

EDITORIAL**Approaching Diversity, Equity, And Inclusion in The Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience: Are we There Yet?**

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Since the Spring of 2020, the Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience (FUN) organization has intentionally committed to reframing and refocusing efforts to move the organization forward through its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Having made a statement in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis during the unprecedented times of the coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) pandemic (for review, see Bushana et al., 2020; Esposito & King, 2020), we have internally evaluated the organization to develop a DEI action plan that would advance the society's ideals and programming for years to come (Bayline et al., 2020). The organization evaluated the DEI action plan in 2021 and a DEI committee was formed. The DEI committee then spearheaded several efforts to improve our organization's ability to meet these DEI aspirations and goals (Neuwirth et al., 2021). Briefly, these DEI goals were as follows: 1) reflection towards action; 2) science as healing; 3) research as resistance; and 4) pedagogy for the oppressed (for review, see Neuwirth et al., 2021). These goals were not only envisioned in the context of DEI as both a need and movement but also in the context of the evolving times in which we are still enduring the challenges brought on by and that have persisted post-COVID-19—all of which have substantially impacted both research (Gibson et al., 2020) and teaching (Neuwirth et al., 2020). In particular, the organization implemented its first climate survey as part of its internal DEI evaluations to gain a deeper understanding of its membership demographics. The goal was to evaluate the current diversity of the FUN membership and its needs and determine how that information could be used to improve future bi-annual climate surveys. These insights can help guide ongoing assessment and reflection, allowing for necessary modifications to action plans and advancing the organization. As a scientific community, FUN embraces

individuals of all cultures, ethnicities, and religions, valuing the diversity that each individual's unique perspective brings to the field of neuroscience. FUN also understands the importance of intentional DEI efforts to achieve an anti-racist culture that includes BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and other oppressed groups (for review, see Rollins, 2021).

FUN's FIRST CLIMATE SURVEY: BASELINE DEMOGRAPHICS OF NEUROSCIENCE EDUCATORS

The FUN organization sent a climate survey via Qualtrics (Provo, UT) between September and November of 2021. Out of $N = 400$ registered members, we received a response from $n = 257$ members (64.25% response rate) in that three-month period. To ensure validity, this survey required at least 197 respondents, based on a confidence interval (CI) of 95% with a 5% margin of error, a 50% population portion, and a sample size of $N = 400$. With an $n = 257$ respondents, we established a valid survey with a 3.66% margin of error.

The survey contained 28 questions, of which 20 were demographic open-ended/choice questions consistent with the aims of the climate survey. Additionally, another 8 questions were closed-ended using a combination of Likert, choice, yes/no, or rank order questions. The climate survey, which the DEI committee developed through consultation with the organization's Executive Committee (EC) in Fall 2021, sought to capture more demographic information that the organization could not obtain previously through the membership portal.

First, it is important to note that the membership portal was a limiting factor for both the EC and DEI committees in evaluating the organization's progress on the DEI initiatives and goals. This finding led to the transition to a new

