

Graduate Association of Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Students 2024 Student Statement

Dear members of the NTP community,

As we transition into a new GAINS administration, we look forward to serving the Neuroscience Training Program (NTP), building and expanding upon the efforts and progress made by past leadership. The purpose of this letter is to update the NTP faculty, students and administration on established priorities to ensure the continued growth of the program.

To our newest members, Welcome! We are excited by your decision to join us and hope that you find your time in the NTP especially rewarding. Graduate school is a challenging and exciting endeavor. GAINS and the rest of the NTP community will be there to support you every step of the way.

Written by NTP students with input from the NTP administration, this student statement provides goals to collaboratively address priorities for progress in the upcoming academic year, underscoring the need for documentation given the transient nature of graduate student enrollment and potential administrative turnover. This letter also serves as a reminder of the role of GAINS and the work we do to support students and the program in a dynamic scientific and academic landscape.

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, how they were completed, and anything else that was completed via student involvement. These priorities were asked for by GAINS in the last student statement and completed by NTP 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 deemed 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 NTP 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. Revising subgroup requirements**
 - a. Subgroup requirements were updated.
 - i. Subgroup enrollment requirements have been cut down significantly.
 - ii. Students now only need to give one subgroup talk.
 - iii. Being a TA for a subgroup now fulfills the entire NTP TA requirement.
 - iv. Subgroups will soon begin to incorporate materials from NTP 610 and 611 to help facilitate learning of the material in a new space.
- 2. Provide NTP students opportunities for professional development.**
 - a. Collaboration with the NTP office has led to the planning of the annual NTP Symposium, which includes professional development panels (Women in Neuroscience), alumni panels (Academics and Non-Academic), and workshops (F31, International Grants) that change each year depending on student requests. The symposium also provides opportunities to network with guest speakers.
- 3. Creation of a first-year checklist to facilitate a smoother transition to graduate school**
 - a. GAINS has worked with the NTP office in the creation of a master document with links to important resources, a checklist of things to do before moving to Madison and once arriving, registering for classes, etc. This will be updated each year and sent to incoming students before their arrival.
- 4. Updated information added to handbook regarding students or faculty leaving their current positions**
 - a. Information on the steps and expected communication when PIs leave the university or when students leave a lab have been added to the handbook.
 - b. Part of the role of the NTP Admissions and Recruitment Coordinator is to update the handbook each year
- 5. Revamping NTP Seminar**
 - a. Students and faculty were polled to determine if there is a better time for Seminar to take place, snacks and tea are provided, and there is increasing faculty attendance, although we hope to see this continue to improve.
- 6. Hold biannual Town Halls to facilitate bidirectional communication between students and administration, as well as provide a space for feedback about the program.**
 - a. This was done in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. However, there were no Town Halls hosted by the NTP administration during the '21-'23 academic years. A Town Hall was recently held in the Spring of '24 and we hope to see this continue.

In Progress or Uncompleted Priorities

1. Revising Subgroup Registration

- a. Establishing a predetermined time for subgroup meetings that can be considered during course registration. This idea has been approved, but has yet to be implemented.

2. NTP Seminar Speaker Feedback

- a. Data collection, analysis, and communicating research findings are all important aspects of being a scientist. We would like to work towards having a mechanism to provide regular feedback to student presenters for NTP Seminar. Our long-standing weekly seminar is a great opportunity to provide constructive feedback and training to NTP students. We will work with the office to help develop a mechanism for presenter feedback.

3. Revamping Faculty Engagement

- a. Faculty engagement with the students is integral to the development and training of current students in the NTP. While faculty attend recruitment activities for prospective and recently admitted students, very few faculty attend NTP related events, such as seminars, the annual symposium, and social get togethers. We intend to explore options to increase the faculty engagement with NTP students.

4. Maintain clear and explicit communication about dates and times of programmatic meetings (i.e. steering meetings and other committee meetings) and post minutes.

