

Student says he has earthquake predicting formula

By Bill Graf

After successfully predicting 15 earthquakes in the last year, including last Monday's quake in Southern California, a UNL student says he has a formula that can predict earthquakes within a 100 mile radius to the day, anywhere in the world.

Lowell Whiteside, 33, a graduate geology student, said he isn't ready to go public with his predictions because he has difficulty getting accurate data to plug into his formula. But he said he has several people that will attest to the accuracy of the formula, including the recordkeepers at the National Earthquake Information Service, part of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The formula is based on sun-spot activity and the time oscillations caused by other quakes take to travel around the globe. Lesser factors, such as the time of year and the moon's phase, also are used, he said.

Whiteside said it takes two earthquakes to cause another quake. Waves from different quakes can strike a fault, or fracture in the earth's crust, at opposing angles and cause another earthquake, he said.

Last Monday's earthquake near San Diego, Calif. was caused by earthquakes in New Guinea and Iran, he said.

"On Sept. 15, there was an 8.0 (measured on the Richter scale) earthquake in New Guinea," he said. "After looking through the data that I've collected, I knew that there was a 70 percent chance of a 6.5 to 7.0 earthquake in the Los Angeles/San Diego area exactly 30 days after the New Guinea quake."



Daily Nebraskan Photo

Lowell Whiteside

Also giving credibility to the formula are strainmeter readings of an earlier Southern California earthquake, he said. Strainmeters measure the strain on the earth's crust

caused by a recent earthquake.

Whiteside said that after removing everything that could be accounted for from the strainmeter readings, the remaining readings were exactly the same as the formula predicted them to be.

The formula came to him in 1974, he said.

"I was working for Russell Stover. One day I was sitting around waiting for the candy to cool, and suddenly it occurred to me that Hawaii, Burma and Guatemala were on the same parallel and that all three places had recently had earthquakes."

After three years of collecting data on earthquakes all over the world, Whiteside said he is satisfied that the formula works.

His next step is to find other scientists to help him write a paper about the formula to present to the scientific community, he said.

The formula could be used to determine the day and area an earthquake would strike, he said. Seismographs could be placed parallel to the faultline, he explained, and wave readings could determine the speed of the shock waves and what time the quake would hit.

Then, much like tornado warnings, people could be alerted and given plenty of time to seek shelter.

Whiteside's fellow workers at the UNL engineering building vouched for the accuracy of the formula.

Bill Kelley and Jim Nelson said that Whiteside has been right in all his predictions.

"He won't make a prediction unless he is 60 to 70 percent sure. So far every prediction he has told me about has come true," Kelly said.

Captioning enables deaf to 'hear' T.V.

Virginia Berman, professor of clinical psychology and coordinator of field testing for UNL's Media Development Project for the Hearing Impaired (MDPHI), is working with WGBH-TV in Boston to develop program captioning techniques.

The WGBH Caption Center is a special unit developing techniques for captioning TV programs. Program research was financed by a grant from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. This is the second year MDPHI has worked with WGBH-TV in the project.

Berman works in the evaluation of the project.

"The Caption Center wanted people to evaluate some materials they specially developed," Berman said.

The MDPHI is a federal funded project which works in designing, developing and evaluating instructional material for deaf students.

"Captioning is harder than most people think," Berman said. "It involves how fast people read, the language structure and what the caption is saying compared to the action on the screen," she added.

Last year's studies involved evaluating the effects of captioned programs on 300 deaf children, ranging from ages 9 to 16, Berman said. The usage of three different levels of language complexity and their effect on interpretation of programs was evaluated.

"This year, we are looking not only into comprehension, but the emotional impact of the speed of words produced on the screen and the interpretation of characters," Berman said.

Berman, who received her doctorate in clinical psychology at Northwestern University has been with MDPHI for three years.

Her work with the deaf came as "a desire to do some sort of practical work as opposed to clinical psychology", she said.

"I try to use some of my background in clinical psychology by applying it to the deaf children," she said.

The objective of these studies is to provide information for a manual on-program captioning for the hearing impaired, Berman said.

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