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Professor uncovers the nature of memories

Associate Professor Michael Anderson recently published a new study of what the brain does when a person forgets

By Caron Alarab
Senior News Reporter

A University researcher is receiving international attention this week for a recent experiment exploring why people forget.

With a team of Stanford researchers, Associate Professor of psychology Michael Anderson found people can use certain brain regions to block memories just as they do to control physical actions.

"It's no longer possible to say that human beings can't actively forget," said Anderson, one of the nation's leading memory researchers. "Our research demystifies the idea of memory suppression."

The findings, which were published in the

Jan. 9 issue of Science magazine, support Sigmund Freud's controversial century-old theory about the existence of voluntary memory suppression.

For the experiment, Anderson recruited Stanford researcher John Gabrieli and the two co-wrote the Science article "Neural Systems Underlying the Suppression of Unwanted Memories."

The report details the steps and results of the experiment, which some experts say could help psychiatrists aid people scared by traumatic experiences.

Although the process could be applied to both pleasant and unpleasant experiences, Anderson said he doesn't want to get ahead of himself.

"We don't know yet if this can apply to emotional memories, but we also don't know that it can't apply," he said.

Word play

Twenty-four people between 19 and 31 years old volunteered for the experiment, during

which they learned unrelated noun pairs, such as "ordeal-roach" and "jaw-gum." Anderson and Gabrieli randomly divided the 36 word pairs into three sets of 12. The first two groups were asked to remember the first word of each pair and then asked to either remember or forget the second word, hence repressing memory.

For the purposes of the third group, the researchers had to determine a measurement for "simple forgetting over time." By not asking the group to either remember or to forget their pairs, the researchers left the subjects to rely on their natural memories without interference.

"People forget things over time, but not on purpose, and we had to demonstrate that," Gabrieli said. "(Anderson) had shown he could create those conditions in prior experiments."

In the second part of the experiment, the first two groups worked on their word pairs while being scanned in a functional magnetic

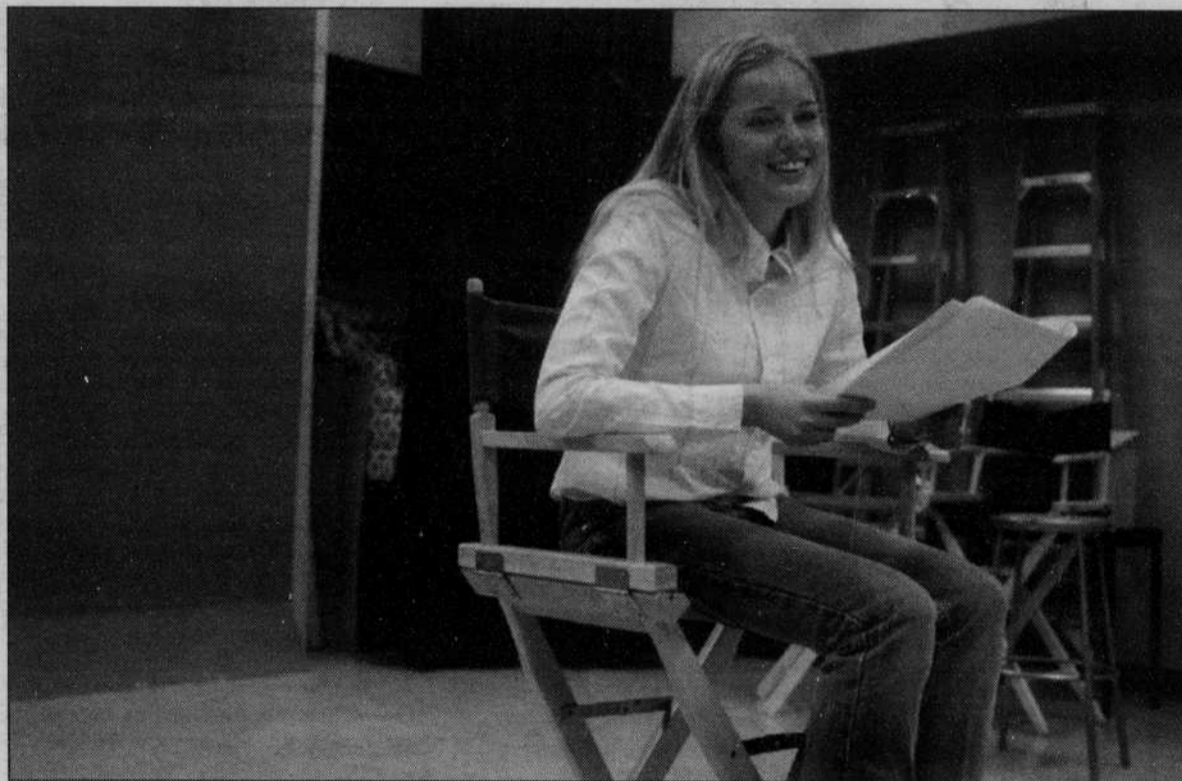
resonance imaging machine, which produces computer images of brain tissue and function. From these images, researchers determined which parts of the brain are used for different tasks.