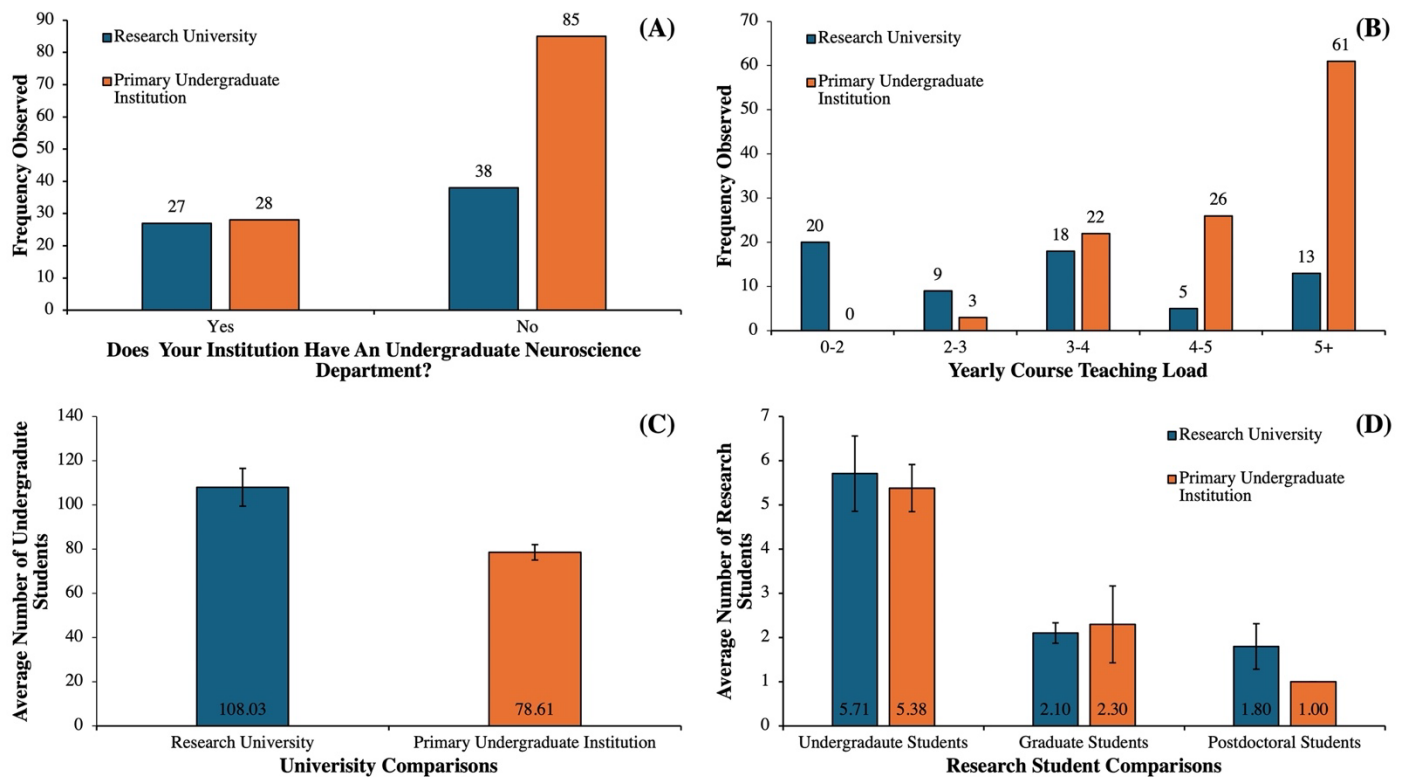


Figure 1. Illustrates the differences in whether PUIs (orange bars) vs. Research Universities (navy blue bars) have undergraduate programs dedicated to neuroscience (A), differences in faculty annual teaching load (B), the average number of students they teach annually (C), and the number of research assistants as undergraduate students, graduate students, and postdoctoral students they mentor (D). Data are shown as the mean \pm SEM for (C and D).

membership portal. This new membership portal, however, lacked the functionality to request and codify member demographics. Thus, a major component of the first climate survey was capturing these demographic details of the FUN membership. This data is reported in Tables included at the end of the manuscript which are as follows: Gender Identity (Table 1); Ethnic Identities (Table 2); Academic Position/Rank (Table 3); Tenure Status (Table 4); Institution Type (Tables 5-7); Department (Table 8); Model Systems in Which They Work On/With (Table 9); and Area in Which They work (Table 10).

CONTRASTING UNIVERSITY DIFFERENCES AND DEMANDS ON NEUROSCIENCE EDUCATORS

Understanding the differences between universities, as well as time constraints and demands placed on faculty, can provide insight into the challenges they face in their role, including the ability to teach, design curriculum, develop new pedagogical training techniques, and create applied learning opportunities using their research within and outside of the classroom. In response to the question regarding whether their college/university has a neuroscience department, faculty from Primary Undergraduate Institutions (PUIs) seemed to have a lesser relative percentage of neuroscience department affiliations than those in Research Universities, although the response

rate on this question was low (for PUIs 28 Yes (10.89%), and 85 “No” (33.07%), vs. Research Universities 27 indicated “Yes” (10.51%), and 38 “No” (14.79%), and $n = 144$ Did Not Answer (56.03%); Figure 1A). Next, faculty reported their annual teaching loads, and we compared them across PUIs and Research Universities. Faculty from PUIs reported having larger teaching loads as expected (Figure 1B). From these same PUI ($n = 112$; 43.58%) and Research University ($n = 65$; 25.29%) faculty respondents, the average number of students taught during the academic year was reported as 108.3 at Research Universities and 78.61 at PUIs (Figure 1C). Moreover, the results were examined for differences in the number of research assistants they worked with by institution type. The data showed that faculty at PUIs, on average, had 5.38 undergraduate students, 2.30 graduate students, and 1 postdoctoral student. Similarly, faculty at Research Universities worked with an average of 5.71 undergraduate students, 2.10 graduate students, and 1.8 postdoctoral students (Figure 1D). Additionally, faculty reported how their research is funded and of the $n = 177$ (68.87%), they noted the following: 54% Intramural/Institutional Only; 11% Other; 10% No Response; 7% NIH + Intramural; 7% Private/Foundation Grant +; 6% NIH Only; 5% 3+ Sources; 3% Private/Foundation Grant; 2% Intramural + Other; 2% NSF + Intramural; 2% Other Public Funding + Other; 2% NSF + Other; 1% NIH + NSF; and 1% NSF Only (Figure 2).

