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May 23, 2017

Science Educator Award Committee  
Society for Neuroscience

Dear Selection Committee,

It is with great pleasure that I provide a letter of support for Dr. Cristian Zaelzer-Pérez who has been nominated for the Science Educator Award supported by The Dana Foundation. I have known Cristian since 2009 and over the years have been thoroughly impressed with his creativity, skill, and motivation. I believe his nomination for a Science Educator Award is well-deserved considering he is one of those rare, multi-talented individuals that have made a far-reaching impact in both neuroscience research and outreach activities.

I believe a large part of Cristian's success stems from his diverse training history and exposure to various cultures and scientific environments. Cristian was born in Chile and pursued training in graphic design (Temuco, Chile) and an undergraduate degree in Medical Technology at the Universidad Austral de Chile (Valdivia, Chile). Following this, he pursued a Ph.D. degree in molecular biology and biochemistry where he performed beautiful work related to the structure and biophysics of TRP and BK channels under the guidance of Dr. Ramon Latorre (Universidad Austral de Chile) and Dr. Francisco Bezanilla (University of Chicago). In 2009, Cristian moved to McGill University in Canada to work with Dr. Charles Bourque in the field of brain circuitry and osmoregulation. There he applied advanced neurophysiological approaches to dissect the role of TRPV channels in the detection of body temperature and osmotic stress. Cristian's research is of the highest quality and impact and this is reflected by publications in top-notch journals including Cell Reports, PNAS, Science, and Nature. His research accomplishments have not gone unnoticed, as he has been the recipient of numerous recognitions including a graduate fellowship from the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research and a BrainStar Award given by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

Along with being an outstanding scientist with a diverse training background, Cristian has shown tremendous passion for neuroscience outreach and public communication. In his spare time over the last several years, Cristian has developed an extraordinary outreach program called *Convergence, Perceptions of Neuroscience* (**[convergenceinitiative.org](http://convergenceinitiative.org)**). In 2016, Cristian launched the initiative with the support of several major partners including the Brain Repair and Integrative Neuroscience Program at the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (~130 faculty and their research programs), the Concordia University Faculty of Fine Arts, and the Canadian Association for Neuroscience (>1000 members).

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*Convergence* is a remarkable transdisciplinary collaboration between scientists and artists and reflects upon the origins of neuroscience where pioneers in the field over 100 years ago applied their artistic abilities to capture and convey discoveries about the brain. Under Cristian's leadership, *Convergence* is serving to unite neuroscientists doing cutting-edge research with talented artists from Concordia University, allowing them to work side-by-side and learn from each other. This initiative provides a novel milieu for artists and scientists to apply their knowledge, creativity, and skill. Importantly, *Convergence* is breaking down barriers between disciplines while enabling better communication about the benefits of neuroscience research for society. *Convergence* has led to the formation of a 3-unit course at Concordia University (DART461) and over 25 major events including laboratory and art studio visits, public lectures, and formal presentations. With this, Cristian has given interviews (i.e. CBC Radio, Le Devoir) and special lectures (Science and You Conference and The Canadian Association for Neuroscience Meeting), and has participated in numerous workshop/teaching engagements. This year's *Convergence* initiative will culminate in a public presentation and exhibition of neuroscience and art at the Grande Library in Montreal, a month-long exposé at a downtown art gallery in Montreal (Virtual Voice Gallery), and exhibition at the Canadian Association for Neuroscience Meeting with >1000 attendees. With *Convergence*, Cristian has shown immense creativity and endless energy to build a highly impactful public outreach initiative. Cristian's kind personality and deep dedication has been instrumental in fostering collaborations and building key relationships that have led to the success of *Convergence*. Importantly, *Convergence* is a rapidly growing and evolving initiative that promises to be even more successful next year.

In summary, I have been very fortunate to interact with Cristian in both research and scientific outreach. He is an exceptional colleague that is much more than a scientist. He thinks outside-the-box and is continuously engaging new opportunities for scientific outreach. I believe he is truly deserving of the Science Educator Award and I have no doubt that Cristian will continue to make key discoveries in neuroscience research while transforming how the public understands and perceives the role of science in society.

Sincerely,



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