

COMMENTARY

Toward a Better Neuroscience Tomorrow: Thoughts on *The Society for Neuroscience and the Undergraduate*

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In her guest editorial, Ann Stuart rightfully addresses the lack of resources offered by the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) devoted to both graduate and undergraduate neuroscience education. Conversely, many of us may not be aware of the efforts that SfN has made in recent years to improve what might be characterized as “Academic Career Professional Development” and the involvement that Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience (FUN) has had in this area.

Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience was indeed fortunate to gain a true voice for undergraduate neuroscience education when FUN member Joanne Berger-Sweeney of Wellesley College was elected to SfN national council in 2002. In 2003, subsequent to the unveiling of SfN’s new strategic plan, council established several working groups, and it was Joanne who co-chaired the Working Group on Professional Development (WGPD) for the years of her term on council. In the initial announcement for the working groups (see www.sfn.org/index.cfm?pagename=neuroscienceQuarterly_03winter_strategicplan), the charge was as follows:

...A focus of the Working Group to deal with professional development and neuroscience educational activities will focus on career development. Members of the group will

- Introduce a SfN-managed Neuroscience Job Fair at Neuroscience 2003 in New Orleans and evaluate its appeal among interested parties.
- Expand the scope of professional development information available through the SfN Web site.
- Sponsor Web-based job fairs in addition to those held during the annual meeting.
- Organize a SfN Web-based audioconference on career development issues and opportunities.

A second focus will be on preparing a multi-year action plan to increase Society-sponsored professional development activities. Potential initiatives for this include

- Expanding the scope of existing neuroscience training workshops and educational activities.
- Holding a series of cross-disciplinary lectures in Washington, DC or lectures at regional chapter-sponsored forums. Conducting selected short courses in different cities under the auspices of regional chapters and/or the SfN Education Committee.
- Establishing a learning center that would sponsor two- to three-day courses on various neuroscience topics for CME credit.

- Supporting the development of model curricula and other age group-specific teaching materials.

To approach these goals, in addition to SfN council, membership and staff representation, the WGPD asked the then current presidents of FUN, Women in Neuroscience and the Association of Neuroscience Departments and Programs, key constituent partner organizations to SfN, to serve on the group for the next several years, which each of us (myself as FUN president at the time) agreed to do. The WGPD discussed the complex nature of professional development for neuroscientists and of specific importance here, the need for greater representation of issues related to the academic career path. Programming for professional development at the SfN annual meetings was expanded and reworked, and led to greater offerings relevant to the FUN and JUNE constituency, academic neuroscientists—such as Richard Olivo’s very successful and well received workshops on teaching neuroscience. Certainly, the Society could do still more to provide resources and events related to neuroscience instruction; but where progress has been made, it should be duly noted.

In addition to the FUN presence on council—which we hope to see continue in the next SfN election, and the work of WGPD, it should also be noted that FUN has had a strong voice in the work of SfN’s Public Education and Communication Committee (PECC) through the representation of FUN councilor Keith Trujillo on PECC’s predecessor, the Committee on Neuroscience Literacy, and soon, FUN’s proposed representative to PECC, FUN past-president Alan Gittis (1998-1999) on this team. While that group takes as its mission the education of the lay public and K-12 educator/student populations, the work of committee members on PECC has provided undergraduate neuroscience educators with a variety of resources that are nonetheless relevant as well.

Finally, the establishment of the SfN Science Educator Award (as well as the Next Generation Award) also marks significant SfN efforts to address the needs of academic neuroscientists. FUN member Eric Chudler received the award in 2003 for his work -- certainly spotlighted by his Neuroscience for Kids Website, but importantly, for providing a wealth of resources to the education community — see his elaborate website at <http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/ehc.html> for a treasure trove of material and links.

SfN can and should do more to address the needs of neuroscientists working in higher education, teaching future generations of neuroscientists. The work that SfN has done, however, should not be forgotten. The reader

should also note that while greater effort to address the needs of neuroscience educators by SfN in the future is to be welcomed and indeed encouraged, such effort by SfN will in no way substitute for nor should it be allowed to limit the more focused efforts that FUN; ANDP; and regional organizations such as NEURON, SYNAPSE, and now MidBrains, the regional annual research meeting organization for undergraduate neuroscience in the Midwest, make to address these same issues. We ARE providing such resources and educating the neuroscientists of tomorrow — Today.

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