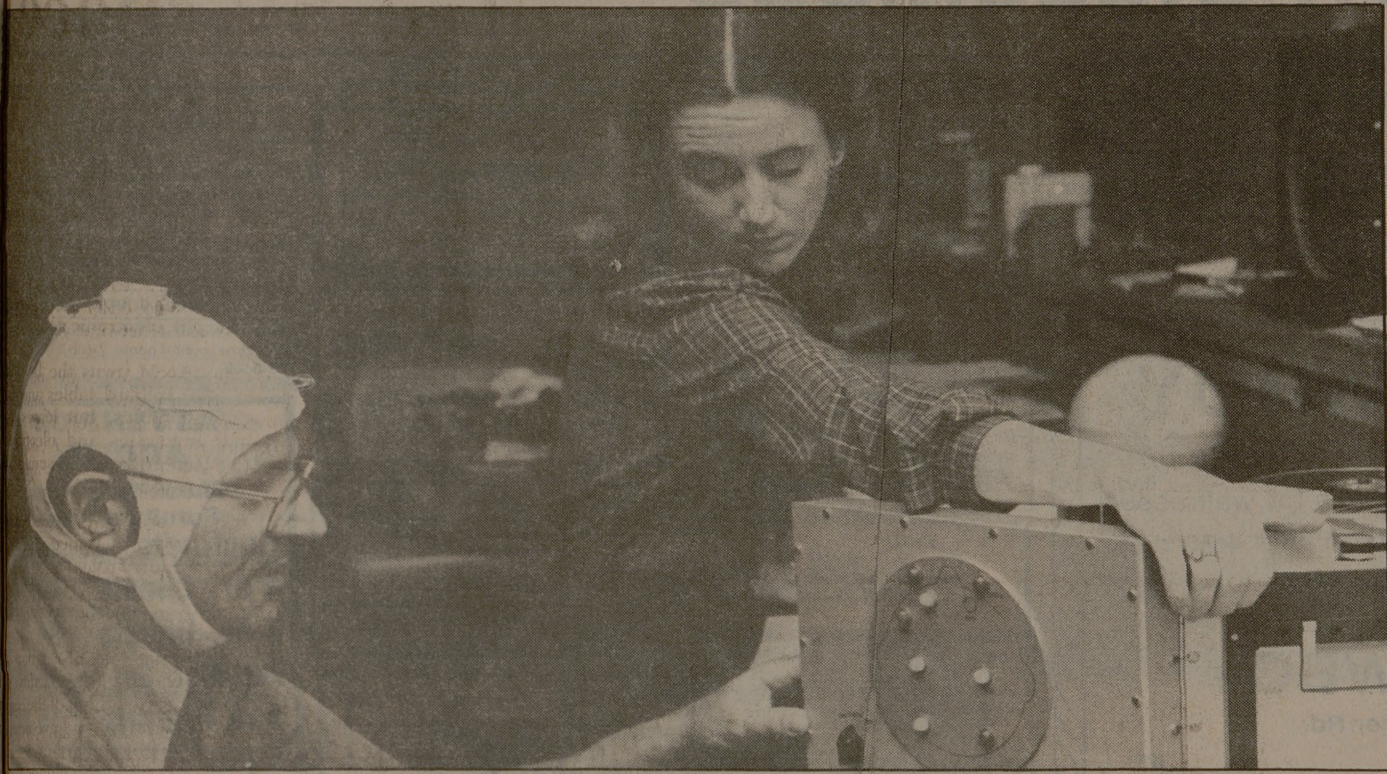


Local



Staff photo by Rose Delano

Dr. Joseph Sommenfeld demonstrates his apparatus with the help of student assistant Melissa Jackson.

Prof studies trials of left-handed

By STEPHEN M. WARD
Battalion Reporter

A Texas A&M professor has found a relationship between left-handedness and getting lost. Dr. Joseph Sommenfeld, a behavioral geographer, has been doing research on the human mind concerning spatial awareness and orientation.

Since 1976, Sommenfeld has been interested in the human mind, especially the left and right hemispheres of the brain and their relation to being right- or left-handed.

Some people may not understand why a geographer is interested in this subject, he said, but they realize that geographers are concerned with understanding the reason why people differ in the ways in which they behave and how they perform in their environment.

"Behavioral geographers study environmental perception," Sommenfeld said. "They are concerned with what personality attributes are that influence how people relate to, or interact with their environment."

