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University of Montana--Missoula. Office of University Relations

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ELDON BAKER TO CONDUCT  
DRIVER AWARENESS STUDY

MISSOULA--

Dr. Eldon E. Baker, acting chairman and associate professor in the University of Montana Department of Speech Communication, has received a small grant from the Highway Traffic Safety Division, Montana State Department of Intergovernmental Relations, to conduct a pilot study of drivers' observable predictions about their performances and the traffic environment.

Ultimate goal of the project is to produce better defensive drivers.

Student drivers from Sentinel High School, Missoula, will participate in the study under the auspices of Thomas J. Thorpe, head of the Department of Traffic Education, Missoula County High Schools.

Baker said observable predictions in the study will be based on student drivers' awareness of such things as traffic congestion, children in school zones, intersections blocked from view and street surface conditions.

"Right now we need to find out the problems people have in learning good driving techniques because we can predict with a pretty high degree of probability that we can take a driver and make him a sharp performer behind the wheel of a car, even as sharp as an astronaut in a space capsule," Baker said.

He said he hopes to show what makes better defensive drivers during the study "by recording what has gone wrong, what is going wrong and what could go wrong" during various driving situations. Students will be questioned while driving.

"Somewhere along the line we think we'll learn that driving a motor vehicle is a very complicated task, although we usually treat it as a very mundane task," Baker said. "A driver doesn't know what really is involved in good driving unless he is thinking constantly about that job and even talking about it."