

## External Review Report of the Neuroscience Graduate Program

Site Visit February 26-27, 2024

### External Review Committee

Dr. Paul Albert, Chair, University of Ottawa

Dr. M. Natasha Rajah, Toronto Metropolitan University

Dr. Perry Howard, University of Victoria

### Executive Summary

The Neuroscience Graduate Program (NGP) at University of Victoria is a multidisciplinary graduate program that began in 2011 and offers M.Sc. and Ph.D. level degrees to students. The Division of Medical Sciences' Organizational chart (Appendix A of Report provided) indicates that NGP includes 6 Research Stream Faculty (Brown, Caruncho, Christie, Nahirney, Swayne, Tremblay) and 2 Teaching Stream Faculty (Gair, McBurney) from the Division. In addition, there are 6 additional NGP faculty members from other departments/divisions listed on the NGP website (Awatramani, Gawryluk, Krigolson, Nashmi, Willerth, Zehr) who also contributed to training within the NGP in previous years.

The Committee felt the quality of research and training provided by the NGP Faculty is excellent. The faculty are excellent. They are highly productive and conduct cutting edge neuroscience research. The trainees are committed, hard-working, and of the highest caliber. The Neuroscience Graduate Student Association (NGSA) deserves special recognition for its efforts in promoting and sustaining a strong sense of community and for providing excellent peer-to-peer support. Most recommendations made in the previous review of the NGP have been considered and effectively addressed including issues of student harassment, although continued vigilance is recommended. Some improvements need to be made to ensure that high quality teaching and research are sustained in future years; particularly considering the anticipated organizational changes shared with the committee.

### Recommendations

Curriculum Improvement: While it was recognized that the NGP offers high quality course content, several recommendations deal with improving the breadth, timetabling and content of NGP course offerings.

- Reconstitute a Teaching Committee composed of NGP Faculty to empower them to formulate course content, scheduling, and new course development. The committee should select a Graduate Advisor as Chair. This will help ensure high quality and consistency of course content tailored to the needs of NGP students, particularly for the Core course 500A.

- Provide more structure and organization in the delivery of graduate courses. It was found that course schedules were inconsistent, with variable content offered on different days, times and rooms. It is strongly recommended that all courses be timetabled and offered in a consistent manner. It was also recommended to improve the clarity of expectations and format of the Research Proposal and Transfer Forms and Procedures.
- Increase the quality and breadth of graduate course offerings. Offer courses on Experimental Design and/or Statistics, Cognitive Neuroscience, Histology Minicourse, Seminar with external speakers as part of the Seminar Course to enhance novelty and learning impact are recommended.
- Work towards reducing barriers to inter-faculty/departmental interactions and collaborations. It seems that DMS interaction with other groups are being cut off rather than expanded, this needs to be fixed in part by working with FGS to promote collaborative courses.

Future Growth of the NGP: The committee was impressed with the cohesiveness and motivation of NGP students, the excellence of the Faculty and overall high quality of their research. However, the labs are currently past capacity and offices insufficient for the number of students. Thus, steps to increase the infrastructure and space of NPG are recommended.

- Dedicate financial support for the maintenance of Core Equipment and staff, so these are not supported entirely by 'soft' (grant) funds. Increase transparency in decisions affecting student progress (space, animal approval, etc.).
- Ensure a smooth transition to the new Faculty of Health by: a) considering a name change (e.g. School of Neuroscience), b) identifying an interim Director by July 2024, c) begin an external search to hire a (new) Director for the DMS, d) ensure strong DMS faculty representation on the search committee for the new incoming Dean of Faculty of Health. Maintaining a strong NGP within the Faculty of Health is in UVic's best interests as this faculty and its graduate trainees are some of the best in Canada and elevate the reputation of the University nationally.
- Improve access to shared spaces with medical students and identify new lab, office and infrastructure space to support NGP growth.