

Graduate Association of Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Students 2021-2022 Student Statement

Dear Members of the NTP Community:

While this last year has been difficult and has proven to continually surprise us, we want to thank everyone for their perseverance throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and their commitment to this program. The purpose of this letter is to update faculty and the administration on student concerns and priorities in order to ensure the continued growth of the Neuroscience Training Program (NTP). Through this letter and continued collaboration with the NTP administration, we hope to build upon the hard work started by NTP students last year.

To our new 2021 cohort, Welcome! We are excited you have joined our community and we hope that you enjoy your time with NTP. While graduate school can be difficult for all, GAINS tries to help foster and promote a supportive environment and community.

This student statement serves to display the continued collaboration between students and the administration as well as document student priorities for progress in the upcoming academic year. This document was put together with input from NTP students and the NTP administration. This is not a list of demands, but rather goals that the faculty, administration, and students can work together to achieve. This documentation is crucial considering the transient nature of graduate student enrollment. Our program must have documentation of where we've been to better evaluate where we are. This letter also serves to clarify the role of GAINS and the work we do to help make meaningful change and positive progress within the NTP.

This letter will be structured in the following way:

Priorities completed in the last year - This section will focus on the priorities from the last letter and how they were completed as well as anything else that was completed via student involvement. These priorities were asked for by GAINS in the last student statement and completed by the Administration unless otherwise stated.

Priorities in progress or not completed - This section will discuss any imperatives that are in progress or not completed and why. This could include imperatives that were determined to no longer be a priority or that were unattainable.

Priorities to focus on in the next year - This section will discuss priorities for the next academic year. These priorities are asked for by GAINS and to be completed by the Administration unless otherwise stated.

We hope this letter is helpful and informative. If anyone has any questions, please reach out to gains@mailplus.wisc.edu.

Completed Priorities

1. **Maintain clear and explicit communication about dates and times of programmatic committee meetings and post associated minutes.** A Google Drive folder was created and meeting minutes are posted there.
 - a. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1tF3YBHA22TWam1oEyImfk1O0yjC-m85l?usp=sharing>
2. **Add a session about bias and diversity in science to the first-year Professional Development course to be taught by an expert.** This was implemented.
3. **Hold biannual Town Halls to facilitate bidirectional communication between students and admin, as well as provide a space for feedback about the program.** This was done in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021.
4. **Hold an annual diversity event with the goal of fostering community within the program.** One event was completed in Fall 2020.
5. **Require a diversity statement in the application to become an NTP faculty trainer.** This was implemented by the NTP Steering Committee.
6. **Reorient goals of the Diversity Enhancement Committee and update this on the website.** Updates have been made, but not all have been implemented. Additionally, some of the roles of the committee remain misleading. Recently, the committee has started focusing more on retention of current students. Further, they also help decide on DEI research talks for NTP Seminar by experts.
7. **Recruit two students to the Admissions Committee, with a combined vote.** Two students were added to the committee. They act as additional reviewers for some applications and are considered equal members of the committee.
8. **Expand student voting rights to all NTP committees.** The NTP Academic Policies and Procedures Handbook currently states, “Unless otherwise noted, the roles of the student members on each Committee are identical to those of faculty members.”

In Progress or Uncompleted Priorities

1. **Maintain clear and explicit communication about dates and times of programmatic meetings and post minutes.** We would like all NTP committee meeting dates/times to be sent out to the NTP community once scheduled and meeting notes to be sent out with a link to the Google Drive once finalized in a timely manner. Most students do not currently know what information is uploaded to the Google Drive or how to access it.
2. **Ask each faculty member to provide the NTP with a list of all completed diversity, inclusion, or bias training, so that new students can use this information when planning rotations.** This is currently being worked on by the Working Group on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
3. **The feedback form for recruitment weekends should include an option that allows the NTP office or Admissions Committee to follow up with the student to resolve issues and ensure accountability.** A space for students to submit their name along with their feedback was included during the 2021 recruitment process. In addition, the NTP office has agreed to include a check box indicating when a student would specifically like to be followed up with. There are

plans to implement this for the 2022 recruitment process.

4. **We ask NTP to update the handbook and programmatic actions to make it easier and safer for students to come forward with complaints via a Grievances and Appeals process.** This is being worked on by the Working Group on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Further, a faculty liaison has been implemented per SMPH policy.

Priorities for the 2021-2022 Year

1. **Clarification of the Diversity and Equity Working Group.**
 - a. Timeline of Working Group, Communication with Diversity Enhancement Committee, etc. While this discussion has been started, regular updates on the timeline and activity of the group should be communicated to DEC and the students.
2. **Updating the Faculty handbook and the Student handbook to include information on the policies, steps, and expected communication when PIs leave the university or students leave a lab. This should include steps to resolve conflicts through the Administration.**
 - a. The addition of language that specifies student inclusion in decision making processes and student autonomy.
3. **Create a structure for continually evaluating curriculum and student success in NTP classes.**
 - a. Currently, there is no structure to evaluate the content of our curriculum and whether students are learning effectively. Utilizing the Curriculum Committee has been discussed as a potential avenue for implementing this.
4. **Update Seminar requirements.**
 - a. The NTP students and faculty trainers have a general dissatisfaction with this course.
 - b. An ad hoc seminar committee has been assembled to brainstorm ways for improvement. Changes from the committee should be implemented by Fall of 2022.
5. **Revise the charter detailing the election of a new NTP director.**
 - a. Ensure the Dean is provided with higher quality, qualitative data when making decisions.
 - b. This was discussed and approved during the Spring 2021 Steering Committee meeting. This should be implemented during the next director election.
6. **Provide annual diversity, bias, or inclusion training that is hands-on. This could be during the NTP seminar in place of a student talk.**
 - a. Interactive workshops during NTP Seminar or outside of it that provide useful tools for students to bring DEI into their labs and work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Neuroscience Training Program General Assembly
Grace George, President of GAINS
Lizzi Holland, Vice President of GAINS
Katy Bjornson, Operations Manager of GAINS