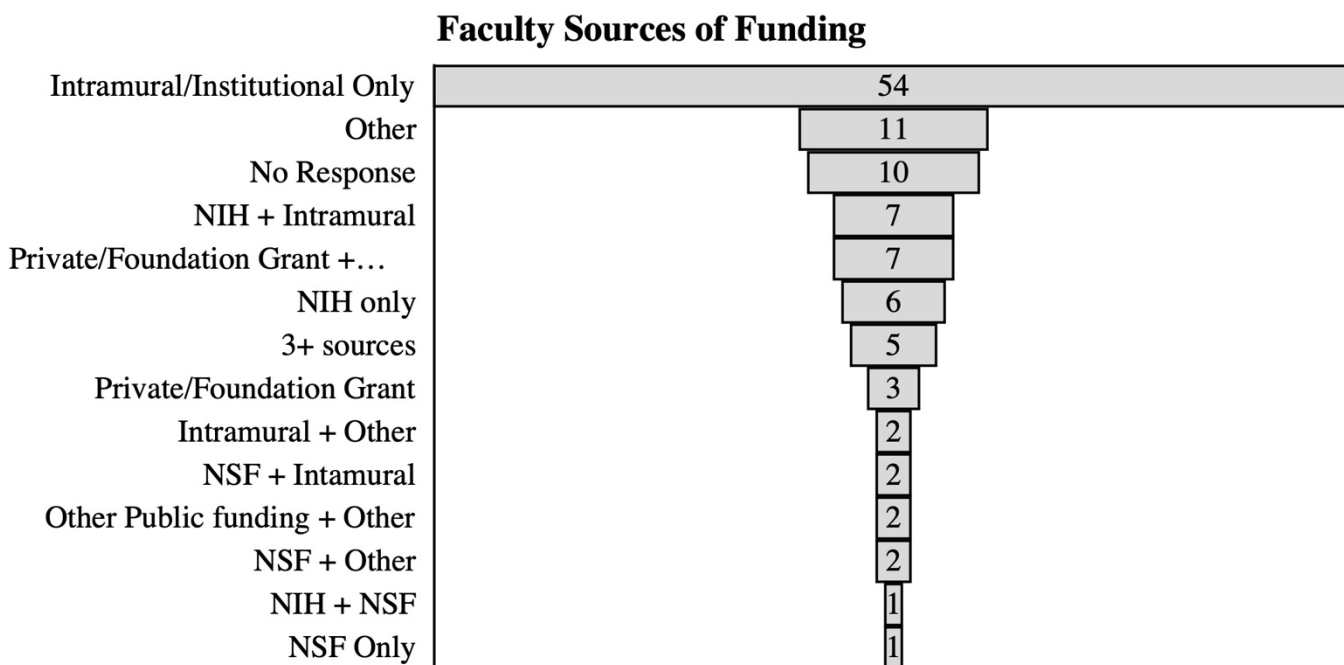


Figure 2. Illustrates the self-reported funding that faculty use to support their research at their institution. Regardless of the type of institution, across the board the majority of FUN members rely heavily on intramural/institutional funding to support their research. Data are shown as the percentage of respondents.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIVERSITY OF FUN'S MEMBERSHIP NEEDS

A general question was included to assess members' opinions on whether they feel the organization values their input. A Likert scale from 1 (Does Not Value) to 10 (Does Value) was used and this data was parsed by members' academic position/rank. The results revealed the following ratings: Full Professor 6.71 ($n = 41$); Associate Professor 5.98 ($n = 58$); Assistant Professor 6.50 ($n = 62$); Lecturer/Instructor 6.42 ($n = 19$); Adjunct Faculty 6.00 ($n = 1$); Postdoc 5.50 ($n = 4$); Graduate Student 5.00 ($n = 2$); and My Position is Outside Academia 8.00 ($n = 1$; Figure 3). Additionally, a thematic analysis was conducted on the responses to the open-ended question: "What two things would make membership in FUN more valuable to you?" The most common themes suggest that the organization needs to consider the following:

- 1) how members can become more involved with the organization;
- 2) what services members can offer/provide to the organization;
- 3) provide more communication to members through a regularly occurring newsletter;
- 4) increase communication with members; provide more teaching resources;
- 5) provide more student resources and do not make them competition driven;
- 6) increase networking opportunities for members;
- 7) increase the number of *Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education (JUNE)* publications;
- 8) provide more local and regional opportunities (i.e.,

conferences, workshops, meetups, etc.);
 9) bring back and continue the *Neuroscience Undergraduate Research Virtual Symposium (NURVS)*;
 10) create more robust faculty mentoring programs; and create community groups for specific groups (i.e., Hispanic, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, tenure-track faculty, postdocs, graduate students, etc.).

In unpacking these themes, we understand that members may need more guidance and communication to gain more insight on how an organization is structured, how it runs, what are its processes, and frequency of calendar items most vital to facilitating their benefits as members. We are now working on stream-lining these calendar events, processes, and structures to make that information clearer to our membership. We have revamped our elections ballots process to make our members aware of vacancies, how to self-nominate or be nominated for any vacancies, and what they eligibility criteria are consistent with our updated bylaws. These changes should help make our members understand how they can serve and in what capacities they can offer their talents to the organization. Building upon the latter two points, we have reinstated our newsletter which serves as an additional communication for disseminating such information to our members to keep them aware of what is going on more regularly. There are several committees that remain in touch with our members, keeping them up to date on information including but not limited to the awards committee, social media committee, and the equipment loan program committee to name a few.

These committees, in part, also support efforts to publish work by our members to be submitted for review in our journal *JUNE*. In *JUNE*, members can find a rich set of

