How learner drivers see the road ahead

All experienced road users know the feeling. You’ve just driven a long distance and have no recollection of anything about the journey.

Now a study comparing learner drivers with experienced motorists could explain how quickly we develop the skills to drive without consciously thinking of what we are doing.

Cath Hughes, a postgraduate researcher in neuroscience at Sussex, has been monitoring the eye movements of road novices and seasoned motorists.

"Experienced drivers appear to have an underlying pattern of eye movements for tasks such as turning a corner or pulling out of a junction," she says. "All the information needed to adjust steering and speed can be obtained within a matter of seconds and drivers make these manoeuvres without thinking about them."

But after analysing the eye movements of a learner driver, using a special head-mounted camera that monitors both eye movements and the scene ahead,
she says it is clear these skills come only with time.

Cath carried out the analysis on Sussex student Gustav Kuhn (pictured), whose task during his first lesson was to drive around the pond in Falmer village. She found that, initially, Gustav kept his field of vision narrow.

"Basically he only looked at his controls and a bit of the road ahead," says Cath. By comparison, an experienced driver made much wider eye movements, as well as going faster. By his third lesson, however, Gustav had widened his field of vision and had picked up speed.

Cath's work is being supervised by Professor Mike Land in BIOLS, who first developed the eye-monitoring technology to find out how people developed hand-to-eye coordination in a variety of tasks, from making tea to playing the piano.

She says the results of her study could have important implications for road safety. "By understanding more about eye-movement patterns, we might be able to understand why some road signs are completely ignored or how drivers are distracted by what they see."

New Chair of Council takes office

A former Managing Director of the BBC World Service has taken over as Chair of the governing body at Sussex.
Currently Chairman of the newly established Electoral Commission, Sam Younger was previously Chief Executive of the British Red Cross, responsible for its work both in the UK and around the world.
This followed a career spanning 20 years in the BBC, first as a journalist and then as a manager, latterly as Managing Director of the BBC World Service between 1994 and 1998.
Mr Younger has been elected as Chair of Council for the period 1 August 2001 to 31 July 2004 and replaces Brian Manley, who was Chairman for six years. "Brian has identified closely with the interests of the University and has made important contributions to its affairs," said Professor Alasdair Smith, the University's Vice-Chancellor, in a warm tribute. "He has been particularly sensitive to the need for a Chairman to steer a course between allowing the professional managers to get on with their jobs, yet intervening when he felt this was in the best interests of the institution. This is a difficult balance to achieve, but Brian has managed it with great skill."

The Council is the governing body of the University and is established under its Royal Charter. The management of the University is entrusted to the Vice-Chancellor, who is appointed by the Council.
Council has over the years established a range of sub-committees to deal with specific matters. Mr Younger, who has been a member of the University Council since 1998, was a member of its Planning and Resources Committee and chaired the group that brought forward recent changes in the University's governance arrangements.

The Council agreed to reduce from 45 to 25 members and to change its composition to ensure widespread representation from the University community as well as from the wider community. The newly formed Council, with Sam Younger as its Chair, took over the governance of the University on 1 August.
Birth of a university

Tracing 40 years of interdisciplinary study

Brian Smith
Emeritus Reader in Experimental Physics, CPES

The birth of the University of Sussex on 16 August 1961 was notable for at least two reasons.

First, the granting of a royal charter that enabled the University to award its own degrees right from the start was a privilege that had rarely been bestowed since the founding of the early Oxbridge colleges. The usual pattern was for new institutions to serve a period of academic apprenticeship, with their degrees being granted through established universities.

Second, Sussex was the product of a remarkable display of initiative by the University Grants Committee (UGC), which recognised the need for higher education to expand. Since existing universities were reluctant to provide extra places, the UGC decided to fund several new institutions. It made it clear that it was seeking bids that showed evidence of strong local support; at least 200 acres available for the campus site; and an innovative curriculum, different from existing ones. Sussex was the first of the resulting seven ‘plate-glass’ universities.

