

Ottawa Chapter

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Chapter Goal

The Ottawa Chapter is led by graduate student volunteers from Carleton University and the University of Ottawa in Ontario, Canada who are dedicated to making neuroscience accessible through engagement, education, and community outreach.

Description of Initiatives

Engagement with Youth:

As neuroscience is not a part of the current curriculum in Ottawa schools, the Ottawa Chapter has prioritized initiatives that engage students and youth. Using interactive demonstrations and by highlighting the impact of neuroscience on everyday life, the Ottawa Chapter helps to bridge the educational gap and inspire early interest in the next generation.

- **Brain Awareness Week (in Schools)** - An engaging series of in-class workshops offered to elementary and high schools in the greater Ottawa area to introduce students to the wonders of the brain. Presentation topics are tailored to capture student interest, featuring topics such as “*Drugs and the Brain*”, “*Your Brain on Video Games*”, and “*Stress and the Brain*”.
- **Brain Awareness Week (at the Museum)** - Hosted annually at the Canadian Museum of Science and Technology, this initiative combines neuroscience education with hands-on Backyard Brains™ demonstrations (such as the robotic claw, human-to-human interface, and mini-EEG), bringing sensory and motor neuroscience to life for museum goers of all ages.
- **Brain Bee** - To support students preparing for the annual Brain Bee competition, the Ottawa Chapter developed a 10-week online course with video lectures designed to enhance learning and simplify studying. During the regional competition (hosted at Carleton University by the Ottawa Chapter), participants are given the opportunity to assume the role of doctor, interviewing Chapter members acting as patients in order to correctly “diagnose” them.

Engagement with the General Public:

One of the key objectives of the Ottawa Chapter is to promote knowledge translation and extension to the general public. It is important for outreach to involve not only students but the greater community and provide opportunities for engagement outside of academia. We work closely with local businesses and charities to provide and support inclusive and engaging community-level events.

- **Brain and Mental Health (BMH) Art Show** - A well-known annual fundraising event run by the Ottawa Chapter. Each year we select a local charity to highlight and raise funds through silent and live auctions of art pieces donated from local and international artists of all levels, as well as donations of food, beverages and raffle items from local businesses. Attendees include artists, scientists, researchers, students, and art enthusiasts within the community.

Engagement with the Ottawa Neuroscience Community:

The Ottawa chapter is also involved in facilitating numerous academic initiatives which promote engagement within the academic sphere. These events help to promote engagement with the Chapter and connect the neuroscience community with relevant organizations.

- **Carleton University Neuroscience Colloquium Series** - A speaker series run through Carleton University, providing extension of knowledge to members of the department and promoting engagement with outside experts. The Chapter helps promote these weekly talks.
- **Local Conferences** - Members of the Ottawa Chapter collaborate and liaise with multiple local conferences, including the Royal Ottawa Hospital's Neuroscience & Mental Health Trainee Network (NeuMe-TN) and UOttawa Brain and Mind Research Institute Brain Health Research Day (BMRI). We are involved in conference proceedings, organization, and promotion to build engagement within the greater scientific and medical research community.
- **Volunteer Recruitment** - Presentations are given each year to incoming neuroscience undergraduate and graduate students to solicit new volunteers and members. We host monthly hybrid Chapter meetings and discuss any new opportunities for community engagement. Promotional materials (brochures, t-shirts, etc.) are re-designed and distributed each year.

Audience

The Ottawa Chapter initiatives engage a broad and diverse audience, including students of all ages, parents, teachers, artists from around the world, community members, local businesses, and researchers in the greater Ottawa area and beyond.

Assessment Opportunities

To help gauge the success of an initiative, we survey our participants, teachers, and community members following an event to ascertain which engagement activities were most effective and to gather suggestions for improvement. We solicit feedback from our undergraduate and graduate student volunteers and hold monthly Chapter meetings to debrief and brainstorm for future events. We also track quantitative metrics across our initiatives, such as the number of individuals reached, with the goal of expanding our impact each year.

Funding

The Ottawa Chapter does not charge membership fees. Initiatives are supported by both internal and external funding sources, including the Department of Neuroscience at Carleton University, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (Brain Bee), and contributions from community members and local businesses (BMH Art Show). The Ottawa Chapter also organizes an annual Carleton neuroscience department holiday party, with any proceeds allocated to support our outreach events.

Resources

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