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UW-Eau Claire: To host regional neuroscience conference Oct. 22

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The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire will be the first Wisconsin school to host the MidBrains 2022 conference, an exciting regional conference for students and faculty in the field of neuroscience, on Saturday, Oct. 22.

The MidBrains Midwest Regional Neuroscience Conference has previously been hosted by private universities in Minnesota and Illinois since its inception in 2007.

“UW-Eau Claire hosted a virtual version of this conference in 2021, and we are very pleased with the opportunity now to bring back the in-person conference here on our campus,” says Dr. Bradley Carter, assistant professor of biology and co-organizer of the event.

More than 180 participants representing 28 different institutions in seven states have registered for the daylong event, which will take place from 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. in the Ojibwe Ballroom of Davies Center. The schedule includes:

- Keynote address by Dr. SuJean Choi, professor of biomedical sciences and associate dean of research in the College of Health Sciences at Marquette University. Choi’s presentation is titled “Why we eat what we eat, and my journey to this question.”
- A full slate of student research presentations, including seven poster presentations from Blugold biology and psychology students.
- Lectures from faculty representing a wide range of research fields and institutions.
- A career panel including Blugold alumni who currently work in fields related to neuroscience, sharing their diverse career paths and advice to students hoping to pursue careers in the field.

The MidBrains conference is an effort of the MidBrains Neuroscience Consortium, a network of faculty from undergraduate neuroscience programs in the upper Midwest. The annual event provides a forum for regional undergraduate students and faculty mentors to present research findings, attend lectures and discussion panels, and meet other student and faculty colleagues interested in the neurosciences.

As a school that added a neuroscience major in 2018, UW-Eau Claire is especially happy to have been selected to host the conference.

“As UW-Eau Claire continues to establish and grow our neuroscience community on campus, we are excited to contribute to this important event fostering connections between nearby institutions and involving our students in the high-impact experiences and logistics of academic conferences,” Carter says.

“One of the major benefits of a conference like this for students is that they have an intense learning experience about neuroscience through their interactions with peers and professionals,” Carter says. “The opportunity to learn about neuroscience research at other campuses and in eventual career settings gives valuable insight to our students as they begin developing their professional identities and considering career options.”

Dr. David Jewett, professor of psychology at UW-Eau Claire and co-organizer of the event, points to another valuable outcome for students taking part in events like the MidBrains conference.

“UW-Eau Claire students will be presenting their collaborative undergraduate research in psychology at upcoming national conferences, the Society of Neuroscience and the Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience annual meetings,” Jewett says. “Taking part in this regional event gives them important presentation experience.”

Below are the Blugold students presenting research at the conference.

- Lindsey Friend, senior biology major from Weston.
- Julia Toenjes, junior biology/microbiology major from Woodbury, Minnesota.
- Emily Maccoux, junior biochemistry/molecular biology major from Luxemburg.
- Grace Thompson, senior biology major from Edwards, Illinois.
- Payton Oliver, senior biology major from Altoona.

- Gillian Davis, senior biology major from Ellsworth.
- Giulia Lelli, junior neuroscience major from Como, Italy.

“MidBrains will be the first research conference I’ve presented at and I’m excited for the opportunity to share my work and be part of the scientific community,” says Friend, whose research focuses on development of swimming behavior in zebrafish relative to light cycles in their environment.

“It’s rewarding to share a project I’ve spent time and dedication toward and I’m proud to present my work,” Friend says. “I think the biggest learning opportunity from participating in this conference is gaining experience as a presenter and strengthening interpersonal skills in my field. Presenting at this conference is a milestone in my professional and academic career, and I couldn’t be more thankful for the opportunity.”

As part of the alumni career panel at the conference, 2011 biochemistry/molecular biology graduate Gregory Fischer will tell students about his work with PreventionGenetics, a Marshfield-based company providing patients with sequencing and CNV tests for nearly all clinically relevant genes.

Fischer says that his connection to campus has remained close, due in part to ongoing collaborations with UW-Eau Claire biology faculty members Dr. Derek Gingerich, Dr. Jamie Lyman-Gingerich and Dr. Julie Anderson. He is pleased to have the opportunity to interact with campus in this direct way and share some of his knowledge with students.

“My time at UWEC was so influential in my decision to pursue a professional degree in genetics,” Fischer says. “It was the faculty who gave so much time, passion and research experience that led to my personal success. It is important to me now that I use my skills and experiences to give back.

“I am happy and honored to talk to current Blugolds and other regional students about my career and the power of the research experience in their future careers.”

Students interested in next year’s MidBrains conference should reach out to neuroscience, biology and molecular biology faculty members.