

## EDITORIAL

# A Tale of Two Meetings: Indeed, the Worst of Times Gave Undergraduate Neuroscience Education One of the Best of Times

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<https://doi.org/10.59390/DWIP7136>

This special issue of *JUNE*, containing articles based on the presentations and sessions included in the FUN 2020 Virtual Summer Meeting (FUN-VSM) held July 30 through August 1, 2020, marks a pivotal moment in neuroscience education history. A meeting that brought new and long-time presenters together from across the field to deliver just-in-time resources and help to undergraduate neuroscience education under extraordinary circumstances. An online meeting, timely and unique in its mission, the FUN-VSM was brought together almost as quickly as the COVID-19 pandemic had brought an end to the long planning process for the in-person 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary FUN 2020 Workshop. We include this short history of the planning for the FUN 2020 workshop here to commemorate the passing of that anniversary.

## THE PREPARATION

Initial planning for the 2020 FUN Workshop had begun in 2017 with the close of the 2017 workshop at Dominican University. In that workshop's final session came the announcement that the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary FUN Workshop would be held at Davidson College, the site of the very first FUN Workshop, from July 31 to August 2, 2020. Planning for the 2020 workshop began in earnest in late 2018, and by January, 2019, the first of many email conversations was held among the workshop organizers: Workshop Chair Eric Wiertelak (Macalester College), incoming 2020 Workshop Host and Chair Julio Ramirez (Davidson College), 2017 FUN Workshop Hosts and Co-Chairs Robert and Irina Calin-Jageman (Dominican University), Preworkshop Subcommittee Chair Bruce Johnson (Cornell University), and incoming FUN Workshop Organizers for 2023 and beyond, Alo Basu (College of the Holy Cross) and Jason Chan (Marian University).

By February of 2019, the major themes for the upcoming workshop had been discussed and a working title drafted: *The 2020 FUN Undergraduate Neuroscience Education Workshop: Best Practices for Rigor, Respect, Responsibility, and Outreach*. From early spring, through the summer and into the fall, the organizers continued to discuss the program, and at Davidson College, secured classrooms, laboratories and auditoriums, locked in lodging, and arranged meals and other logistics for the workshop. At the 2019 annual FUN executive and business meetings held in conjunction with the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) Meeting, the FUN community received updates on the planning. Across the days of the SfN meeting, the workshop organizers met with FUN officers, FUN members, recruited

session leaders for the preworkshop and workshop sessions, and networked with potential corporate sponsors. By the close of 2019, many of the session leaders had been recruited, and at Davidson, details of the expenses for the workshop had been determined. By early January 2020 the registration costs for attending had been calculated and construction of the registration website began. And, on January 21, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in the US (CDC, 2020).

## THE SHADOW

Then life changed. On February 10, 2020, the registration website for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary FUN Workshop, to be held July 31-August 2 at Davidson College opened. As dozens of registrations were submitted, Italy began lockdowns on February 20 to contain the spread of COVID-19 (Lawler, 2020). On February 27, Wiertelak started a new discussion with the organizers: putting contingency plans in place for the workshop, in case the COVID-19 situation lasted into the summer. And the planning continued; soon February turned to March, and the sessions began to be organized into a preliminary program. On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic (WHO, 2020). The workshop organizers added an alert at the FUN website: a go/no-go decision for holding the conference would be made no later than one month prior to the scheduled start of the workshop, and all registrations were covered by a "no worry" refund policy. By mid-March, the world as we knew it was changing rapidly. Social distancing. Hand washing. Masks. *Work from home*. Our colleges and universities closed their campuses and our courses retreated online. And still quietly, hopefully, registrations kept coming in for the FUN workshop. On March 31, Wiertelak convened a Zoom meeting of the workshop organizers to discuss the situation and the workshop plans. Each of the organizers spoke in turn about the changes happening at their home institutions, and Ramirez filled the group in about conditions at Davidson. Postponing the event and alternatives to the workshop, such as a virtual meeting, were discussed. Later that evening, Wiertelak contacted FUN President Mary Morrison (Lycoming College) with the organizers' recommendation that the FUN Workshop scheduled for 2020 be cancelled, for the safety of all involved.

## A DISAPPOINTMENT

On April 5, after informing the presenters and session leaders of the decision, Morrison and Wiertelak addressed

the greater community via email, the FUN listserv, and the website with the following:

“Life has changed dramatically for everyone during the first few months of 2020. As each day has gone by, we have all watched the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic grow across the world, and in our own neighborhoods. While we had hoped that it would be safe for us to congregate by the time of the workshop at the end of July, that now seems far from likely. And so, it is with great regret that we reluctantly must cancel the 25th anniversary FUN Workshop, due to the real threat to our safety that is posed by COVID-19.

The FUN Workshop may be cancelled for 2020, but it is our hope to be able to announce plans soon for the future of the workshop and events hosted by FUN. We are already working to find ways to hold the workshop in the near future, and hope that you will attend the next FUN Workshop-- whether it may be 2021, 2022 or further still in the future.”

## TRIUMPH

The world knows that COVID-19 was not the only suffering that 2020 held in store. But, thanks to the work of Alo Baso, Jason Chan, their collaborators Yuan Yuan Kang (University of Houston-Downtown), Melanie Leussis (Emmanuel College), and so many others, there soon was a new plan, not for a FUN Workshop, but for the FUN-VSM. In that terrible summer, in that horrible year, for us and our students

– for what we do – there was *hope*. There was *community*. There was...FUN.

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Received May 20, 2022; accepted May 20, 2022.

The authors acknowledge, thank and apologize to Charles Dickens.

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