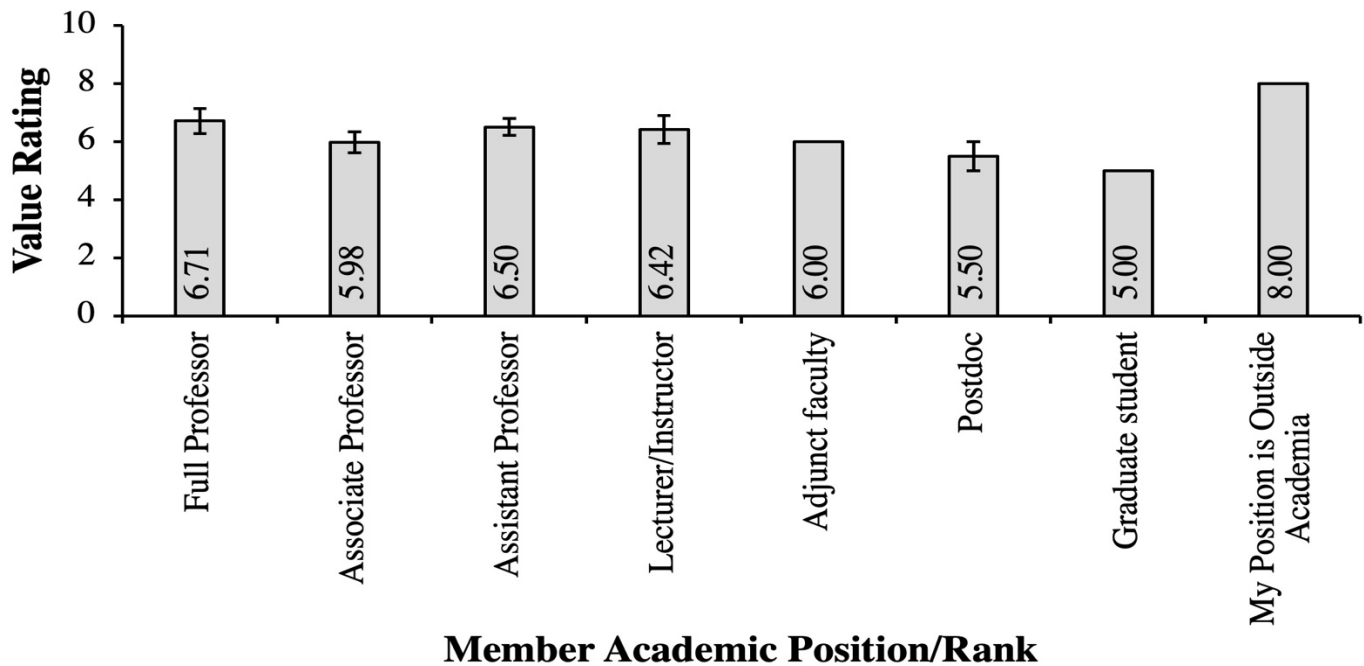


Figure 3. Illustrates the self-reported member data parsed by academic position/rank on how they feel FUN values their opinion. Across all academic positions/ranks, members reported on average ~6 out of a 1 (Does not value) to 10 (Does value) scale. This indicated that FUN needs to improve by making members feel as though they are valued by the organization. Data are shown as the mean \pm SEM.

resources both pedagogical and early research techniques, as well as general data on the field as it relates to neuroscience education. We have worked tirelessly to get JUNE modernized and set up with digital archiving of all past publications to make the archives easier for members to access and use as needed. As such, members should take the time to look through the abundant resources in JUNE and to feel free to reach out to faculty that have published papers in which they share common interests to begin new conversations that build upon their mutual interests to advance the field.

We have more work to do in the next few years to build more contact/meeting touch points (i.e., in-person or virtual) for our faculty to begin connecting, reconnecting, and remaining connected through FUN led initiatives through conferences and workshops at local and regional levels. This will take time and planning, but we are dedicated to increasing these opportunities for members to benefit as much as possible. Our mentoring programs are gaining steam. The faculty dedicated to this committee and program are currently working on new ways to increase its outreach and impact for our members. New information will come out in future newsletters on this program to make our members aware of how they can participate as both a mentor and mentee.

Taken together, there is much work that still needs to be done to provide more local opportunities. Understanding our membership reach is necessary to logically and practically set up the local and regional opportunities. In order to assess the regions where we can best address this request from its members, we evaluated the self-reported zip codes from the

survey and generated geographic information systems (GIS) data to visualize the spread and diversity of members across the United States for PUI's and Research Universities (Figure 4); private and public institutions (Figure 5); and faculty position/academic rank (Figure 6). These data will serve as a rough map of where we have greater and fewer opportunities to network with our members and how can we make linkages and connections with members; thus, highlighting the need in areas for more virtual workshops/conferences to build such relationships. Notably, these GIS graphs are limited to the respondents who provided their zip codes and the mapped GIS data does not reflect the location of all members.

UNDERSTANDING FUN's MEMBERSHIP NEEDS: A TRANSPARENT SELF-REFLECTION FROM THE CLIMATE SURVEY

FUN has come a long way since its inception, but there is more work to be done. We are at the "tip of the iceberg" in understanding our members' needs. This demographic data provides critical insight into how the organization should continue to provide support and services for a complex group of neuroscience educators. These educators face different challenges based on their affiliation with private or public institutions, PUIs or Research Universities, their academic rank/position, the geographical location in which they and their students conduct research, and the financial costs associated with conference and workshop travel, especially given the suboptimal funding predicaments they experience. Most faculty indicated that they rely heavily, if

