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the Mercury
The Student Newspaper of UTD

Researching facial recognition and chess

By Alex Ransom

Published: Tuesday, September 8, 2009
Updated: Saturday, January 2, 2010 03:01


Amy Boggan

Amy Boggan, cognition and neuroscience graduate student, will submit a study for publication about UTD chess members' chess game and facial recognition.

Boggan began studying 19 chess team and club members in spring 2009. She had the participants view a series of chess game boards, note differences, then make a similar evaluation with pictures of people's faces. New chess players may participate in the study for the fall semester to augment the data.

If she receives funding, Boggan plans to have functional magnetic resonance images (fMRI) made of the expert chess players' brains. The imaging would confirm if the same parts of the brain used to view a chessboard were activated for recognizing faces.

"Chess experts do seem to process chess games holistically. The sum of the parts is more than just the (individual) parts of the game," Boggan said. "It's a fairly clear effect."

The implications for the research include improving the accuracy of eyewitness testimony and designing better ways to teach based on how people use visual stimuli to gather information.

"If we can better understand visual expertise, in theory we should be able to train future experts," Boggan said.

For more information about facial recognition research, contact Boggan at aboggan@utdallas.edu.