young driver placed at the same state perceptually would not be able to compensate due to the experience factor.

"The stereotypes are not fair," Temple said. "Just because you are old does not mean you're a bad driver." There are a lot of good old drivers and just as many bad young drivers. Driving statistics show younger drivers are in greater numbers of accidents than old drivers. These figures don't account for amount of time on the road, and the number of accidents caused by older drivers.

The effects of this study in conjunction with others might change the procedure for getting a drivers license, Temple said. There might be development of both cognitive and more perceptual tests. Many people can see well but still lack the necessary skills to drive safely. Drivers faced with this are both young and old.

Some tests used for licensing could be reaction time, short and long term memory, attention span and dark adaptation.

Another application could be improvements in

street signs. Older drivers have trouble telling colors apart, like yellow and orange.

New tests could point out weak areas of young and old drivers and how to compensate or avoid them.

However, more careful testing could leave the elderly mad, and without a car. Younger people might find themselves in the same situation. Alternative forms of transportation would have to be found for these people.

"When the car is taken from an elderly person its a real shock—as if they lost their freedom," Temple commented.

The advantages would be safer driving conditions because of better drivers. "The test will screen for ability not age," she said.

Calendar of Events

February 23

Master Series: Salvatore Accardo, violinist. 8pm Artemus Ham Concert Hall 739-3535

February 24

Seminar: "Developing Your Leadership Abilities" 6-9pm Dungan Humanities 214 \$20 739-3394

February 25

Concert: Sierra Wind Quintet 8pm Black Box Theatre 739-3738

Film Series: "Tokyo Story" 7pm Wright Aud. 103 Free 739-3401

February 26 & 27

Seminar: "Mathematics Learning: Teaching Today for Tomorrow" Fri. 3-9pm; Sat. 8am-6pm Carlson Education Bld. \$56 739-3394

February 27

Seminar: "Patents and Trademarks" 9am-5pm Beam Hall 109. \$175 with CEU's 739-3394

Seminar: "Handmade Paper Workshop" 9am-noon Grant Hall 237 \$20 739-3394

ROTC funding could be in jeopardy

by karen splawn

news editor

There is a slight possibility the ROTC at UNLV may be eliminated, according to Lt. Colonel Sheldon Wintermute, director of the program.

Wintermute said that several college units across the nation were being looked at for cost effectiveness by the U.S. Army.

"Even if the most drastic thing is done, some presence (of ROTC) will be here for another year and a half," he said, adding steps would be taken to ensure cadets

already enrolled complete the itinerary.

"The administration, from President [Robert] Maxson on down, is totally supportive of the program," he said.

Maxson reaffirmed that by saying he would do everything "possible" to keep the unit flourishing.

"We need to work with our congressional delegates in Washington. We also need to work hard in recruitment."

Mark Beals, assistant dean of the College of Education, (which oversees the program) said his department would be reluctant to see ROTC

go.

"I think ROTC serves a vital purpose. The leadership is superb. The problem, I suspect, is reflected in our university. We're now a campus with a hundred-year history. The nature of campus is commuter. I believe Colonel Wintermute and his program have turned the corner. The quality of those in it is excellent."

Wintermute said there was a chance of ROTC having an extension center at UNLV if funding was cut, but also said he wasn't sure on whether or not UNLV would have them on that basis.

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