

Synapshot

FALL 2025

DEPARTMENT OF NEUROSCIENCE_CSH

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A message from the Department Chair

Welcome to the first edition of the Neuroscience Newsletter! I'm so excited to share with you all of the wonderful things that are happening in the Neuroscience Department. In this issue you'll learn about the history of Neuroscience at DePaul; how we started first as concentrations in Biology and Psychology then as a major and now an official department. As someone who was a part of the evolution of Neuroscience at DePaul, it is so humbling and gratifying to see how far we have come and how the interest in this field just continues to grow!

In this newsletter you'll also be introduced to (or be reacquainted with) our current faculty and staff who will share their current projects and publications. Our faculty are doing incredible work in their labs and publishing books and our staff are truly remarkable in how hard they work to build community and support student success! You'll also be introduced to some of our current neuroscience majors and one of our alumni who was recently named as the Early Career College of Science and Health Alumni Achievement Award winner.

Lastly, we'll share with you some of the new and exciting work we are doing to connect with Chicago and to encourage and foster student success.

We hope you enjoy this inaugural issue of our newsletter.



Dorothy Kozlowski, PhD

Chair and Vincent de Paul Professor
Department of Neuroscience
College of Science and Health

Neuroscience has come a long way!

Neuroscience first started as a concentration in 2009 then became a major in 2016 and is now a Department! Learn about the evolution of Neuroscience at DePaul.

Understanding the complexities of the human brain has long been a subject of fascination, studied by individuals in fields as disparate as philosophy and physiology. The field of neuroscience itself is comparably new and has emerged as a rapidly growing area of study. Students at DePaul could first identify as someone interested in Neuroscience in 2009, when Drs. Dorothy Kozlowski and Sandra Virtue first created concentrations in neuroscience for Biology and Psychology majors. These became very popular and soon students were asking why they couldn't major in the discipline. This led to the development of the interdisciplinary Neuroscience program in 2016. The program was created by an interdisciplinary team of faculty from Biology, Psychology, Philosophy and Computer Science. These faculty taught courses in Neuroscience and also acted as its governing body. Over time, the Neuroscience Program grew and functioned as any other Department on campus which led us to request that we be considered a formal Department. On

July 1, 2024, it was recognized as the new Department of Neuroscience in the College of Science and Health with Dr. Dorothy Kozlowski serving as its Chair.

The Department of Neuroscience was established July 1, 2024.

Neuroscience majors learn the workings of the nervous system at both the cellular and molecular levels, and also explore how it generates behavior and cognition. Additionally, they learn the important role of computer science and mathematics in developing new technologies and therapies, making it highly relevant in today's evolving technological landscape. Students can choose concentrations in each of these areas, depending on what interests them most.

Many Neuroscience majors are interested in pursuing careers in the health sciences. Therefore, a new pre-health concentration was added last year which

was then used to create early opportunity programs with Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science. Students have the option of 3+ [accelerated programs](#) in Physical Therapy and Physician Assistant professional programs. There is now also an accelerated program for neuroscience majors who are interested in becoming an Occupational Therapist with DePaul's MS program in Occupational Therapy.

Accelerated Programs in Health Professions are now available.

Neuroscience is also now available to pursue as a minor for students in other related fields such as philosophy, computer science or marketing where neuroscience knowledge is becoming important to fields such as ethics, artificial intelligence and business.

Becoming a department also allowed Neuroscience to establish a physical space on campus. We were allocated a suite of offices in McGowan North which have become a hub of activity for faculty, staff, and Neuroscience students. The "Neuroscience Suite" has provided us a great space to come together in community. Every quarter this space is home to an event where students, faculty and staff come together for conversation, food, games, stickers, tattoos, and of course relaxing activities such as coloring. We hope the next time you're on campus you'll pay us a visit - McGowan North 125.

Neuroscience at DePaul has truly come a long way. However, we're not finished yet! We look forward to evolving and growing to serve all our students curious about the nervous system.



