



DEPARTMENT OF NEUROBIOLOGY & BEHAVIOR

Spring 2020 Newsletter

Message from the Chair

I am writing in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are all facing challenging times, but the University and the Department are working hard to protect our community's health, while continuing our educational and research mission. All the members of the Department are working remotely, keeping busy with online lectures, off-site research operations and departmental activities.

While we are, like many, worried about the current situation, we are adjusting to the ongoing challenges with determination, hard work, passion for science and glued by a strong sense of community.

The Winter and Spring have been busy!

Our students, postdocs and PIs continued to conduct impactful research and publish outstanding scientific results. The most recent article, just published in *Nature Communications* by the group of Dr. Wollmuth, identified a new potential therapeutic target for the nervous system dysfunctions observed in Lupus patients. The Department's [Center for Neural Circuit Dynamics](#) – a center bringing together theoretical, computational and systems neuroscientists – was awarded a prestigious NIH Brain Initiative U01 grant to study the coordination between populations of neurons in the brain of behaving animals. These two successes exemplify our commitment to advance research at the interface between basic neuroscience, medicine and computational sciences.

In the past months, we have been running two faculty searches that brought to campus a group of incredibly talented scientists. We co-hosted, together with Department's Center for Neural Circuit Dynamics and the Simons Center for Geometry and Physics, the [Physics of Neural Circuits and Network Dynamics Workshop](#) at the end of January. We also opened our Department (first physically and then virtually) to new perspective graduate students for this

year's recruitment season. Multiple events have been cancelled in response of the COVID-19 virus, including the Swartz Foundation's 24th Annual Mind Brain Lecture featuring Dr. Donald Katz from Brandeis University ("Constructing the World of Taste in Your Head" – view more [here](#)) and the Graduate Students' Spring Symposium in Neuroscience, a day of student talks, posters, and a keynote seminar by Dr. Arnold Kriegstein. While we don't know yet when campus will reopen, we look forward to re-scheduling these exciting events.

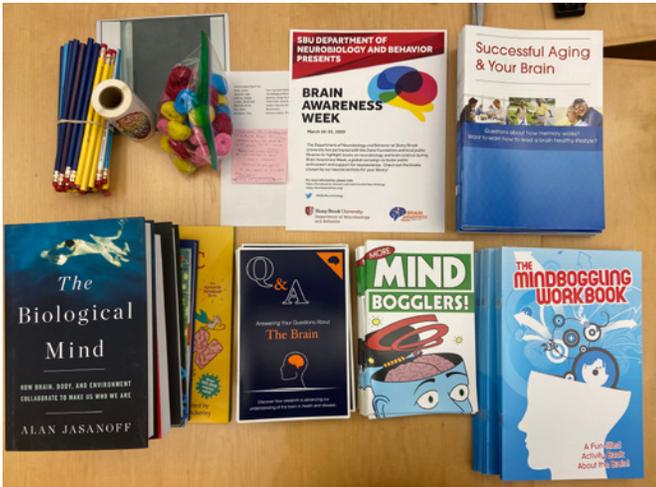
Last, but absolutely not least, during the past months we worked hard on our pedagogical mission. We implemented new computational courses for both undergraduate and graduate students and revised the molecular biology course for our graduate students. We added an innovative new online format to the traditional and hybrid versions of one of our large introductory biology courses. In response to COVID-19, we moved all our Spring semester courses online and we are very excited to keep teaching neuroscience even during these challenging times.

Lots of exciting things happened in the Department since our last newsletter and we will continue to advance research and education in neuroscience over the next months. It will be challenging, but the accomplishments of the past months, a Winter packed with exciting activities and news, and our plans for the immediate future fill us with energy and optimism.

Visit the [Stony Brook University Coronavirus update page](#) for current updates on the University response, and visit our Twitter at [@SBUNeurobiology](#) for updates from our department.

Ciao!

Alfredo Fontanini
Professor and Chair
Department of Neurobiology & Behavior



BRAIN AWARENESS WEEK SPOTLIGHT: MARCH 16 TO 22

This year we led a series of initiatives for Brain Awareness Week. Our faculty members and staff assembled a list of 22 of their favorite neuroscience books (including some children’s books) and donated copies of the books to several local libraries. These books — along with brain health informational booklets and fun workbooks and goodies for children, teens and adults courtesy of the Dana Foundation — were then displayed in each library to celebrate Brain Awareness Week. On campus, our Department partnered with the Department of Art to host an Art+theBrain art exhibit, celebrating and creating discussion on the intersection between visual art and scientific research. 25 images from our department were submitted to the exhibit, which will later be hung in the Department.



CONGRATULATIONS!

To the four MD/PhD students in our labs who matched on March 20:

- **Greg Kirschen** matched to Johns Hopkins for OB/GYN
- **Jesse Levine** matched to Baylor for Child Neurology
- **Raja Pillai** matched to Children’s Hospital in Boston for Neurodevelopmental Disabilities
- **Nick Schwartz** matched to Stanford for Neurology

To our Fall 2019 graduates:

- **Ke Chen**, PhD, Fontanini Lab
- **Logan Becker**, MS, Park Lab
- **David Golann**, MS, Sirotkin Lab