

Brain Awareness Week 2010

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On November 9, 2010, glistening brains sat in dissecting trays waiting for students to pick them up like newborn babies. They had been chilling in the fridge in the back of the brain anatomy lab. The time had come for them to take part in something meaningful and unique, something called Brain Awareness Week (BAW). BAW is an annual outreach program hosted by Lake Forest College. Dr. Shubhik DebBurman created the event in the fall of 2003 as a capstone assignment for his first-year studies class, Medical Mysteries: Neuroscience in Chicago. The purpose of BAW was to give first-year college students a forum through which they could share what they had learned with the public, thus reinforcing students' learning and teaching them skills for interacting with the college community. BAW has since expanded its audience, level of student-involvement, and the number of activities. Together, the Neuroscience, Biology, and Psychology Departments, as well as the First-Year Studies Program and the student neuroscience organization, SYNAPSE, collaborate to bring to the Lake Forest community a week filled with programs designed to promote neuroscience education and research.

Last year, we were students in Dr. DebBurman's first-year studies class, Medical Mysteries: Neuroscience in Chicago. This class had us participating in the community outreach firsthand. Being only first-year students at the time, it was both exciting and daunting for us to be given the responsibility of leaving people with a little more knowledge and hopefully a greater appreciation of the brain. In the student commons, we presented posters to the entire Lake Forest College community. Our topic was "Hearing in the Brain." The majority of our audience was students who were on their way to the cafeteria for dinner, so we were not expecting much interest in our presentation. Surprisingly, we found ourselves answering questions about the parts of the brain that hearing involved, how the brain deciphers music from other noise, and other neuroscience topics. The enthusiasm and interest in neuroscience shared by the entire Lake Forest community was inspiring. As freshmen at the time, we did not expect the amount of dedication and hard work that was required for a single event. However, the experience that we took from Brain Awareness Week was unique in that it made us grow as college students. Dr. DebBurman commented, "Even though BAW has grown in quality and quantity over the past eight years with many new and engaging events, the core of its success year after year still lies in the high quality of projects that first-year studies students showcase along with their peer mentors (who are typically the students of advanced biology courses). 2010 was no exception."

The 2010 SYNAPSE President Daniella Brutman has the award to prove it. Due to her successful leadership and efforts guiding BAW, Daniella received the 2011 Brain Awareness Week Travel Award from the Society for Neuroscience. The award is given to one undergraduate each year for his or her leading effort to raise awareness of neuroscience issues within the community. In addition to the award, Daniella felt that the experience helped her to grow as a leader. "With 20 events in one week, I had to keep track of everything. I had to know how to delegate, work with a team, communicate effectively, and trust others." Daniella believes that the skills that she acquired from BAW will help promote her future success as a medical student next year.

A few memorable BAW events were the hands-on brain anatomy lab, guest speakers, faculty forum, and movie



FIYS 106 group (left to right): Stephanie Beltrami, Celina Antony, Jerry Wang, Tyler Hogstrom, and Lani Leong

night. The hands-on brain anatomy lab invited all students at Lake Forest College to feel and pick up a real human brain. Dr. Shubhik DebBurman dissected a sheep brain, and his students from the first-year studies class and BIO 362: Mechanisms of Brain Dysfunction presented posters on topics such as how the brain learns and hears, how the brain controls sleep, Alzheimer's disease, Lou Gehrig's disease, and more. The faculty forum and the showing of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* were two of the more interdisciplinary events in BAW because the participating faculty came from departments outside of neuroscience, such as philosophy, psychology, biology, French, and art. The goal of these two events was to promote awareness of neuroscience among non-science majors. BAW also featured Jim Wand, a highly acclaimed hypnotist with a PhD. Daniella believed Wand's performance was one of the most successful events because, in addition to receiving active participation and enjoyment from his audience, he was able to effectively connect it back to neuroscience.

Science students were not the only ones affected by BAW. Jerry Wang '14 is a finance and international relations major who took FIYS 106 in 2010. For Jerry, being a part of Brain Awareness Week and the class helped him understand a subject that he found interesting but did not want to pursue a career in. His favorite part of BAW was presenting what he had learned; "It felt good teaching people everything we had to learn. On top of that, it furthered our own understanding of the subjects we didn't research." Even though Jerry was not a science major, he still felt that he took away many valuable skills from being a part of that first-year studies class. In fact, "The skill of doing research on such specific topics has helped in my other subjects when looking for research on topics when I need to write papers and such," said Jerry. He also added that working as a team and keeping constant communication to keep everyone updated helped his social skills.

So did Brain Awareness Week fulfill its mission? As Jerry noted, "...once we completed the project, I remember feeling proud that I, as a first-semester college student, could be a part of something so big."

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