Neuroscience Suite Ribbon Cutting. L-R Dr. Eric Norstrom (NEU), Dean Stephanie Dance-Barnes, President Rob Manual, Dr. Dorothy Kozlowski (NEU), Dr. Sandra Virtue (NEU/PSY), Provost Salma Ghanem, Jaimie Engle (NEU Student Success Coordinator); & Dr. Okunola Jeyifous (NEU).

Meet the Faculty

Okunola Jeyifous

Dr. Jeyifous (Dr. J) teaches Intro to Neuroscience, Neuro Research Methods, Conversations with Neuroscientists and Cellular Basis of Learning and Memory. His research focuses on the cell biology



of synaptic plasticity. Current projects examine (1) the role of the secretory pathway in regulating different forms of synaptic plasticity and neuronal pathophysiology, (2) the cellular mechanisms underlying nicotine addiction and (3) the development of fluorescence-based assays and reagents to visualize neuronal transmission. What he enjoys most about neuroscience is that the tools we use to study the brain are constantly evolving, which leads to new mechanistic insights and compels us to continually refine our working models. It makes the field both dynamic and deeply stimulating. Dr. J's recent achievements include receiving the 2025 CSH Faculty Mentor of the Year Award, being nominated for the 2025 Excellence in Teaching Awards and serving as Co-organizer and Co-host of the 2025 Annual Chicago Brain Bee hosted at DePaul.



Dorothy Kozlowski

Dr. Kozlowski (Dr. K.) is a professor and Chair of the Neuroscience Department. She teaches Sensory Neuroscience, the Neuroscience Capstone and Neuroscience Research Methods. Her research focuses on understanding traumatic brain injury, focusing on survivors of intimate partner violence in the last

few years. She recently received a grant from the Michael Reese Health Trust to examine medical records from Chicago hospitals to learn more about the impact of brain injury in survivors and how best to create pathways for health services for them. She was recently acknowledged as one of the [Illinois Researchers to Know](#). Her favorite thing about Neuroscience is that there is still so much that we don't know!

Austin Lim

Dr. Lim teaches courses such as The Brain Through Science Fiction, Introduction to Neuroscience, Seminar in Neuropsychopharmacology and the Neuroscience of Movement. His research interests include movement disorders, such as Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases. Dr. Lim's passion in neuroscience started with learning about the memory deficits of Patient HM. Since then, he has become



fascinated by case studies of people with unusual conditions: people who hear colors, people who can't see faces, people with exceptional memories and the many others with highly unique brains. A recent achievement was the publication of [Horror on the Brain: The Neuroscience Behind Science Fiction](#) published by Globe Pequot.

Eric Norstrom

Dr. Norstrom teaches Cellular Neuroscience, Advanced Neuro Fundamentals, From Music to Mind: The Neuroscience of Music and Neurobiology of Music. His research includes exploring the



toxicity of metabolic fragments of a protein involved in Alzheimer's disease. The fragments may have been missed in previous research because they're an intermediate step to the more famous amyloid beta peptides. His lab is currently assessing whether they can reliably induce cellular toxicity with these metabolites. He's also starting a project assessing the possibility of establishing "perfect pitch" by combining auditory stimuli. Dr. Norstrom's favorite thing about neuroscience is the new discoveries happening every day. "It's a dynamic and young science that has massive potential for helping humanity face its toughest challenges." Dr. Norstrom recently received a University Research Council grant.



Sandra Virtue

Dr. Virtue is a professor in both the Neuroscience & Psychology departments. She teaches the Neuroscience Capstone and Physiological Psychology. She is working on a variety of research projects that investigate how the brain processes different types of language. For example, she is currently

examining how trademarks are processed, how nonliteral language influences believability of conspiracy theories, how individuals process both emojis and text, and how people solve anagrams. Her favorite thing about neuroscience is how the field is always making new exciting discoveries—reading and learning about new Neuroscience research is always one of her favorite things to do! She just published a new ERP study that investigates how readers process different types of inferences in the brain.