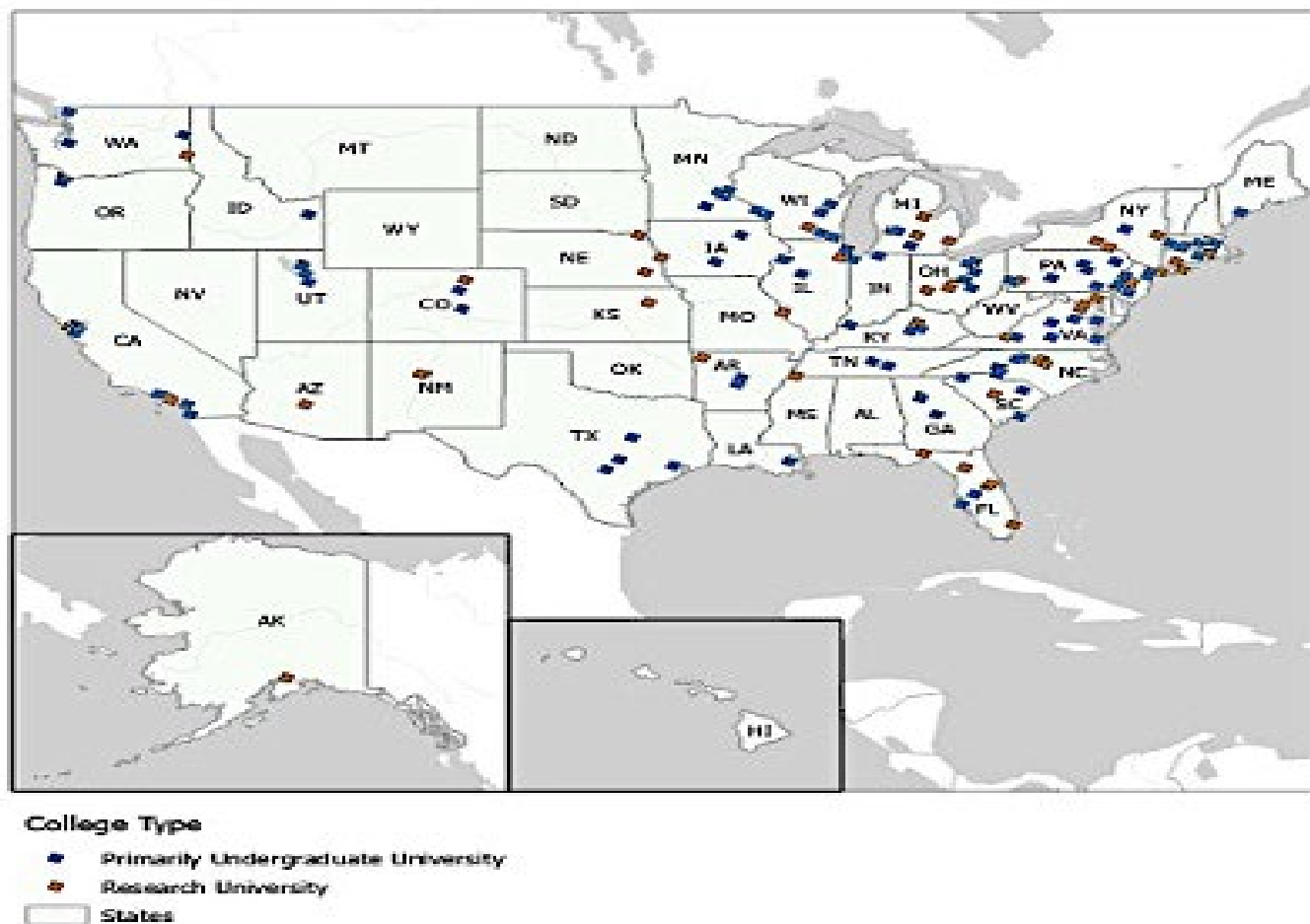


Figure 4. Illustrates the survey respondent's geographical location by zip code for Primarily Undergraduate Universities (navy blue diamonds) and Research Universities (red diamonds) across the United States from the climate survey.

not solely, on intramural funding, which puts significant financial pressure on them, making opportunities for professional, early career, and sustained career development more difficult to achieve. Furthermore, intramural funds are not guaranteed, and amounts can vary significantly annually, often favoring developing tenure-track faculty. Faculty members also face a range of additional challenges in their institutions based upon their gender, ethnicity, as well as whether they belong to a dedicated neuroscience department or conduct neuroscience research within a non-neuroscience department. Securing funding to maintain teaching, develop new pedagogy, and train next generation neuroscience students using model systems (i.e., mammals) presents additional financial challenges or restricts what faculty can achieve. Indirectly, the findings from the climate survey, in part, mirror themes from recent reports that guide faculty, pre-faculty, and students in understanding and potentially addressing unequal treatment by ethnicity, gender, and other factors. These efforts aim to help overcome disparities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields through DEI efforts (Payne-Sturges et al., 2021; Penner et al., 2021; Rollins, 2021; Buchanan et al.,

2020; Chaudhary, 2020; Clark & Hurd, 2020; Linkova et al., 2020).

One clear message from members was that they find that their opinions were valued across all academic ranks/position at a score of ~ 6 on a scale of 1 (Does Not Value) to 10 (Does Value), which was a significant finding. Further, the themes that emerged were insightful and provide the organization with a valuable opportunity to rethink our approaches, strategize, and (re)deploy the resources we can offer to help address what our membership would like from us as an organization. Several themes identified in the survey are already being addressed by the FUN executive committee (EC). The executive committee and various Fun committees have reinstated a newsletter, implemented the current strategic plan, and a reorganization of FUN. They have also increased the transparency of organization and duties, updated the bylaws to increase member awareness of how long they can serve and in what capacities, and created more transparent election processes and voting rights for members and the committees that help to serve the overall membership in a multitude of ways.

