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Photo by Mark Ylen

Ray Hyman shows the tools of his trade for uncovering fraud in claims of the paranormal.

**Professor debunks mystic myths**

By Peter Cogswell  
Emerald Reporter

Magic is more than just a fleeting fancy for University psychology professor Ray Hyman. It's a way of life.

Hyman, a cognitive psychologist who researches human error, has been interested in the world of the paranormal since he was seven, when his father gave him a magic kit.

Since he attended graduate school at Johns Hopkins University, Hyman has been researching why people make mistakes, why people believe things that are not true and how people are deceived.

"A lot of people take things like this (the paranormal) seriously, and I am interested in what is going on," he said.

Hyman was working his way toward a journalism degree at Boston University as a professional magician, mindreading and palmreading, and began to believe that he actually had the power to really perform these activities.

One day a friend challenged him to try reading lines on the palms of people's hands in the opposite direction than Hyman was using and the answers came out to be the same. At this point it dawned on Hyman that he had been fooled.

For Hyman, it was a revelation. He became curious about why he had been fooled and decided the answer could be found in the field of psychology.

Hyman came to the University in 1961 after spending five years as an associate professor in psychology at Harvard University and three years with General Electric.

Besides teaching at the University, Hyman is actively involved with investigating paranormal and parapsychological claims made by people to various bodies such as the CIA, the National Science Foundation and the U.S. military.

Parapsychologists are scientists who research phenomena such as telepathy, ESP and clairvoyance.

"Almost every year someone comes to the military or the NSF and says they can bend tanks with their minds," Hyman said. "I investigate these exotic techniques that people try to sell the government."

Some of the claims Hyman has investigated as part of one of three committees he serves on include sleeplearning, firewalking, subliminal tapes, meditation, ESP, psychokinesis and bio-feedback.

Hyman got started as an investigator after people looked at his background as a professional magician and his current interest in psychology.

"Once people realized my background in magic, some people felt this was a good combination," he said.

Hyman's idol in the magic world is Houdini, who, besides performing as an escape artist, spent a lot of time debunking magic tricks. Be-

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