The Neuroscience Department also has affiliated faculty in other departments who teach or do research on Neuroscience. You can learn more about them on our [faculty and staff page](#).

Meet The Staff

Jaimie Engle

Getting to know the Neuro Student Success Coordinator

What is your role in the NEU Department?

Administrator and Student Success Coordinator

What do you enjoy about working with Neuroscience students (and faculty)?

I enjoy facilitating connections between students, staff and faculty. Sense of belonging is so important for student success, so we pride ourselves in having such a fun and welcoming Neuro community! I love seeing students take their connections outside of the classroom. I also enjoy how much fun we have mingling in the Neuro Suite. It's not uncommon to see students, staff, and faculty engaging in conversation and lots of laughs.

Awards and acknowledgments:

I've received Staff Recognition Awards from each supervisor I've had since joining DePaul in 2019. I'm very involved in the Global Association for Academic Advising (NACADA) and the Illinois Academic Advising Association (ILACADA). I've presented multiple times at conferences for each, including a collaboration with Neuro Academic Advisor, Sarah Finck, entitled: *Revelio: Student Success Barriers for Muggles and Wizards Alike*. I serve as Webmaster for ILACADA and am a Past President. I also chaired the 2025 NACADA Region 5 conference and am a past Region 5 Chair.

What is something you'd like to share about yourself?

I'm from a tiny town called Golden Eagle, on the southernmost tip of the Calhoun County, IL peninsula. Surrounded by the Mississippi and Illinois rivers, I grew up taking ferry boats to get out of the county for things like grocery shopping, doctors appointments, work, etc. I love re-reading and re-watching the Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter and Game of Thrones. I also fish and watch and play golf.



Sarah Finck

Getting to know the Neuro Academic Advisor

What is your role in the NEU Department?

Academic advisor (official job title is Assistant Director of Advising)

What do you enjoy about working with Neuroscience students (and faculty)?

My favorite thing about working with neuroscience students is the curiosity that they all have. As someone with no background in the field, I love hearing discussions between faculty and students where you can see the students making connections between what they're learning in classes and how that may be applicable to real world things. In my role, I love seeing students' "ah-ha" moment where something clicks for them and they feel passionate and connected to what they're learning and where they're going. It's very fulfilling to be a part of their journey.

Awards and acknowledgments:

Outstanding Academic Advisor in 2024, presented by the Illinois Academic Advising Association.

What is something you'd like to share about yourself?

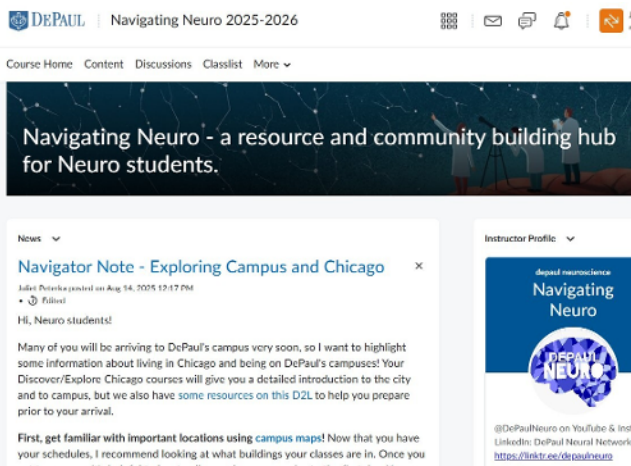
My passions outside of work include reading, traveling, and spending time with loved ones. I've had the privilege to visit eight countries (and counting!) across three continents. I also read on average about 40-50 books per year. Getting to experience the world through these different lenses drives me to be a better, more considerate person for those around me and in particular the students I work with. I hope that my lived experiences are helpful when it comes to advising neuroscience students, even though I couldn't tell you the difference between grey matter and white matter.