After completing this phase, Anderson tested the students' memory for all of the word pairs and confirmed a previous finding — the more often people avoid thinking about the second word, the harder it became to remember it.

"People's memory gets worse the more they try to avoid thinking about it," Anderson said. "If you consistently expose people to a reminder of a memory that they don't want to think about, and they try not to think about it, they actually don't remember it as well as memories where they were not presented with any reminders at all."

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In the spotlight



Lauren Wimer Photographer

Sophomore Ebba Corleto auditions in front of a panel of 11 Monday night for a position on the student-produced program "Duck U." The show airs at 9 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday nights in the residence halls on channel 14 and on channel 23 at 10 p.m. Wednesday.

Student producers of 'Duck U' are looking forward to filling another term with news, sports and a new dating game show

By Jared Paben
Senior News Reporter

More than a dozen applicants waited in the lobby on the first floor of Allen Hall Monday night, chatting

nervously about sports, the audition they were all waiting for or nothing at all. A sign-up sheet circulated around the room, which alternated between moments of quiet chatter and uncomfortable silence.

A woman exited a doorway down the hall and entered the lobby. She picked up the sign-up sheet and called out the first name on the list. Nobody moved. She called it out again. A man stood up and

followed her through a door, down a short hall and through another room, which looks out onto a studio. They entered it. The 11-member "Duck U" panel, made up of show hosts, producers and reporters, was already seated, waiting for the first audition.

With the campus television program "Duck U" already in its second

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PFC questions validity of paying dues to USSA

Tension arose when PFC members expressed concern about providing \$7,435 to the national lobbying group for higher education students

By Chuck Slothower
News Reporter

Nine student groups won funding, one was defunded and one was sent packing in a quest for more information at the ASUO Programs Finance Committee meeting Monday night.

The successful groups gained budgets for 2004-2005 totaling \$289,277, with the Office of Student Advocacy and the Oregon Marching Band accounting for the majority of that sum.

The biggest controversy of the night, however, arose when committee members expressed concern over the ASUO Executive's request to fund the United States Student Association, a national political lobbying group that advocates on behalf of students on higher education issues.

The USSA originally asked for \$20,000 from the University but agreed to let funding increase gradually, resulting in an executive recommendation for \$7,435 to pay dues and provide for student travel to conferences. ASUO President Maddy Melton and Vice President Eddy Morales lent their support to USSA, resulting in considerable tension.

"What makes this not a partisan group," asked PFC Sen. Colin Andries. "Why should we fund this?"

Melton responded that the USSA is a political organization but is non-partisan and does not lobby for particular candidates. Still, concerns persisted about funding a largely off-campus organization.

"When you go off-campus and you go to a federal level, we as a board really have to make sure the incidental fee is going to benefit students at the University of Oregon," PFC Chairman Adrian Gilmore said.

Melton pointed to USSA's effectiveness in fighting for greater spending for higher education, protecting the Pell Grant and reauthorizing the Higher Education Act as proof of its worth.

"We raised the Pell Grant from \$4,000 to \$4,500," Melton said. "If that doesn't benefit students at the University of Oregon, I don't know what does."

Regulations governing the incidental fee are clear that

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