

Dear members of the selection committee,

I am very pleased to present this letter of recommendation in support for the science initiative *Convergence, Perceptions of Neuroscience* that has been nominated for the Science Promotion Prize given by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada.

Convergence, Perceptions of Neuroscience was launched in 2016 with the support of several major partners including Concordia University Faculty of Fine Arts, and the Canadian Association for Neuroscience (>1000 members), the Brain Repair and Integrative Neuroscience Program at the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (~130 faculty and their research programs), and the Canadian Association for Neuroscience. *Convergence* is a remarkable collaboration between scientists and artists based in a meaningful cross-disciplinary exchange.

The collaborative character of the initiative permeated every aspect of the project where knowledge could be disseminated in a transverse and equitable way by stressing the importance of sharing, and not just delivering information, across disciplinary boundaries. *Convergence* has stimulated and emphasized not simply the acquisition of basic neuroscience principles by our arts students but also, reciprocally, for the scientists, an understanding of the underlying dynamics that drive creative practice in the arts. The deep respect that this information/interpretation “loop” generated and that Dr. Cristian Zaelzer continued to support, has created an ideal climate for our students to learn from neuroscience trainees, as well from each other. Our common purpose has been, through an extensive partnership, to bridge the arts and the neurosciences in order to generate conversation, to discover similarities, and to respect differences.

The *Convergence, Perceptions of Neuroscience* initiative also generated a new course within the Faculty of Fine Arts that connected our students to the neuroscientists and the neuroscience organizations surrounding the project. This three-credit course (Independent Studies DART 461) set the formal frame for some of our most talented and ambitious students to participate. In our first semester, the class received extensive interest (85 students) with 20 selected individuals being chosen to take part. Those 20 students were then paired with 16 neuroscience trainees in the BRaIN Program.

The work hosted by *Convergence, Perceptions of Neuroscience* set out the framework for public dissemination. Under Dr. Zaelzer’s direction the initiative produced four different events, two dedicated to the teaching of the neurosciences to art students, and two devoted to the teaching of contemporary art concepts and practices to the neuroscientists. I was impressed that all four these events were open to, and attended by, the general public. The two neuroscience events were launched with the help of an extensive network of volunteers from the RI-MUHC. The trainees developed talks that transferred neuroscience knowledge to my students in a simple and exciting way. This experience also profited the trainees in helping them share their ideas and projects to audiences not familiar with current neuroscience research. Similar events were created at Concordia in which the arts students shared with the scientists their work and methodologies. These four collaborative investigations did not simply provide an experience to learn about diverse fields of inquiry and to share concepts between disciplines; it also provided my students with an opportunity to visit the laboratory environments where neuroscientists perform their daily research. Their research spaces—like the studios, workshops, and rehearsal halls where our students work—were opened to us to explore and learn how neuroscience research is performed. Throughout our partnership, *Convergence, Perceptions of Neuroscience*, emphasized how much *the students* were the key to bringing about better understandings between neuroscientists and artists, and how this understanding could, in turn, be communicated to larger, non-specialized communities.

Dr. Zaelzer has moved *Convergence* to a new level with his attentiveness and dedication. I often wonder how he contributes as many hours to the project as he does to his scientific career! The list of *Convergence* and Cristian's achievements born through the initiative is long but I would like to summarize just a few final points. He created and maintains the exceptionally dynamic *Convergence* website (www.convergenceinitiative.org) and also coordinates and continues the French translation of the website. He continues to establish links between other organizations interested in collaborating with *Convergence* and its mission.

Convergence coordinates and facilitates, as well, the collaboration of the news departments of the RIMUHC and Concordia University to give comprehensive coverage of the events developed by the initiative. It also established links to Visual Voice gallery and the Canadian Association of Neuroscience, which was fundamental for the final exhibitions where the results of this collaboration were presented to the public. The tremendous efforts nested in this initiative allowed more than one thousand people to become familiar with the complexities of neuroscience through the use of an emotional connection to it, the arts.

The work of *Convergence* has been presented in conferences (NeuGeneration 2017, 11th Annual Meeting of the Canadian Association for Neuroscience and soon, at the Annual Meeting of Society for Neuroscience). Discussions and commentary about the initiative have been broadcast on CBC Radio Canada, *Le Devoir*, *McGill Magazine*, Concordia's *The Link* and the *NOW* newsletter, the Montreal General Hospital Foundation website, and the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre website news. Additionally—and significantly—a beautiful catalog documenting the collaborative work that our teams completed during the DART 461 Winter 2017 semester was disseminated to the public in April and May of 2017.

I cannot think of a more suitable initiative than *Convergence, Perceptions of Neuroscience* for this prize, it will allow the work to continue and grow as we move forward. I remember receiving the first email from Dr. Zaelzer expressing interest in forming a partnership with the Faculty of Fine Arts under this project and I am astounded at how much we have already accomplished. With the energy that he has demonstrated and his genuine effort in continuing to grow the *Convergence* initiative, I am truly excited to see where this project will go next! Dr. Zaelzer is already full of ideas to make *Convergence* even more accessible to the public and we are pleased to continue to work with him on this exceptional endeavour.

Yours sincerely,



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