The CID and the Neuroscience Program: the Formation of Scholars at Illinois
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Introduction

The Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate gave us the chance to compare ourselves with other programs. Because all programs vary in their formal requirements, and all turn out excellent PhDs, we decided to focus our CID initiatives on small adjustments to the program’s formal structure, and larger changes to informal aspects.

In retrospect, our efforts can clearly be tied to three major themes of central concern to the CID: the internal coherence and consistency of the program, students’ development of a professional identity during graduate school, and the fostering of intellectual community. Ideally, these represent the answers to three basic questions: Do students know what they are supposed to do? Do they know where they’re going? Do they have a supportive community to help them get there?

Our poster shows changes and enhancements to the program begun during and after the CID, and how they relate to the three major themes. In addition, we feature three persistent problems that are readily identified but not easily solved.

Conclusions

The past five years have seen numerous changes and improvements to the program. How do we know if they are working?

Signs of progress

Reduced average time to the Qualifying Exam

From over 5 years in the late 1990s to less than 3 years today, with overall time to degree also shorter. This may reflect revisions to the program guidelines and better tracking of students.

Our students are accomplished presenters

The program creates opportunities for practice, and many present at national meetings within their first two years.

The development of professional identity, the growth of a supportive intellectual community, and overall morale are more subjective and difficult to measure.

Future steps

Improved communication

Essential to hear and respond to student issues, have everyone follow program structure and procedures, allow for flexibility in procedures and requirements

Faculty models of professional behavior

Joint faculty presentations and debates will allow students to observe high-level faculty interactions

Alumni involvement

Alumni have perspective on graduate study, important career experience and insights, and are natural advocates and models for current students