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GU GRADUATE STUDENTS TEACH MIDDLE SCHOOL ABOUT THE BRAIN



Carrie Leonard (G'16), a second year student in Georgetown's Interdisciplinary Program for Neuroscience, says teaching local middle school students about the brain was a rewarding experience for both her and the students. "It allows them to envision themselves in this kind of position in the future," she says.

OCTOBER 19, 2012 - CARRIE LEONARD (G'16) TALKED ABOUT teaching students from a local middle school at the Society for Neuroscience's Oct. 13-17 annual meeting in New Orleans, where many university researchers presented their work.

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Leonard, a second-year student in Georgetown's Interdisciplinary Program for Neuroscience, invited to share her experience during a poster session about Brain Awareness Week.

The week, observed every March, is a global campaign sponsored by the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) and the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives.

"I love to teach," Leonard explains, "[And SfN is] a great place to share what you've done and collect ideas for the future."

Leonard and dozens of other graduate students hosted 7th and 8th graders from Hardy Middle School for sessions about the brain at Georgetown's medical campus this past spring.

Hardy, located a few blocks from the university, is a predominantly minority populated school. More than half of its students are considered economically disadvantaged.

Leonard says this population of students often misses out on hands-on science education.

"We actually had too many students to do just one day," Leonard said, explaining that the program was expanded to two days to accommodate 100 middle school students from Hardy.

LESSONS ON THE BRAIN

The students started their day at Georgetown promptly at 9 a.m. with an interactive lecture and discussion hosted by Karen Gale, professor of pharmacology.

Gale introduced the students to the difference between professions in the medical and research fields.

She followed that with an overview of the brain's anatomy and an introduction of a few fundamental concepts in neuroscience.

After lunch, the students began a rotation through eight hands-on demonstrations, all hosted by the volunteer graduate students. These demonstrations covered a range of concepts in brain health, attention, action potentials, reflexes and anatomy.

COOLEST THING

Leonard said many of the young students are used to being bound by financial restrictions. The event allows them to think, possibly for the first time, about a career in science, she said.

"The kids get to hang out with the graduate students and see that they're really smart but also really cool," she explained. "It allows them to envision themselves in this kind of position in the future."

Leonard said a highlight of the sessions was a young boy, inspired to become a forensic scientist by TV shows such as *CSI*, in awe as he held a human brain in his hands.

"I never thought I'd be able to do something like this," she said the boy exclaimed. "This is the coolest thing in the world."

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

More than 60 Georgetown faculty members and students presented at the conference this year, including neuroscientist [Josef Rauschecker](#) and [Dr. Peter E. Turkeltaub](#).

Leonard is already planning ahead for next year's Brain Awareness Week.

She said she and fellow graduate student Summer Rozzi (G'16) received very positive feedback at the Society for Neuroscience meeting after presenting their work with the middle school children.

"The overall goal of Brain Awareness Week is to raise awareness about brain research and positive outcomes from research and how it benefits society," Leonard says. "We want to get them excited about science, period."

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