The Navigating Neuro Initiative

A head start for incoming Neuro students

In summer 2023, Neuroscience received a grant from DePaul's Vincentian Endowment Fund to support a new initiative called "Navigating Neuro." The idea was to give incoming Neuro students a head start at learning how to navigate resources and begin building community before beginning their first year at DePaul. Using DePaul's learning management system, D2L, Neuroscience Administrator and Student Success Coordinator, Jaimie Engle, built the first Navigating Neuro D2L site.



Getting a head start

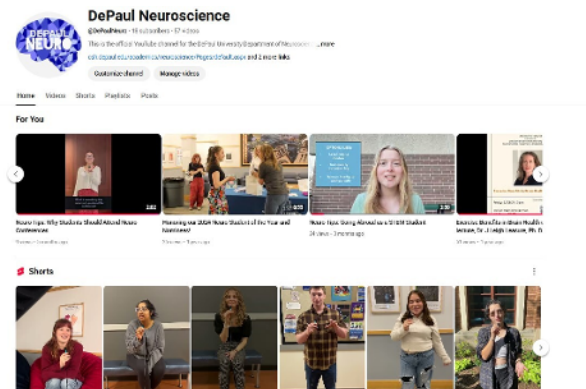
The site was designed with the intent of giving students a good starting point with common resources and questions, without reinventing the wheel. To help familiarize students with who and where we are, we've included brief introduction videos from Neuro staff and faculty, as well as campus maps and 360 virtual tours of Neuro spaces. There are additional modules focused on Getting Involved, Academic Requirement Information, Academic Success Skills, Managing Stress, Neuro Career Exploration and Getting into Research.

Current students as "Neuro Navigators"

Three current students were hired to serve as "Neuro Navigators" -- peer mentors who shared information and invaluable advice based on their own experiences navigating life as a DePaul Neuroscience major. Over the summer, the students facilitated community-building through discussion board forums on the D2L site and then through low-stakes socializing events during the academic year.



They were also tasked with creating asynchronous content such as slideshows and videos that students could access at any time to learn about a variety of relevant topics. Videos like "Studying Abroad as a STEM Student," "Using Professor Office Hours," "Accessing DePaul Counseling Services," and much more have shed light on resources and experiences that can sometimes seem mystifying. Because the content these students created was so useful, we decided it needed to be shared beyond just our incoming students, so we created the @DePaulNeuro YouTube channel!



Navigating success

Now in its 3rd year, 75% of our students are in a Navigating Neuro cohort. Though participation is not required, we are pleased with the voluntary engagement from many of our students. Those that have taken advantage of the site resources have reaped the benefits of greater resiliency, sense of belonging and securing coveted department opportunities like getting into research. All because they got a bit of a head start! Navigating Neuro will continue to grow and adapt as needed to best serve our students, and will remain an integral part of the Neuro department's student success initiatives.

Alumni Spotlight:

Dr. Taylor Schmitt, Class of 2015

Championing neuropsychology, equity, and student empowerment, Dr. Taylor Schmitt was the inaugural recipient of the College of Science and Health Early Career Alumni Achievement Award.

Dr. Taylor Schmitt (née Greif), recipient of DePaul's Early Career Alumni Achievement Award, is a shining example of what it means to live the university's mission. A 2015 graduate with a Psychology major and Cognitive Neuroscience concentration, Dr. Schmitt stood out early for her academic excellence and leadership. As an undergraduate, she co-founded DePaul's chapter of the Sports Legacy Institute Community Educators (SLICE), training peers to deliver concussion education to underserved middle schools and presenting her research at national conferences.

After earning her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Saint Louis University, Dr. Schmitt completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan, where she now serves as a Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and practicing neuropsychologist. Her scholarly contributions include 13 peer-reviewed publications, 30 conference presentations and successful grant writing.

