

Stanford community shines at the Bay Area Science Festival

by [Rex Sanders](http://news.stanford.edu/thedish/author/rexsanders/) (<http://news.stanford.edu/thedish/author/rexsanders/>) on November 14, 2014 4:00 pm

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Stanford faculty, staff and students were enthusiastic participants in this year's [Bay Area Science Festival](http://www.bayareascience.org) (<http://www.bayareascience.org>).

The festival, held at locations around the Bay Area earlier this month, highlighted more than 20 events with Stanford participants, ranging from the "Mind Control Lab" to "Virtual Reality in the Social Sciences."

The festival's mission is to "celebrate the Bay Area's scientific wonders, resources and opportunities by exploring the role of science, engineering and technology locally and in the world."

"It's always nice to see kids getting excited about this technology," said **SHAWNEE BAUGHMAN**, manager of Stanford's [Virtual Human Interaction Lab](http://vhil.stanford.edu) (<http://vhil.stanford.edu>).

"It was fun to work with the other schools and get together," said **SAMMY KATTA**, a graduate student in the neurosciences program.



Sammy Katta guides a helmeted Bay Area Science Festival guest through the rubber hand illusion in the Mind Control Lab at the California Academy of Sciences. Credit: Chris Miller

Tricking the mind

Katta and fellow neurosciences graduate student **DAVID LIPTON**, along with **WHITNEY HEAVNER**, a postdoctoral scholar in biology, worked with students and postdocs from UC San Francisco, UC Berkeley and the Gladstone Institutes on exhibits for the "Mind Control Lab" at the [California Academy of Sciences](http://www.calacademy.org) (<http://www.calacademy.org>). Guests were entertained

with the rubber hand illusion, in which the participant comes to believe that a rubber glove on a table is his or her own hand, even though they can plainly see that it is not.

“I was surprised at how well the rubber glove worked,” said Katta. More than 50 people took that challenge.

For a taste-and-smell exhibit, guests tried to identify the smell of melted fragrant candles, or held their noses and tried to identify the flavor of a jellybean. Hundreds tried, most failed.

“Distinguishing an apple from other fruits is really hard,” said Lipton.

Experiencing virtual reality

Tickets sold out very quickly for the “Virtual Reality in the Social Sciences” event at Stanford’s Virtual Human Interaction Lab. This was the third year the lab hosted a festival event.

Baughman and **CODY KARUTZ**, a graduate student in the symbolic systems program, quickly improvised and split the group into two for tours and descriptions of the lab’s research.

The most popular part was wearing a head-mounted display and experiencing one of several virtual worlds under development at the lab. Everyone got a chance, including 5-year-old kids.

“It’s always fun with kids. They get pretty excited about it,” said Baughman. But some are more impressed than others.

One kid asked: “Why isn’t it like my video game?”

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