Sommenfeld's three central research themes deal with perform-

ance on written tests as a measure of spacial skill compared to performance in the real world, differences seen in brain functions between left- and right-handed people, and evidence that shows a correlation between what happens in the left and right hemispheres of the brain.

Sommenfeld is mainly concerned with spacial skills because geography involves spacial orientation and how people get along in everyday life. For instance, Sommenfeld, who is left-handed, said that some people, often left-handed people, have a difficult time orienting themselves; they get lost easily whether they are in the country, mountains or city.

"Left-handedness does not necessarily mean you are going to have poor spacial skills," Sommenfeld said, "but it is surprising how often people who do have poor orientation are left-handed."

Sommenfeld has found that people who do well on pencil and paper tests don't do as well in real world situations, and those who do well in real world situations do worse on paper tests.

Other interesting findings suggest that a higher percentage of

journalists are left-handed, which may be because of enriched verbal skills. Also, a higher incidence of left-handedness is sometimes seen in such occupations as computer programming, architecture and environmental design.

The difference between left-handers and right-handers is, in a sense, that their brains may be functioning differently, he said. Differences in brain function are determined by how left or right-handers perform various kinds of tests, and how their skills appear to be affected by the difference in handedness.

He said that left-handed people do all the normal things a right-hander does, only they use the right (hemisphere) side of the brain instead of the left.

More males than females tend to be left-handed, but typically and traditionally, females in almost all cultures perform poorer on tests in spacial skills than males, Sommenfeld said.

Although Sommenfeld's research is still in progress, he has written two papers, one on cerebral specialization and environmental behavior and the other on cerebral correlates of environmental skills.

and has conducted studies recording brain activity at Texas A&M, Alaska and Mexico.

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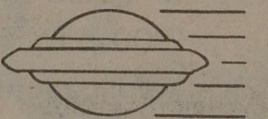
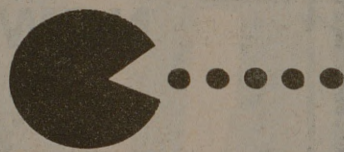
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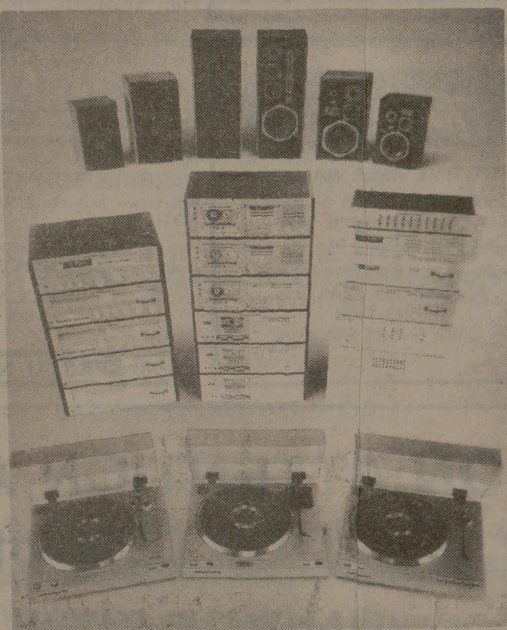
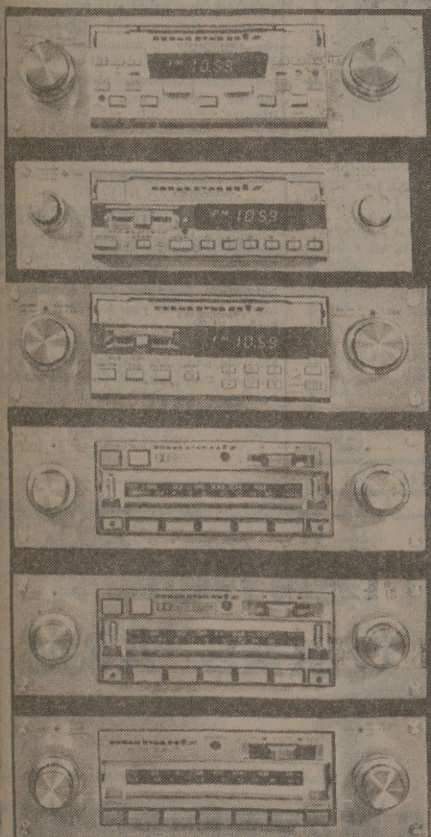
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