Dr. Schmitt is also the founder of New2Neuropsychology (N2N), a national initiative supporting

underrepresented students in neuropsychology. In just three years, N2N has reached over 550 students across 27 institutions and distributed \$84,000 in scholarships in partnership with the American Academy of Clinical Neuropsychology.

Dr Schmitt says "My neuroscience education, research, and leadership experiences at DePaul laid the foundation for my path to becoming a clinical neuropsychologist. Working in Dr. Kozlowski's neuroscience lab and the SLICE concussion education program equipped me both with critical research skills and a passion for community outreach—both of which directly shaped my development of New2Neuropsychology (N2N). DePaul's mission of socially responsible leadership continues to guide my efforts to advance equity and education in the field of neuropsychology."

Dr. Schmitt continues to inspire DePaul students, faculty and staff through her mentorship, research and unwavering commitment to inclusion.



Dr. Schmitt pictured with her award at the autumn 2024 CSH Alumni Reception at the W Chicago.

CSH Alumni Awards

The Early Career College of Science and Health Alumni Achievement Award recognizes the accomplishments of alumni who have completed their degrees within the past ten years. These individuals have demonstrated promise in their professional fields and a dedication to community service in both their personal and professional lives. This award highlights their early professional achievements and their continued commitment to advancing scientific knowledge and health practices.

For more information about this award and the other CSH Alumni awards, and to nominate, please [click here](#).

Student Spotlights

Future neuroscientists making their mark

We have an excellent community here in DePaul Neuroscience, so we wanted to share the experiences of some of our most involved students. We asked them to share why they chose Neuro, what their favorite Neuro class has been so far and what have been their most impactful experiences. Here's what they had to say.



Ash Duffee

I wanted to understand why humans think, feel, and behave the way we do. With its wide range of topics to explore and the many unanswered questions, I can't help but be drawn to the field.

My favorite class so far was Neuroscience research methods, which pushed me towards wanting to pursue a career in research, and I later served as a TA for the course.

Currently, I am the president of the Neuro Club, treasurer of Nu Rho Psi and a volunteer for the Chicago Council on Science and Technology (C2ST). I also designed the new DePaul Neuro logo! The most meaningful experience has been joining the Jeyifous Lab, where I study the cellular and molecular mechanisms underlying learning and memory. I am honored to have received two grants to support the development of an independent research project, and I'll hopefully be presenting at the 2026 SfN annual meeting!



Ravinder Singh

I'm extremely passionate about mental health, and have had an interest in understanding how certain actions/ behaviors are processed in the brain.

Neuropsychopharmacology connected with my interests in Chemistry and provided a deeper understanding of the different uses of drugs as well as the mechanisms behind different drugs of abuse.

Joining a research lab, being President of Students Against Incarceration, being a Neuro Navigator and being a Hay Scholar through the William E. Hay Leadership Accelerator. In particular, being a Neuro Navigator was one of my favorite experiences in Neuro as it helped to connect me with so many different students, and provided an opportunity for me to share some of my experiences at DePaul. I enjoyed getting to interact with incoming Neuro students before the first week of classes, and loved hearing about the different experiences Neuro students had through the year or during their time in Neuro.



Juliet Peterka

I chose to study neuroscience because it connects all aspects of human experience, and I'm also passionate about treating neurodegenerative diseases and chronic pain. A research-oriented career path appeals to me since it allows for constant curiosity and inventiveness!

Cellular Mechanisms of Learning and Memory, was my favorite class since we dove deeply into one topic using mostly primary journal articles.

I participated in summer research in Dr. Jeyifous's lab at DePaul (2023) and Dr. Lam's lab at Medical College of Wisconsin (2024). Both experiences helped me practice designing experiments, which greatly impacted my critical scientific thinking. They led me to return to Dr. Jeyifous's lab this summer to complete an Honors Thesis on the effects of hypoxia on Golgi Satellites. Outside of research, I work as a Neuro Navigator to provide peer support to incoming Neuro students! I also studied abroad in Chile last fall, and I'm passionate about increasing study abroad opportunities for STEM students.