As a self-reflection, FUN can improve by increasing the

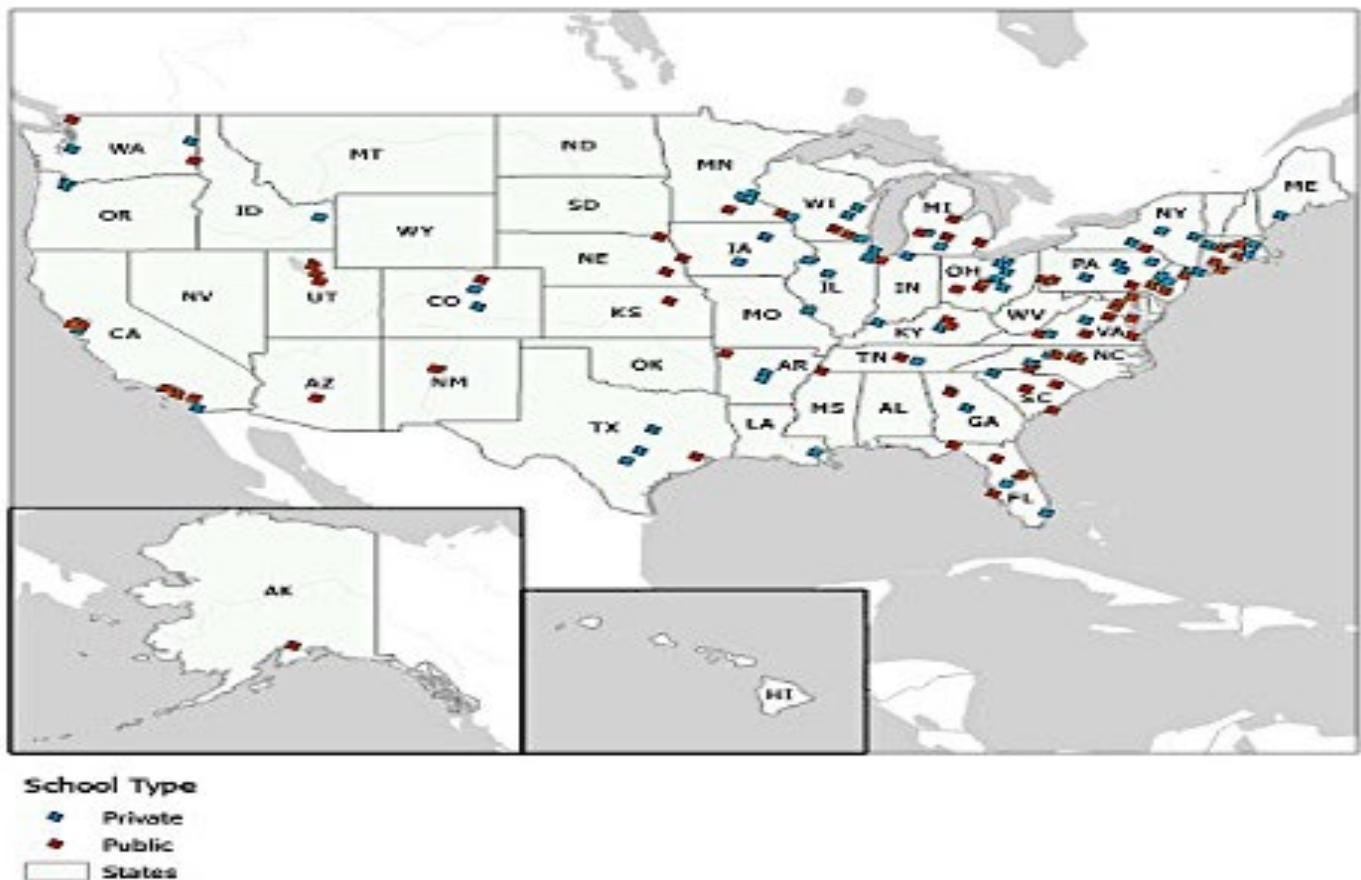


Figure 5. Illustrates the survey respondent's geographical location by zip code for Private (green diamonds) and Public (red diamonds) institutions across the United States from the climate survey.

flow of information to its members through email, social media, the reinstated newsletter, social activities (e.g., virtual FUN Final Fridays), and the Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education (JUNE). The EC can discuss ways to increase workshops and conferences (i.e., local and regional) beyond the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) annual event to foster a tighter-knit community amongst its members and by utilizing more virtual opportunities strategically. We received a loud and clear message that faculty and their students would be more involved if more virtual opportunities, such as NURVS, were offered. The NURVS was held for two years (2020 & 2021) and was modeled off the virtual conferences of the Nu Rho Psi Chapters: Beta from Rutgers University (Drs. Mimi Phan and Kasia Bieszczad) and Chapter Epsilon from The State University of New York at Old Westbury (Dr. Lorenz S. Neuwirth), which organized the Advancing Cross-Disciplinary Outreach in Neuroscience (AXON) regional conference during the COVID-19 pandemic. The AXON conference is currently in its 6th year and continues to be held in a hybrid format. During its initial year, FUN used the same structure as AXON and created NURVS, but the EC decided to discontinue this event following its second conference in 2021. We have since recognized the critical impact—both positive inclusion opportunities and negative

aspects of discontinuing such events—on faculty and students. The EC will discuss reinstating NURVS and assess the feasibility of setting up regional NURVS to create more opportunities and networks for its members and their students.

