

A meeting of the minds

December 7 2011



Lisa Feldman Barrett, Distinguished Professor of Psychology, greeted scholars and researchers at the first meeting of Northeastern's Affective Science Institute. Credit: Mary Knox Merrill.

People are happiest in warm weather, but grow considerably unhappier as humidity levels rise, according to an analysis of the language of some 1.3 billion tweets by Northeastern University computer science PhD candidate Aniko Hannah.

“We can predict people’s moods with 80 percent accuracy using this data,” Hannah said.

Her research was on display in the Curry Student Center ballroom last Thursday as part of the first event sponsored by the new Affective Science Institute (ASI) at Northeastern. ASI will be a nexus for collaboration, training and the exchange of ideas between researchers and scholars who study emotion and related fields in the New England

area.

Distinguished Professor of Psychology Lisa Feldman Barrett gave an overview of the institute to roughly 100 scholars and researchers from more than a dozen universities and medical institutions who filled the Fenway Center prior to the poster session.

Barrett is the codirector of the Interdisciplinary Affective Science Laboratory at Northeastern, which studies how emotions function in the mind by using experiential, behavioral, psychophysiological and brain-imaging methods.

Understanding affect, she said, can play an important role in solving global challenges in health, security and sustainability, which are areas of research focus at Northeastern.

“Affect is a ubiquitous aspect of everyday human life, whether we are making small choices, such as what to have for lunch, or big choices, such as whether we should get screened for cancer,” Barrett explained.

At the poster session, Vera Vine, a clinical psychology PhD candidate in the Regulation of Emotion and Anxiety Disorders Lab at Yale University, showcased her research on the relationship between emotional clarity and affect intensity.

A patient’s inability to express her emotions clearly may lead to stronger bouts of depression and other disorders, Vine said. As she put it, “Patients need to figure out what their emotions are and how to deal with them.”

Vine expressed interest in playing a role in the success of the institute. “It’s an exciting opportunity to be in an intimate setting with renowned scholars,” she said. “I want to benefit from the collaborations and then

try to give something back.”

Provided by Northeastern University

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