2025 Annual Chicago Brain Bee

On a cold Saturday in early February, DePaul Neuroscience proudly hosted the 2025 Chicago Brain Bee - a competition for high school students that tests their knowledge of neuroscience in a fun and engaging way.

Organized by Assistant Professor, Dr. Okunola Jeyifous, with support from Department Chair, Dr. Dorothy Kozlowski, Department Administrator & Student Success Coordinator, Jaimie Engle, and 15 neuroscience student volunteers, the event was co-sponsored by the [Society for Neuroscience Chicago Chapter](#). Previously hosted by Lake Forest College, and Loyola University, this is the 1st year that DePaul hosted the event, which rotates among various Chicago universities who are members of the [Chicago Society for Neuroscience](#).

There were 44 contestants from 14 area high schools, joined by some of their teachers and family members. The event kicked off with a 40-question qualifying exam for participants, based on the "Brain Facts" book. The 10 participants with the highest exam scores were selected to participate in the main event. Armed with dry erase boards, markers, and a wealth of brain facts, they were asked a series of questions in an elimination style-format, until the last remaining participant was crowned as the winner. Manu Gadhiraaju from Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy took 1st place. Ira Sidhani from Adlai E. Stevenson High School took 2nd place and Natalie Geenen from Northside College Prep took 3rd place (Natalie's 2nd year in a row in the top 3!) The top 3 were honored with certificates, DePaul

Neuro t-shirts and cash prizes from the Chicago Society for Neuroscience. Manu went on to compete in the [USA Brain Bee](#) (at Rutgers in May 2025) and attended the Chicago Society for Neuroscience Annual Meeting in March.

In addition to participating in the Bee, participants and guests had an opportunity to learn more about DePaul Neuroscience from Chair, Dr. Dorothy Kozlowski, who presented an overview of the department, including major concentration options, interesting electives, impactful support resources and exciting research being done by DePaul Neuro faculty. Two current DePaul Neuro students - Juliet Peterka and Niki Alyari spoke about why they chose DePaul, how they became interested in Neuro, clubs and activities they're involved in, experience they've gained as research and teaching assistants and how they organize and manage their time and commitments. Dr. Okunola Jeyifous spoke about his scientific and academic journey, the courses he teaches and the important research going on in his lab. Parents and guests also attended an informational session hosted by DePaul University Admissions.

The commitment and preparation that goes into participating in the Brain Bee showcases how this competition not only promotes academic excellence but also



sparks a genuine passion for neuroscience. It also highlights the invaluable partnerships between higher education institutions and public schools, which cultivate the next generation of neuroscientists, physicians and clinicians.

Your support can make a difference in advancing neuroscience education at DePaul University. To learn more about how you can contribute to the future of neuroscience, visit the [Fund for Neuroscience](#).

DePaul will host the Brain Bee again in February 2026.



Brain Bee Winner Competes at USA Brain Bee

Manu Gadhiraaju represented Chicago in the USA Brain Bee at Rutgers University on May 3, 2025. In addition to material he learned for the Chicago Brain Bee, Manu needed to learn Human Neuroanatomy and Neurohistology. A neuroscience major, Grant VanderKlipp tutored Manu ahead of the competition. Although Manu did not place in the top 10, he stated that "I had a great time at the national brain bee and learned so much...I want to pay it forward...and would love to help the next National Brain bee participant prepare". Manu is pictured with the founder of the USA and International Brain Bees Dr. Norbert Myslinski.

Thank you for your interest!

Please use the links below to learn more about DePaul's Department of Neuroscience and to provide support for our students, research, and initiatives.

[about us](#)

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If you prefer, you may send a check addressed to DePaul University with the **"FUND FOR NEUROSCIENCE"** in the memo line and mail it to:

DePaul University
1 E. Jackson Blvd
Chicago, IL 60604

You can also engage with us on social media.