- a. There is currently communication about committee meeting dates/times, but we would like to see meeting minutes posted on the NTP google drive and receive post-meeting communication with the link to meeting minutes when appropriate.
 - i. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1tF3YBHA22TWam1oEylmfk1O0yjC-m85l?usp=sharing>

5. Reorient goals of the committees and update this on the website

- a. To our knowledge, many standing committees do not regularly meet or do not achieve the stated goals of the committee. There should be a system for creation of ad hoc committees with specific goals as needed.
- b. There is ongoing discussion with the NTP administration regarding the NTP committees moving towards having ad hoc committees for specific purposes, with clear updates on the website on what committees exist, their purposes, and who the representatives are.
- c. GAINS has met with the DEI committee about clarifying roles and goals; we would like to continue this with other committees.
- d. We are seeking NTP office's assistance in seeing continual updates on the NTP website with current information about committees and student representatives so that students can easily access the most currently updated information.

6. Facilitate IDP mentor-mentee conversations

- a. We are working with the NTP administration on creating a system to encourage PIs and their students to have regular check-ins regarding student progress and goals. This year we worked with the NTP administration to create an optional mentor-mentee compact, which will be

distributed to first-years as part of their orientation materials in coming years.

- b. We want to continue working on providing resources for mentor-mentee relationships, and tools for ensuring regular check-ins between students and their PIs so that student progress and goals are continuously discussed and updated. This is also to help ensure that the expectations of the students and those of their advisors are in alignment with one another.
 - i. Approved by Steering in November 2023, there is a new committee format which will allow students to also meet with a committee without a primary advisor.
- 7. Update the Student Handbook to reflect recent changes and create programmatic structures to make it easier and safer for students to come forward with complaints via a Grievances and Appeals process.**
- a. The Student Handbook is an important guide and resource for students of all years in the NTP. An updated handbook ensures that students have access to accurate and current information, helping them navigate their academic journey, understand expectations, and make informed decisions. Since the Student Handbook was last updated in October 2021, the need for an updated handbook is urgent. It is projected that the most updated student handbook will be uploaded at the end of Spring 2024 or early Summer 2024. The following important changes to the program not included are:
 - i. Student thesis committee meeting
 - ii. Subgroup and research talk requirements
 - iii. Stipend changes
 - b. The Grievances and Appeals process was initiated by the Working Group on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. A faculty liaison has been implemented per SMPH policy. Further, the NTP appointed a faculty liaison for our program, specifically. However, it feels as though many students are unaware that someone has been assigned this role. The NTP faculty liaison to be added to the handbook and/or website and updated when necessary.

Priorities for the 2024 Year

In addition to the ‘In Progress’ Goals above, we hope to expand our priorities to include the following:

- 1. Creating a structure for continual evaluation of NTP curriculum and student success in NTP courses**
 - a. We will work to create new predictive measures for student success in NTP courses. The NTP attracts students with diverse training backgrounds. By collecting voluntary data from students (e.g. undergraduate major, number of gap years taken, number of hours studied per course section, etc.) and comparing to grade outcomes, we aim to analyze how these variables predict success in core classes, thereby providing students with a route to academic success, regardless of their academic background or starting point. Initial data can be obtained through an independent, GAINS-generated survey. Future data can be obtained through existing course surveys pending approval and cooperation from the NTP administration.

2. Increase alumni engagement in the NTP

- a. The NTP website has an established alumni section that includes alumni name, advisor, NTP start/end term, and last known job. We would like this to stay as up-to-date as possible and for existing alumni information (such as current positions) to be regularly updated.
 - i. We request the office to maintain an internal updated alumni email address database which students can access upon request.
- b. Encourage alumni to notify the NTP with job/internship/informational opportunities.
- c. Active alumni engagement in NTP Symposium in 2024.

3. Keeping students informed about the SMPH umbrella program

- a. In Spring of 2023, the GAINS representatives met with Dr. Laura Knoll to understand how the SMPH Umbrella program will impact incoming and current students. The projected date of this program being implemented is Fall of 2024. We are aiming to meet with Dr. Knoll this semester (Spring of 2024) to obtain any updates about this program.

4. Resume regular NTP newsletter, “Brain Waves”

- a. Brain Waves is a newsletter designed to showcase the research and accomplishments of NTP faculty, students, and alumni. It has not been updated since Fall of 2018, and we would like to resume this newsletter on an annual or bi-annual basis. This will be done by GAINS representatives with assistance from the NTP Office.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

2023 GAINS

Danielle Carrol, Co-President
John Razidlo, Co-President
Serena Wisner, Operations Manager
Calista Holt, Social Chair
Suhjung Janet Lee, Member at Large

2024 GAINS

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