

Comments on School and Workshop on Axonal Transport and
Neurodegenerative Diseases

From

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I am an American biomedical research scientist and educator. I worked on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin for ten years and then moved to Drexel University 12 years ago, where I remain today as a senior faculty member and Full Professor. For the past 10 years, I have been Director of the Graduate Program in Neuroscience at Drexel. I have also directed a training grant in the neurosciences and served actively on study sections for the National Institutes of Health on predoctoral fellowships. I have also been asked to serve on study panels reviewing graduate programs in European countries. My arena of research is neuronal cytoskeleton and axonal transport. For all of these reasons, I feel that I am well qualified to evaluate the school and workshop on Axonal Transport and Degenerative Diseases organized in India by Drs. Krishanu Ray and Subhojit Roy. I was pleased to have been invited to participate as one of the guest faculty members, and am happy to provide these comments.

I can state without reservation that the workshop was the best of any forum of its kind that I have participated in. The level of organization, quality of the participants (students and faculty) and the execution were exemplary at all levels.

To summarize the highlights:

1. The organizers did a very careful job of selecting the faculty participants, all of whom are excellent speakers with proven records not only in their field of research but also in their dedication to the education of students. As indicated above, I have strong credentials in education as well as the research field, but so too do other participants such as Drs. Peter Hollenbeck, Scott Brady, and Bill Saxton. The excellence of the lectures become contagious, with each of us building on the contributions of the others.
2. The organizers achieved a very healthy ratio of students to faculty. At other forums of this kind, it has been my experience that students have been intimidated because they have been literally outnumbered by faculty. Here, there were far more students than faculty, with each us giving multiple full hour lectures, rather than having so many faculty that each could only give a short 20 minute blurb of research. This was an excellent approach and enabled us to truly teach the students, provide background, tell career-related stories, inspire them, and field all of the questions they wished to ask.

3. The students themselves were fully engaged and enthusiastic at all levels, which is a tribute to their preparation for the meeting, as orchestrated by their mentors and the organizers of the event.
4. The school and the workshop were held at two different venues, allowing for a refreshing change of environment mid-way through.
5. The students had assigned papers to read and to report on orally in stimulating discussion sessions interspersed among the faculty lectures. This ensured that students were learning the material in real time so that they could meet the challenge of reporting on the assigned papers.
6. The students not only presented posters, but the posters were judged, with the top two also giving oral presentations of their work. This was an outstanding element to the program that gave extra attention to the students' own research.
7. At every level, including all meals, students and faculty intermingled, allowing discussions on science and career to continue for as long as the students wished.
8. The event closed with a very nice ceremony including congratulations and thanks for those who worked hard to make the event happen, inspirational words, and then a wonderful party for students and faculty. The positive and collegial attitude, with both respect and good fun, were a wonderful close to the event that left doors wide open to future interactions.
9. The meeting was well planned and yet (very importantly) there was flexibility as well, so that things could be adjusted on the fly to optimize the experience for everyone. This worked extremely well, especially when the students pushed the time limits of some of the lectures to ask more and more excellent questions.

At every level, the event was done right, and I believe sets a model for how such events should be done in the future. As I spend a great deal of my own career training graduate students and helping them to launch their careers in the biomedical sciences, I believe that I have the credentials make a firm evaluation of the event arranged by Drs. Ray and Roy. I would surely give it the highest marks on all criteria.