



CAN-ACN

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR NEUROSCIENCE
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES NEUROSCIENCES

Quebec City, June 6, 2017

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

As the Chair of the Advocacy Committee of the Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN), I am writing this letter of recommendation with great enthusiasm for the Convergence Initiative for the SfN Award for Education in Neuroscience.

CAN has collaborated with Convergence and we have supported their work throughout the last year. During this period, I had a chance to closely follow the evolution and impact of this incredibly creative educational program aimed to make neuroscience accessible by the public. Convergence, Perceptions of Neuroscience, is an independent initiative supported by the Brain Repair and Integrative Neuroscience (BRaIN) Program of the McGill University Research Centre (MUHC), the Integrated Program in Neuroscience (IPN) of McGill University, Concordia University Faculty of Fine Arts (FOFA), the Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN-ACN), the Montreal General Hospital Foundation, and the Visual Voice Gallery.

The primary goal of the Convergence Initiative is to make neuroscience research accessible to a general audience by linking it to the arts, while dispelling scientist and artist stereotypes in the process. They set up collaborations between neuroscientists in the early stages of their careers from the McGill University Integrated Program in Neuroscience (IPN) with advanced undergraduate art students from Concordia University's Faculty of Fine Arts. Neuroscience students gave talks about their work that inspired various artworks. This collaboration helped neuroscience students by providing them with an opportunity for acquiring a broad perspective from non-neuroscientists meanwhile enabling them to learn to communicate their research in a rich new language. Art students gained an entirely new source of inspiration by familiarizing themselves with the work of the scientific community and in doing so, provide them with new interesting questions that challenge society and their art practice.

The core event of the initiative was a series of short talks by neuroscience and art students, where they explained their respective scientific or artistic work to a multidisciplinary audience, followed by

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conversations that brought these divergent parts together. These dialogues gave way to a pairing process with the selection of collaborative teams. Moreover, events were planned in order to facilitate the work: four main Convergence events showcased key concepts of art and neuroscience in talks open to the students and the public. Additionally, they ensured to provide “students-only” social gatherings that included guided tours of the labs and studios of the scientific and artistic participants. These types of activities ensured the interaction, comprehension and cohesion between the people working in the program. The program currently consists of 16 neuroscientists, 12 labs, and 20 fine arts students representing 14 different art disciplines. A network of neuroscientists, artists, academics and personal administrators work supporting each student in an initiative entirely coordinated by Convergence volunteers. During the last year the initiative organized 15 meetings.

The final products of the initiative are showcased to the public at several collaborative exhibitions: the first one was set at the specialized Art-Science Gallery Visual Voice in Montreal, it showcased the artworks of 8 teams of artist and neuroscientist focused in diverse tangible media like wood and paint. It attracted more than 300 hundred visitors during the 9 effective days of the exhibition. The Dynamic exhibition took place May 10th to May 20th. During the 8 effective days of exhibition, the 6 teams of artists and neuroscientists exhibited art pieces with high dynamism, including kinetic sculptures, performing arts, and four video works.

CAN has featured the Convergence Initiative at our Public Lecture day just before the 11th Annual Meeting of CAN in Montreal from May 27th to May 31st, 2017. CAN has dedicated big part of the outreach afternoon on the Saturday, May 27th for this activity. We rented the auditorium of La Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec (BAnQ) for this purpose, this is a beloved facility in the city allowing us to attract large number of montréalais/e. Our event was visited by ~300 people. Additionally, an information booth exclusively dedicated to Convergence, Perceptions of Neuroscience, and some video work were presented at the Bonaventure Hotel during the days of the conference.

Convergence seeks to overcome stereotypes by providing everyone involved with the initiative, neuroscientist, artists, or public, with the opportunity to learn to think outside-the-box in collaborations with people of differing points of view. They see free dialog and integral education as the fundamental pillar for a rich and prosperous society. Their final goal is to influence people's perspectives about neurosciences and arts. The initiative energized the neuroscience and art community and provided the public with a fascinating way to learn and interact with science. This was made possible by the groups contagious sense of energy and deeply thought concept that was both very clever and inspiring. At CAN we feel lucky to have been able to feature and support their activities, we hope to continue our collaboration in the future.



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If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katalin Toth'.

Katalin Toth, Ph.D.

Chair of the Advocacy Committee
Canadian Association for Neuroscience

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