

VRN Reviews Neuroscience at Vanderbilt

The last three years have witnessed a huge change in the administration of our Vanderbilt Brain Institute: from founder Elaine Sanders-Bush's retirement as Director, to Randy Blakely's interim directorship and pseudo-co-appointment as Director of Graduate Studies in Neuroscience, to Lou DeFilice's appointment as full DGS until his departure this past fall, to the selection of Mark Wallace as our permanent VBI Director and his appointment of Doug McMahon—whose primary appointment is in the College of Arts and Sciences—to our current DGS, and finally the departure of Assistant Director for Education Mary Early-Zald this very month. Were you able to follow? Don't worry, the Institute and its core Program are and always have been in good and capable hands. Chalk it up to growing pains in a young program. These changes are expected, or even essential in taking a very good program and making it great. But we should not be content to think that the Vanderbilt Brain Institute and its component programs are collectively *one of the best* in the nation, rather we must strive to be *the best*. To this end, we must realize that our program is beginning to enter a middle-age of sorts: no longer can the sole focus be on graduate education—financial development, community involvement and intra-/inter-collegiate collaboration must play a more prominent role in furtherance of the VBI's mission. Moreover, being *the best* does not consist solely of publications, lab funding and academic achievement—instead, we must strive to find novel and exciting ways to consolidate the greater Vanderbilt Neuroscience community and have our voices heard.

This journal, appropriately dubbed *Vanderbilt Reviews Neuroscience*, is hopefully a step in that direction. The idea came from many sources. First, there are the prestigious law journals that rule legal academics. As a highly motivated student at any given law school in the country, you would likely wish to publish your work in an exalted journal like the *Yale Law Review*, or the *Harvard Law Review* or even the *Vanderbilt Law Review*. Institutionally published journals are not only common in legal academia, they are the norm. Why isn't scientific publishing the same way? That question brings me to inspirational source #2: four years ago, two enterprising Vanderbilt undergraduates named Warren Langevin '07 and Noah Clemons '05 founded the *Vanderbilt Undergraduate Research Journal (VURJ)* as an open-source mechanism for anybody at Vanderbilt to be "published." I personally joined on as one of the founding editorial reviewers probably with hopes as high as Warren and Noah. I thought the journal was a great idea, and it stands as one of the key elements in founding this journal, but unfortunately it has not prospered in the biological sciences the way we had hoped (1 paper in the four issues to date). For one, the name is somewhat restrictive: if you're not an undergrad, why would you want to send a paper out to a journal with the "Undergraduate" distinction in the name? Secondly, as a graduate student, one is not going to essentially waste his/her hard work that could eventually be published elsewhere by placing it in an in-house journal. Third, submitting any paper involves work...unless it's already written and going to waste! While I admire the *VURJ* and its loyal team (of which I am still enthusiastically a part), *Vanderbilt Reviews Neuroscience* has one huge advantage that they do not have, the third great inspiration: 5-page reviews are already required by the program as part of the doctoral candidate qualifying process. Furthermore, peer review is done by the faculty and the graduate student reviews must be deemed exceptional to even pass the first phase of the qualifying exam. But after all the blood, sweat and tears spilled in the creation of these fine documents, they are allowed to waste. This journal puts an end to that by compiling them all, as a single qualifying class, into one volume of which the students and the Program may be proud. The fourth and final inspiration for this journal is its utility as a recruiting tool—for both students *and* faculty. It is our hope that this journal will be our voice in the competitive world of scholarly work, a novel mechanism by which Vanderbilt makes its mark even bigger. Many, including myself, like to brag that we are *not* the "Harvard of the South," they are the "Vanderbilt of the North." To conclude a paragraph that is entirely too long, I hope the graduate students featured in this, the first of what will hopefully be an annual volume, are proud of their work, and eager to continue contributing to our neuroscience community.

One final comment to get the reader pumped-up: naming the journal *Vanderbilt Reviews Neuroscience* may seem not only obvious, but hypocritical given the criticism of the *VURJ* for being too restrictive. This may be true, but the VBI is laying claim to the "*Vanderbilt Reviews*" part of the name. If it's successful, maybe we'll let the Pharmacology Department use the title when they try to catch up to us!

What's next for Vanderbilt Neuroscience? A lot can happen in a year...

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