The first Vice-Chancellor, John Fulton, a Balliol man renowned for his extensive network of contacts, set out to find a distinguished scholar to lead his academic team – someone willing to explore new frontiers, and with experience of different universities. As Briggs, professor of history at Leeds, was his choice. He would later become Vice-Chancellor when John Fulton retired.

Other key appointments followed, including David Daiches, Patrick Corbett and Roger Blin-Styole. These were all highly respected academics, but they were also intellectual risk-takers, frustrated with traditional departments and eager to develop new approaches to learning that would break down traditional academic boundaries.

Briggs and his team wasted no time in devising a programme that facilitated interdisciplinary teaching and research. The University was organised into Schools of Studies, each based on a unifying theme, such as a geographical area or a cluster of related subjects. Briggs coined the phrase “rewriting the map of learning” to describe the approach.

Sussex opened its doors in October 1961 with 52 arts students meeting in two rented houses in Brighton. Each undergraduate studied a major subject together with a number of more general contextual courses designed to broaden their understanding of the subject and its relationship to other disciplines. Subjects such as history could be studied in several different Schools. This approach might appear unexceptional now, but at the time it was considered revolutionary.

Extending the Schools system to all subject groups presented several problems. Academics working at the quantitative end of social sciences would have much preferred their students to put more time into acquiring data-handling skills. A multi-disciplinary course, Structure and Properties of Matter, was developed in time for the arrival of the first science students in October 1962 and served the early science Schools well. But it was not popular with later arrivals and was eventually abandoned.

None of these difficulties stopped Sussex rapidly acquiring an excellent reputation for its teaching and research. But as the University expanded, it became progressively harder to maintain consistent practices and, in one particular respect, Sussex became a victim of its own success. Not all the staff who were appointed shared the founding fathers’ enthusiasm for academic innovation. Some of the distinctive features of the redrawn map of learning have been lost over the years, due in part to the influence of some of these later arrivals.

Paradoxically, the fact that the curriculum is defined by the Schools structure has made it difficult to introduce new subjects if they do not fit easily within it. Women’s/gender issues and arts/science are examples of topics that have been introduced because they were deemed to be important, but sit uneasily in the curriculum.

Only over the past two years has it become generally accepted that a full review of the arts curriculum might be necessary. The decision was triggered by the realisation that, although the principles underlying the original academic structure were still valid, its administration had become cumbersome and was probably unsustainable in the longer run. Many arts Schools offer their students about 40 courses. With this complexity it is difficult to ensure that individual students enjoy a genuinely interdisciplinary experience or that progression through the School courses provides a coherent intellectual passage.

It has been decided that a new map of learning for the arts will be introduced in October 2003. The total number of courses on offer will be reduced, but more than 100 degree programmes – many of which allow considerable flexibility of choice – will be available in the revised curriculum. The great advantage of the new system will be that academic pathways will be defined more clearly and it will be easier to understand how the component parts fit together. Meanwhile, the scientists and engineers should not be too complacent – it will be their turn next.

A longer version of this article appeared in the Times Higher Educational Supplement on 10 August.

New accident forms

The Health and Safety Office have recently produced new accident/incident report forms, which have been distributed to all Health and Safety Advisors, School Admin Officers and porters’ desks. Ring ext. 7116 if you require forms. All unused old forms should be destroyed and the old accident books returned to the Health and Safety Office.

Con Ainsworth and Beryl Clough

Con Ainsworth, who taught archaeology at the University for more than 25 years and received a honorary Master of Arts degree in January, has died at the age of 84. Beryl Clough died on 12 August, aged 55. She was a Research Project Secretary in USIE who joined the University in July 1996.

In brief

The early bird gets a discount
Details of Sportservice classes for the Autumn Term are now available. Sign up for a class on ext. 8228 by 7 October and get early-bird rates (£2 off the course price).

Fitness Room programmes
Sign up for a fitness programme (£5) before 31 August and receive a free mini health check-up, or update your current programme for only £3. Contact the Falmer Sports Centre reception on ext. 7125.

