

## Society of Young Neuroscientists and Professors of the South East

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In June of 2001 Project Kaleidoscope in partnership with the Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience (FUN) hosted a three-day conference for neuroscientist who teach and conduct research at primarily undergraduate institutions. Attending the conference was Cheryl Frye from the University of Albany-SUNY. Dr. Frye is a founding member of the Northeast Undergraduate Research Organization for Neuroscience (N.E.U.R.O.N.), which is supported by NIH. At Dr. Frye's urging, an organizing committee formed to consider ways to bring a similar meeting to students who live within the Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic regions of the U.S. The organizing committee consisted of Louise Freeman (Mary Baldwin College), Judy Grisell (Furman University), Michael Kerchner (Washington College), Barbara Lom (Davidson College) and Sherry Serdikoff, Corey Cleland and Cheryl Talley from James Madison University.

The meeting was named SYNAPSE (Society of Young Neuroscientists and Professors of the South East). SYNAPSE was intended to reach students from as far north as Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania and as far south as Spelman College in Atlanta, GA. The primary goal was to encourage undergraduate students to seek post-graduate study in Neuroscience-related fields. To that end, SYNAPSE planned to sponsor an annual one-day meeting held in the late spring. The meeting would provide undergraduates with a forum to showcase their research, network with other researchers and to hear a keynote speaker of significant prominence. The meeting was to annually rotate between southern and northern locations within the region but to remain accessible within an eight-hour drive from any of the institutions within the consortium.

Inspired by the success of N.E.U.R.O.N., the organizing consortium invited over 100 institutions to participate. An additional goal of this project is to provide these faculty members with the opportunity to network, solicit graduate students and to attend workshops primarily designed for scientist that mentor undergraduates in research.

In June of 2002 a proposal was submitted to NIH for a R-13 conference grant. The proposal was not funded. However, members of the organizing committee immediately began to plan a smaller conference that could be supported by the registration fees and perhaps donations from the host institution. The conference plan written in the original proposal provided the action steps for what was to become the first annual SYNAPSE meeting that was hosted by James Madison University, May 3-4, 2003.

The meeting started with a "Pre-synaptic Pizza Event" on Friday night. Early arrivers had opportunity to meet and to mingle around pizza and soda. The Conference started at 10:00 on Saturday. There were a total of 94 registrants. The registrants came from six other Virginia Institutions (Mary Baldwin College, The College of William and Mary, Mary Washington College, University of Virginia, Liberty University and Old Dominion University) two schools in South Carolina (Furman University, and University of South Carolina), Davidson College in North Carolina, Washington College in

Maryland and Lafayette College in Pennsylvania. Funding for the Keynote speaker was provided by the JMU College of Science and Mathematics. The registration fees (\$15 for faculty, \$10 for student) defrayed the cost of lunch and afternoon snacks. The conference took place at the new James Madison University Conference Center. The Keynote address and lunch were held in adjoining ballrooms. The poster sessions took place in the grand foyer where big windows allowed lots of natural light.

The day began with opening remarks and a drawing for door prizes donated from Sinaur Publishers and FUN (Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience). The Associate Dean of the JMU College of Integrated Science and Technology delivered a welcome. The College provided the registration packets and provided administrative support for the conference. The poster presenters were assigned morning or afternoon sessions. The sessions were 1 ½ hour each. Each faculty member received poster assignments upon registration to assure that each presenter received visits from interested faculty.

As conference attendees entered the room for lunch they were instructed to bring their plates to a workshop table. The workshop facilitators sat at tables of 8-10 students. Workshop Number 1 was "Life as a first year graduate student in Neuroscience" The facilitator was a first year graduate student in the Neuroscience Program at UVA. Other workshops were: "Paying for your Graduate Education- Fellowships and Scholarships," "Applying for Fellowships as an Undergraduate," "Choosing a Graduate Program," "Graduate Advisor, Friend or Foe," "Working as a research technician instead of or before graduate school," "Life after Graduate School," and "Fraud."

Following the afternoon poster session, the keynote speaker, Michael Menaker from UVA delivered a research talk "Do living things predict the future." The meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Evaluations of the meeting will be analyzed and included in the re-submission of the R-13 conference for 2004. The steering committee will also consider the comments and suggestions while planning next year's meeting. The general consensus was that the meeting went extremely well and was relatively well attended for a first-time event. The enthusiasm of the students and the quality of the work they presented proves that a regional undergraduate Neuroscience conference is a good idea.