

ARTICLE

External Reviews, Internal Influences: Consultations and the Undergraduate Neuroscience Curriculum

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In 2007 FUN established the FUN Program and Department Consultations Service, or FUN-PDCS. Since that founding, the service has provided numerous consultation recommendations to undergraduate programs seeking assistance with external program reviews, designing and improving courses and many other programmatic needs. FUN-PDCS, like FUN, is primarily a grassroots organization and draws on the expertise of the

FUN membership to aid programs in their more personalized pursuit of the FUN mission: to promote and improve undergraduate neuroscience education and research.

Key words: program review, neuroscience curriculum, professional development, minority recruitment and retention, facilities design, neuroscience study abroad, funding sources, enhancing teaching effectiveness

Established in 2007, the Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience (FUN) Program and Department Consultations Service (FUN-PDCS) is a service offered to undergraduate programs and departments through the FUN Committee on Education. Inspired and adapted from the American Psychological Association/Society for the Teaching of Psychology's Department Consulting Service (<http://www.teachpsych.org/otrp/deptconsult.php>), the FUN-PDCS was developed in response to increasing institutional needs for neuroscience program and department evaluations. The consultation service provides undergraduate neuroscience programs and departments with a list of qualified consultants who will provide feedback that will enable them to improve their programs. Since that founding, the FUN-PDCS has provided numerous consultation recommendations to undergraduate programs seeking assistance with external program reviews, designing and improving courses, and many other programmatic needs.

This article is intended to provide the reader with information not only about the services that the FUN-PDCS provides to programs and departments, but also how they may become part of the network of PDCS consultants.

THE FUN PDCS: MISSION AND SCOPE

To meet the wide variety of consulting needs that undergraduate neuroscience programs and departments have, the PDCS maintains a database of faculty consultants with expertise in a broad range of areas. Specific areas include (but are not limited to): curriculum (evaluation, development, designing/improving special programs or courses, research experiences or honors); faculty (writing grant proposals, developing funding sources, writing for publication, promoting professional development and/or mentoring, enhancing and evaluating teacher effectiveness); advising (student advising for career planning, graduate school preparation, changing enrollments, minority recruitment and retention); research facilities (designing neuroscience labs, designing teaching facilities, computer applications for courses, labs, or

administration); and departmental program evaluation (self-assessments, program evaluation, department evaluation).

Undergraduate neuroscience programs and departments in need of consultants to conduct program evaluations and related services are not required to be affiliated with FUN as members to make use of the FUN PDCS. While consultants do not deal with problems concerning individual faculty members, they can address general personnel issues, such as promoting faculty development. Inviting departments are asked to pay an honorarium (to be determined by the department and invited consultant) as well as expenses (transportation, lodging, and meals). All financial arrangements are solely between the institution and the consultants and in no way involve FUN. Departments with limited finances may request a reduced or waived honorarium, which consultants are free to agree to, but under no obligation to accept. The FUN-PDCS will match departments with consultants believed to be suited to the needs of the department, although neither FUN nor FUN-PDCS makes guarantees or warranties regarding the abilities or suitability of consultants ultimately contracted with by the program or department.

REQUESTING A CONSULTATION THROUGH FUN-PDCS

Programs and Departments may initiate a request a consultant by sending a brief email expressing interest in a consultation to: Eric Wiertelak, Director of the PDCS at Wiertelak@macalester.edu. A consultation request package will be forwarded to interested parties, to be filled out and returned to the FUN PDCS for processing. Requests for consultants will be matched with the expertise of available consultants and a list of three or more consultants and their qualifications will be generated.

The consultation request package provides the Director of the PDCS with the information used to develop a consultant recommendation. Of central importance are not only determining the area or areas of consultations desired, but also gathering sufficient further detail about

Specialty	Specific Area
Curriculum Evaluation	Undergraduate neuroscience curriculum development Undergraduate neuroscience curriculum evaluation Developing/improving special programs or courses Writing in neuroscience Laboratory and active learning strategies Service learning and outreach
Advising	Student advising: neuroscience-related employment Student advising: graduate school Changing enrollment patterns Minority student recruitment/retention
Faculty	Writing grant proposals Developing funding sources Writing for publication Promoting professional development Enhancing teaching effectiveness Minority faculty recruitment/retention Faculty evaluation Teaching/research assistant development Improving departmental collegiality
Research Facilities	Neuroscience research/teaching lab design Support facilities design (vivarium, instrumentation, etc.) Laboratory equipment and supplies Computer applications for courses or laboratories
Program/Department Evaluation	Program/Department external review Administrative development Program/Department self-assessments

Table 1. Consultant specialties and specific areas of expertise.

the program/department and institution. Briefly, the package contains several short forms that when completed, provide demographic information about the program and institution initiating the request, details about the perceived need for a consultancy, including proposed dates of any site visit, specific areas of focus for the consultancy (see Table 1), and consent and waiver forms for the consultancy. The package also includes a post-consultancy evaluation form to provide feedback to FUN-PDCS about the outcome of the consultancy once completed. FUN-PDCS uses these evaluation forms to assess the ongoing effectiveness and range of the services provided as well as the performance of the consultant pool.

BECOMING A FUN-PDCS CONSULTANT

Individuals wishing to become consultants should contact the PDCS Director/Chair of the Committee on Education for PDCS consultant application materials. Completed applications are returned to the Director, who forwards them to the PDCS Subcommittee of the Committee on Education for screening and recommendations. Briefly, applicants must submit:

- A current copy of their CV.
- A one-paragraph statement, listing their educational

and current employment statuses and a summary of their particular skills and qualifications for conducting consultations. This paragraph will be sent to prospective clients as part of the matching process.

- A cover letter, requesting appointment as a PDCS consultant. The cover letter should provide the committee with an overview of the candidate's particular interests, history of consulting activities, and any other relevant qualifications that can aid in the evaluation of the application for appointment as a consultant.

All materials are subsequently forwarded by the Director to the FUN Committee on Education for final review during the FUN annual meeting. To be appointed, consultant applicants should have expertise in a number of the areas listed under Specialties and Specific Areas in Table 1. Experience as a program evaluator is highly desirable.

THE FUN-PDCS: FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Since its founding in 2007, the FUN-PDCS has grown, receiving more requests for consultation services each year, and the need for such services continues to grow. While the number of FUN-PDCS consultations is difficult to track as the service only makes initial recommendations,

inquiries to the service have grown almost tenfold, from an annual total in the first year (2007) of three to 28 in 2011. As the many undergraduate neuroscience programs and departments mature, the need for external review teams suited for the needs of ongoing institutional assessments will expand dramatically. With FUN-PDCS continuing to provide a no-cost service to match programs and departments with consultants that have the expertise desired, the quality and effectiveness of these programs will be enhanced. Consider becoming a FUN-PDCS consultant to join FUN in the shared mission of promoting undergraduate neuroscience education and research.

REFERENCES

Departmental Consulting Service. <http://www.teachpsych.org/otrp/deptconsult.php>.

The materials designed for evaluation and consultations with psychology departments by the American Psychological Association/Society for the Teaching of Psychology Department Consulting Services provided direct inspiration for the materials developed by the FUN-PDCS for use with neuroscience programs and departments, and thus the role of the APA DCS in the development of the FUN-PDCS and the content of this article is gratefully acknowledged.

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