**UQ Summer Research Project Description - 2026**

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| **Project title:** | **How do people infer social information from dynamic naturalistic facial expressions?**  |
| **Hours of engagement & delivery mode** | For the Summer program, students will be engaged for 6 weeks only.Hours of engagement are between 20 – 36 hrs per week and will fall within the official program dates (Summer = 12 Jan – 20 Feb 2026).Aspects of the project may be conducted remotely but the applicant should expect to be on campus for weekly meetings with their supervisor, and weekly lab meetings, in addition to any necessary laboratory hours.  |
| **Description:** | An important question when considering faces in the real world, is that they are always *moving*. However, our understanding of how observers perceive and infer socially relevant information from dynamic faces has traditionally relied upon highly recognisable posed videos of prototypical expressions such as ‘happy’ or ‘angry’, displayed by either humans or heavily morphed computer-generated faces. While such stimuli may provide useful experimental control in the lab, they are heavily criticised for their ecological validity in the real world.Therefore, the goal of this project is to create a novel database of dynamic naturalistic stimuli which aims to bridge the gap between tightly controlled, sterile sets of dynamic facial expressions and the kinds of dynamic facial behaviour perceived “in the wild”. Such stimuli may help to uncover the multidimensional visual information afforded by faces, helping us to understand how these are represented in the brain, and to design more sensitive measures for detecting difficulties in social cognition arising from ageing, neurodegenerative, psychiatric, or neurodevelopmental conditions.  |
| **Expected learning outcomes and deliverables:** | Scholars will gain valuable experience in a research active environment, working on the initial stages of a large-scale project that will ultimately combine brain and behavioural data. Scholars will help collect and curate stimuli, set up behavioural experiments and collect pilot data, leading to the opportunity for the publication of research. Students may also be asked to produce a report or oral presentation at the end of their project. |
| **Suitable for:** | This project is open to applications from students with a keen interest in visual cognition, social/affective neuroscience and systems neuroscience. Coding experience (Matlab, Python, R, Qualtrics, JS) is a bonus but not necessary. Students who have (or will have) completed NEUR2020, NEUR3192 or NEUR3302 are strongly encouraged to apply. 3rd and 4th year students only. |
| **Primary Supervisor:** | Prof. Jess Taubert  |
| **Further info:** | Students considering applying for this project are encouraged to contact Jess Taubert via email prior to submitting their application.Email: j.taubert@uq.edu.au |