

## **VRN starts trouble and gets a makeover at 1-year-old**

The release of the inaugural volume of *Vanderbilt Reviews Neuroscience* was widely hailed by the Vanderbilt University Neuroscience community as a success—in some cases surprising people in regards to the quality of the work presented, and how the journal was constructed. I was personally quite pleased with the results and, for the most part, how it was received.

Its publication did, however, raise some interesting concerns within the community that—as with any new venture—were difficult to predict. One of the first concerns was about the role of dissertation advisors in the authorship and publication of the doctoral qualifying review articles. It has long been the policy of the Neuroscience Graduate Program that the Phase I qualifying review was to be written by the student alone—with no input from the advisor. However, when I was first reformatting these reviews for the journal, I not only included the advisor's name on publication, but also made the advisor the corresponding author. I didn't think much of this arrangement, since it is somewhat conventional, but then I received an email from a student questioning why his advisor was the corresponding author and not him. At first, I made the mistake of feeling that this concern was trivial, but it turns out that this student was not alone. I discussed the issue briefly with Mark Wallace, and decided to make students the contact for the review while leaving the advisor as the final author.

This move sparked some debate among the faculty on two fronts: first, if the students were expected to write the entire review by themselves without any input from their mentors, should the advisors be listed as authors at all? Second, is this policy of faculty non-interference even good for the program and its trainees? To the former concerns, *VRN* has changed its policy on authorship: the reader will find that research advisors are not listed as authors in this volume. While this reflects the situation surrounding most of the reviews, I am aware of some that were indeed edited by the trainee's advisor after s/he passed for the purposes of publication in this journal. I feel that this new policy will need to be updated as VBI policy changes. To the latter concern, the Vanderbilt Brain Institute and the committees advising it on the Neuroscience Graduate Program have begun to reconsider the policy of non-interference. Since I was on the Curriculum Committee in 2006, I've been trying to argue to the powers-that-be that the whole point of this review is to make students better writers. Of course, the advisor can't be allowed to write the review for the student, but how is the trainee supposed to learn good writing if those that know how to write effectively can't critique it? It is the view of the *VRN* editorial board that this policy needs to be changed for the good of the program and its students.

A second major criticism of the journal was its policy on publication. Upon founding the journal, we toyed with the idea of actually registering and indexing this journal and its contents so that it is searchable on PubMed and the like in order to instill enthusiasm among the students. This idea was met with heavy criticism almost immediately. As I said at the time, I would hope that since the details on the project have still not been worked out—even among those involved—that nobody would have a strong opinion one way or another. That's rather shooting first and asking questions later—a methodology to which I do not ascribe.

A third major issue arising from the publication of the *VRN* was a concern for actual control of the journal. While it was not my intention at all, I was the sole editor of the 2009 volume. Understandably, more eyes on a publication are preferable. This year, two associate editors have signed-on (Mariam Eapen and Caleb Doll) to train for the top spot. However, the concerns were for a lack of faculty intervention in the publication process. The formation of a Faculty Review Board has been suggested by one of the neuroscience committees to augment the work and decisions being made by the editorial board. While I do not object to this idea, it must be clear that this journal is to be run primarily by the trainees, and the Editor-in-Chief must always be a trainee for the following reasons: 1. faculty have a tendency to make good ideas "requirements" of the program (i.e. forum, foundations, etc.) and make already established requirements more difficult; 2. as with most people, faculty tend to care more about their own work than work done for what they may view as a publication of little consequence. In contrast, the trainees will always look to lighten the load for fellow students in a qualifying process that is (whether the Program likes to admit it or not) already four grueling parts. The trainees will also care more about this journal than the faculty because it is for many their first real publication. This care and dedication to student and journal are what will keep the publication fresh and anything but "of little consequence."

Some changes the reader may find this year are the inclusion of reviews from various other, unpublished qualifying classes (2004-07) in addition to the entire 2009 qualifying class. This initiative was undertaken to recognize the best of what *VRN* missed in the past. Furthermore, the *VRN* website (<http://vrn.vanderbilt.edu>) is finally up-and-running thanks to the generous efforts of Aaron Nidiffer, who also designed Mark Wallace's lab website and redesigned the VBI site, which was sorely needed. Mr. Nidiffer also designed the logo that graces the cover of this volume.

On a personal note, I will be stepping down as Editor-in-Chief with the publication of this volume. While I plan to continue contributing to this endeavor, Mariam Eapen and Caleb Doll will take the *VRN* reins and keep it fresh in the years to come.

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