Sussex website changes
The autumn term will bring an important change in the way that the University’s main web pages are organised. From October there will be two ‘home’ pages. The first page will present information about the University to external visitors, while the second will be directed towards staff and students, making it easier for you to find the information they need to access regularly. See www.sussex.ac.uk/USIS/www/new-structure for more details.

Con Ainsworth and Beryl Clough
The administrator's story

Including the things that might have been: an island in the West Indies, a vineyard in the New Forest and a multistorey carpark...

Ray Howard
Finance Officer (1961-88)
From the Bulletin, 26 Oct 1982

I started work at the University on March 20, 1961...

In those early months there was no Planning Committee, no Planning Process and no University Plan. Planning was however what we mostly did. There wasn't much else to do. For this was the golden age. We had no students and not one member of academic faculty on the payroll.

Sussex started with a number of advantages. Not only was it the first of the New Universities. It also had a pleasant site, near the sea and convenient to London. It had an imaginative and eloquent Vice-Chancellor and a world famous architect.

If it could not be said that money was no object it was true that the main difficulty was spending it fast enough to achieve the physical and academic plans. It is not surprising, therefore, that we recruited the best and brightest young academics and those most frustrated in their ambitions elsewhere.

The attraction was not so much the rate of growth as the opportunity to innovate without having to persuade a conservative Council or Senate that there may be better ways to spend government largesse than on more of the same. We were not just building a new university in a physical sense, we were drawing a new map of learning.

It was stimulating for administrators to participate in this process. They could also derive professional satisfaction from making their own innovations.

Apart from the new building to be planned there were new accounting systems and new budgetary procedures to be designed and implemented.

There was a Charter and Statutes to be written, there were committee systems to be built up and there were administrative structures to be organised, and reorganised and reorganised.

Oddly enough it is some of the projects that came to nothing or that folded after a few years which stick in the memory, the things that might have been.

The University Grants Committee wouldn't give us the money for Sir Basil Spence's design for cantilevered lecture theatres in the shape of a butterfly in Fulton Court, nor for a Vice-Chancellor's house on campus (a far-sighted decision that). We never did build a multipurpose hall or a multistorey carpark.

We didn't start new Schools of Environmental Studies or Cognitive Studies or, what were those other names?, though we had what seemed to be endless meetings of Planning Committee at the Isle of Thorns to discuss them.

We didn't accept as a gift an island in the West Indies which, would, we were told, have made an excellent study centre or holiday camp. We did have a study centre in Barbados, but not for long. We did not acquire a vineyard in the New Forest for scientific research. Pity about that.

What was achieved is about us for all to see...
Small ads

FOR SALE: Desk-top computer, £60 ono. Email a.cheng@sussex.ac.uk or come to Flat 1, York House.

TO RENT: 1-bed 6th-floor p/b flat, between Western Rd and seafront, £580 pcm including hot water and seasonal CH. Available Sep. Email John on maystar@blois.susx.ac.uk.

FOR SALE: IKEA changing table, £40. IKEA cot and mattress, £35. Used for only 6 months. Email a.prince@sussex.ac.uk.

TO RENT: Room in well appointed, modern flat, 7 Dials (nr. station), from Sept/Oct. Would particularly suit gay male (pref. PG) student. £75 p/w (exchange phone). Tel. Alan on 720802.

WANTED: 2 or 3 double bedroom flat (master with ensuite), GCH, fitted kitchen (dishwasher), furnished/part-furnished, newly decorated, washer/dryer. Quiet, modern, clean, comfortable. For academic year Sept 01–Sept 02. Non-smoker. Contact Eduardo Dieck, email edieck@hotmail.com or fax 020 52 81 52 48 19.

SMOKERS WANTED: To complete an established scopolamine drug study, which pays £20 for 2-3 hours of your time. Drug administered via a (tiny!) injection under the skin. Must be native English speakers. Contact Trudi Edginton, ext. 8916 or trudie@blois.sussex.ac.uk.