Additionally, we also noted that community groups are critical for DEI efforts and can strengthen organizations, institutions, research groups, laboratories, etc., to think deeply, more broadly, challenge convention, and ultimately build towards advancing the field of neuroscience through creative problem-solving solutions for both research and education. Although we currently have a mentoring program in place, it needs to be strengthened and expanded upon to meet the needs of our members. Given the demographic data, we may not have a large enough representation for individuals from all backgrounds to offer their services to mentor junior faculty from similar backgrounds and thus we will need to develop mentoring training structures, policies, and procedures around DEI best practices to guide both our mentors and future mentees to make this program successful. This program will be a key element of the organization moving forward and will be re-evaluated in the next climate survey. Additionally, there is a need to create more opportunities and places (i.e., virtual or otherwise) to have specific faculty ethnic/gender groups, tenure-track

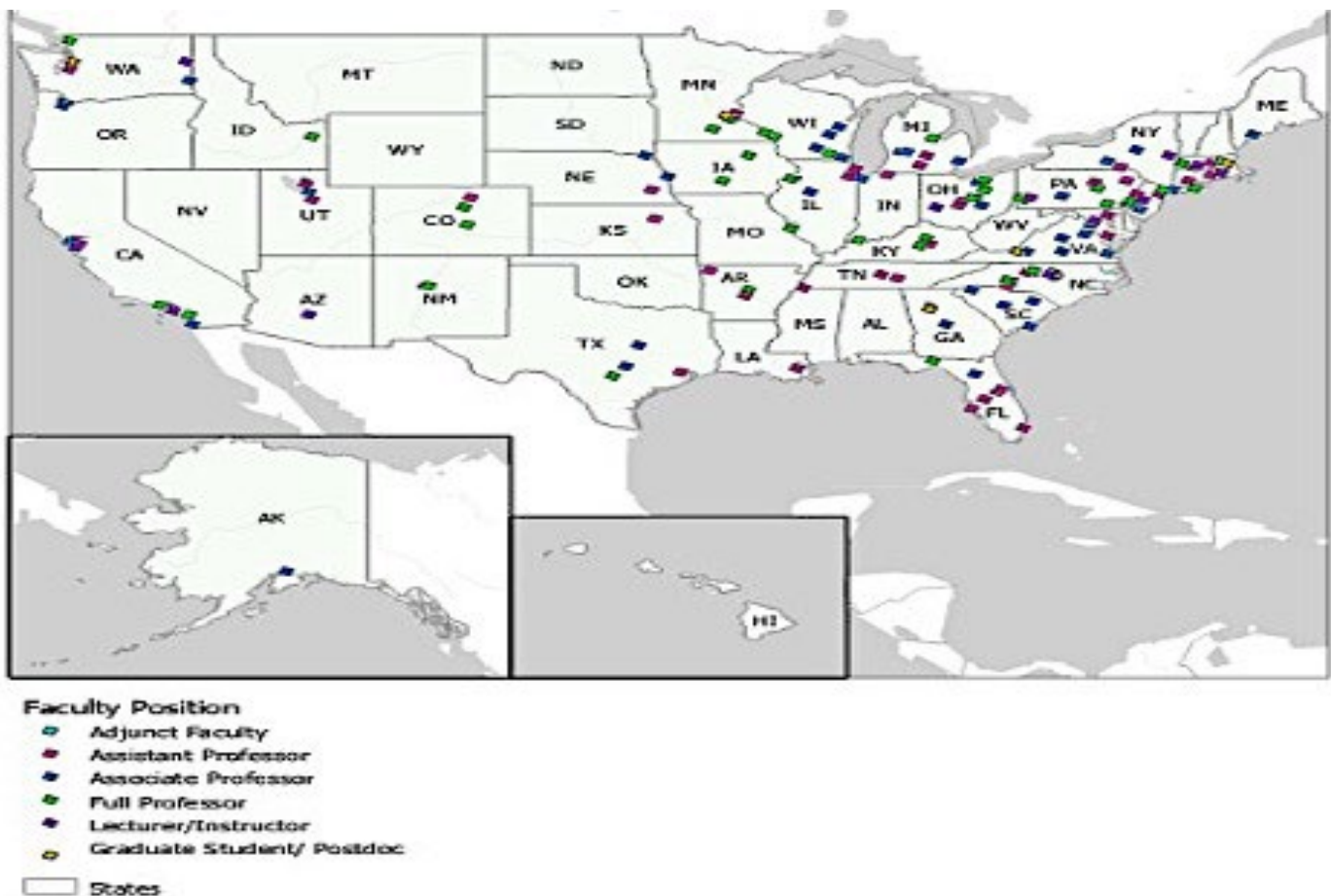


Figure 6. Illustrates the survey respondent's geographical location by faculty position/academic rank with Adjunct Faculty (teal diamonds), Assistant Professor (red diamonds), Associate Professor (navy blue diamonds), Full Professor (green diamonds), Lecturer/Instructor (royal blue diamonds), and Graduate Students/Postdocs (yellow diamonds) across the United States from the climate survey.

faculty, and postdoctoral and graduate students. This will give members of these groups a space to reach out, (re)connect, discuss challenges they face, and obtain perspective, advice, etc., on how to move forward consistent with points raised by others elsewhere (for review, see Salazar Montoya, 2024; Asai, 2020; Mukherji et al., 2017). We fully understand the situation our members face, experience, and work through. It is important to remember that the EC and faculty serving on FUN committees are the same individuals who contribute to making the organization a special and unique resource for its members. In contrast to the typical administrative bureaucracies encountered at their institutions, FUN faculty support each other in every effort to minimize or eliminate such bureaucracies to achieve our collective goals.

As a community principally composed of neuroscience faculty, we hold the tools necessary for serving one another, growing together, and building a stronger network—not only for our current members but for the future generation of neuroscientists we teach, train, and mentor daily. We should be most proud that we are honored to have such a privilege, but we also understand that meeting the needs outlined in this climate survey will require time, effort, and garnering resources for FUN to address its members' concerns in a transparent and timely manner.

