

12 May 2017
Society for Neurosciences
Individual Prizes and Fellowships
The Science Educator Award

Re: Letter of Support for The Science Educator Award – Dr. Cristian Zaelzer, Ph.D

I, Kimberly Glassman, wish to officially submit a letter of support for the nomination of Dr. Cristian A. Zaelzer, Ph.D for the Society for Neurosciences' Science Educator Award. As an art history and psychology student, as well as aspiring curator, I have always been partial to the study of the arts. However, I had an equal interest in the psychology and science of the brain in relation to the visual arts, but did not believe these two interests would ever come together in an experimental and free nurturing environment. In the fall of 2016, Concordia University announced a course being offered in the Design Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts in collaboration with the *Convergence Initiative, Perceptions of Neuroscience*. It was only when attending the first information session that I met Dr. Zaelzer for the first time, an encounter that in retrospect was a pivotal turning point in my education and career.

I started working with the *Convergence Initiative* as the Manager of a Fine Arts Communications committee. The premise of the course was to pair up graduate neuroscientists with undergraduate artists to create collaborative works to be exhibited in numerous art and science venues in May 2017. Dr. Zaelzer had single-handedly commenced an infectious interdisciplinary movement that would quickly gain momentum in the Montreal arts and scientific communities over the course of the project's inaugural year.

I was personally given the opportunity to expand the boundaries of what I thought was possible in the realm of art curation, art history and neuroscience education – and this has impacted me in ways words almost fail to describe. Dr. Zaelzer provided me with the time and resources to dedicate to the research of the history of art and neuroscience. This resulted in an expansion of knowledge on my part, but also in the resources webpage of the *Convergence* website that directs arts and science academics and educators, as well as the general public, to sources and articles we found while conducting the research. In this way, Dr. Zaelzer also developed accessible educational resources. It also resulted in the introductory essay of the *Convergence* Exhibition Catalogue, which can also be found in virtual format on the *Convergence* website. Dr. Zaelzer helped me every step of the way, proving to be an excellent mentor and supporter for my 'unconventional' research.

I could list to you all of the lectures and scheduled events that Dr. Zaelzer planned and executed promoting public outreach in neuroscience education and a collaboration between the visual arts and sciences, however, I believe a personal anecdote would better illustrate the very real impact Dr. Zaelzer and his initiative had on me, like he did on many others. During the first weeks of the course, the neuroscientists came to present their Five Minute Talk series at Concordia University to present their research to the

artists. Dr. Zaelzer had thought it would be wise to conduct interviews with the neuroscientists and artists to document their views on the collaboration. These interview sessions were exceptionally enlightening. I was given the opportunity to speak with neuroscientists about their research, their inspirations, and their view on art and their stance on interdisciplinary research and education. It was in this space that my mind truly expanded. Hearing neuroscientists speak about their work so passionately and expressing their desire to share it with the public and have them understand made me realize that art really did have a place in the communication of neuroscience and science education. I can say with absolute certainty, that this would not have been the case had Dr. Zalezer not founded this initiative and had he not provided me with the support and inspiration to pursue neuroscience-art history and curation seriously. I now plan to pursue this topic in future graduate studies.

In short, Dr. Zaelzer, as a science educator, is *pushing the boundaries* on how we communicate and consume knowledge and understand neuroscience. In addition to his neuroscience research at the Research Institute of McGill University Health Centre (RI-MUHC), he has been working tirelessly on the *Convergence* project with the aim of joining together the arts and sciences in a form of interdisciplinary think-tank with the aim of communicating neuroscience to a community normally estranged from the topic. What better quality can you ask for in an educator than to question current educational models, propose new innovative solutions, and inspire a new young generation on the endless possibilities of collaborative work? In my opinion, there is no better.

Thank you for your time and consideration of Dr. Cristian Zaelzer Ph.D as nominee for The Science Educator Award. It is my sincerest hope that he receives the recognition he deserves so he may inspire other educators to follow his example.

Warmest Regards,

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