TO LET: Large sunny room with own private bathroom in lovely Victorian house, Beaconsfield Villas. Suit pg/staff. Non-smoker only. £300 pcm incl. Contact nick.jagger@employment-studies.co.uk

WANTED: Large double room in Hove 2-bed flat. Close to sea, station and shops. Suit professional non-smoker. Available now for min. 6 mths. £375pcm excl. bills. Ext. 8146 (day), tel. 727810 (even), email amir@sussex.ac.uk.

TO RENT: Furnished flat or house in central Brighton/Hove, Lewes or nearby country from 1 Jan to 31 July. For responsible, non-smoking visiting professor and wife. Can provide references. Email benedict.3@odu.edu.

TO LET: Spacious flat on Marine Parade. Available now. Partially furnished. Two double bedrooms, one with en suite. Good-sized kitchen and lounge. £825 per month. Contact Dr Lee Hogarth, lee@blois.susx.ac.uk ext. 7106 or 483776.

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Top marks for USIE teacher training

Trainee teachers at the University's Institute of Education receive an excellent start according to the latest inspection reports from OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education).

OFSTED inspectors have awarded both Music and English Secondary PGCE programmes at Sussex the highest possible grades for the quality of training and the accuracy and consistency of the assessment of trainees for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

“We are delighted by the grades,” said Pat Drake, Director of Initial Teacher Education. “Duncan Mackrill, our Music Curriculum Tutor, and our English PGCE Curriculum Tutor, Dr Vic Griffiths, have achieved these results and are to be congratulated.”

USIE offers PGCE in eight Secondary subjects each year. There are still a few places available on the Music programme, which starts on 17 September.

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Nursery in top tot form

The campus nursery for the children of staff and students has received a glowing report from government inspectors, who described it as a "a happy, stimulating nursery".

The nursery, which was set up in 1966, caters for 37 children aged three to five.

Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) found that, "Children are making excellent progress in all areas of learning. By making choices in their play, they are becoming independent, autonomous learners."

They added: "Children's interest is captured by the stimulating, well-planned programme of activities that is characterised by high expectations for what they are able to understand and achieve."

The eight members of staff at the nursery were commended in the report for "excellent teaching" that "pays close attention to children's individual personalities and interests".

Other particular strengths noted include the fostering of children's creativity, with paintings and drawings that "help to make the nursery rich, exciting and welcoming".

Finally, the inspectors highlighted the nursery's good relationships with parents and carers, which "help staff provide appropriately for individual children".

Rosie Jones, the nursery supervisor, said: "This report is a compliment to all the staff. We feel privileged to work with the delightful children in the nursery, but it is all about team effort."

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Staff vacancies

Apply by 22 August

Residence Day Porter (ref 223)
Night Porter / Receptionist (ref 224)
Housekeepers, student residences Hove (ref 225)

Apply by 24 August

Research Fellow, Sussex Centre for Neuroscience (ref 207)

Research Officer, Poverty Research Unit (ref 0248)
Courses Assistant, Psychological Counselling Service (ref 213)

Apply by 30 August

Clubs & Societies Organiser, USSU (ref 226)

Apply by 31 August

Research Officer / Fellow, EIT (ref 222)

Accounts Clerk (ref 215)

Apply by 6 September

Research Officer (ref 229)
For further details, see www.sussex.ac.uk/units/staffing/personnel/vacancies or contact Staffing Services on (01273) 678706, fax (01273) 877401, email recruitment@sussex.ac.uk

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Bulletin

The fortnightly Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field and Peter Simpsons, with regular contributions from Jacqui Bealing. We welcome any news, story ideas, letters or small ads from staff and students of the University. The next issue will be out on 31 August, with a copy deadline of 1pm on 24 August. Please contact the Press and Communications Office in Sussex House on ext. 8888 or email Bulletin@sussex.ac.uk

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Professor John Nixon from CPES is pictured far left in a very fetching red and white kimono as he proposed the toast at the final banquet of the 15th International Conference on Phosphorus Chemistry in Sendai, Japan. (Note the newly opened sake barrel at the front.) John gave one of the keynote lectures at the conference, which was attended by 548 delegates from 39 countries.