DEI (RE)ASSESSMENT: ARE WE THERE YET?

FUN had established previously DEI action items and these are reviewed below based on its first climate survey to achieve the ideals of a supportive, inclusive society:

(1) Reflection toward action: FUN has increased its transparency in all its processes, recently updated its by-laws, and has broken down all silos from past organizational structures that did not offer best practices or opportunities to meet our DEI goals. We have started mentoring groups, but more work is needed on these fronts. We have reinstated the newsletter, continued with FUN Final Fridays, and improved our website to include opt-in and opt-out communication options during member registration and renewal, allowing for self-selected transparency and increased communication. All of which have made us move the needle toward a more inclusive organization.

(2) Science as healing: FUN recognizes the need to create a safe space where BIPOC/underrepresented minority (URM) members and friends can share their stories, struggles, and strategies for healing. We committed resources and faculty have volunteered their skills to support mentoring programs in this specific area. Some of these mentoring circles have been fruitful with the

emergence of stronger communities and a sense of belonging that was previously non-existent. To further grow this community circle, we need to formalize these community groups, improve advertising efforts, and set up regular meeting schedules similar to FUN Final Fridays. This will provide a forum for science as healing as originally envisioned.

(3) Research as resistance: From these community circles, we can now leverage more opportunities to develop special issues in JUNE to provide the outlet for addressing challenges. These special issues can highlight these intersections, share critical information, and serve to record and inform the next generation of neuroscience students of the battles faculty currently face, including issues that may linger when they become faculty in the future. These efforts aim to reduce and eliminate the societal toll of systematic prejudice and oppression experienced by diverse neuroscience faculty.

(4) Pedagogy of the oppressed: FUN commits to supporting members with programming to develop, establish, and maintain anti-racism work through workshops and sessions on inclusive excellence in STEM which have been offered through FUN Final Fridays on inclusive pedagogy. As such, FUN needs to (re)envision itself offering more regional and regularly occurring conferences and workshops. These events should not only provide opportunities for presentations, posters, and networking, but also reserve critical space for BIPOC, URM, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized faculty and students' equal opportunities to offer their perspectives, skills, knowledge, and research. As members utilize these opportunities (and pedagogy surrounding it) to advance DEI efforts within their home institutions, we will make progress towards restorative social justice through the FUN organization.

CONCLUSION

Following the FUN statement in 2020 (Bayline et al., 2020), which provided the first critical step in beginning a restorative social justice and inclusivity model of neuroscience pedagogy and research for the organization, we committed to this action plan. Thus, it continues to be a part of our fundamental responsibility to our members to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and to do our part to become an anti-racist organization. We then updated and further operationalized these DEI action plans in 2021 (Neuwirth et al., 2021). Here, we evaluated the findings from FUN's first climate survey to guide the organization further in improving and achieving these DEI action plans as originally envisioned. As the leading supporter of undergraduate neuroscience education and research, FUN makes these commitments to empower and support our faculty members and students by advancing pedagogy and research in integrated neurosciences. This commitment, however, cannot be fully achieved or actualized if we, as an organization, do not hold ourselves accountable, do so transparently, and modify our actions to meet the needs of our members. We will continue to actively work to ensure that all our proceedings are transparent, fair, and equitable while advancing the ideals of DEI in our society's selection of officers and committee members as we continue to

support faculty and students in neuroscience. To hold ourselves accountable for reaching these goals, we commit to conducting a climate survey bi-annually, with the next survey commencing between Fall 2024-Spring 2025.

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TABLES

Self-reported Member Gender Identity	n-size	Percentage (%)
Female	115	46%
Male	65	26%
Other	1	0.004%
Did Not Answer	71	28%

Table 1. Demographic analysis of FUN member's self-reported Gender Identity.

Self-reported Ethnic Identities	n-size	Percentage (%)
White	145	46%
Asian or Asian American	10	3.89%
Black or African American	7	2.72%
Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx	7	2.72%
Another Option Not Listed	2	0.78%
White, Another Option Not Listed		
American Indian or Alaska Native, White	1	0.39%
Asian or Asian American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0.39%
Asian or Asian American, White	1	0.39%
Black or African American, Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx	1	0.39%
Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx, White	1	0.39%
Another Option Not Listed	1	0.39%
Prefer Not to Answer	6	28.41%
Did Not Answer	73	28.41%

Table 2. Demographic analysis of FUN member's self-reported ethnic identities.

Self-reported Academic Position/Rank	n-size	Percentage (%)
Full Professor	41	15.95%
Associate Professor	58	22.57%
Assistant Professor	62	24.12%
Lecturer/Instructor	19	7.39%
Adjunct Faculty	1	0.39%
Postdoc	4	1.56%
Graduate Student	2	0.78%
My Position is Outside Academia	1	0.39%
Did Not Answer	69	26.85%

Table 3. Demographic analysis of FUN member's self-reported academic position/rank.

Self-reported Tenure Status	n-size	Percentage (%)
Tenured	91	35.41%
On Tenure-track, But Not Tenured	51	19.84%
Not on Tenure-track	36	14.01%
Did Not Answer	79	30.74%

Table 4. Demographic analysis of FUN member's self-reported tenure status.

Self-reported Institution Type	n-size	Percentage (%)
Liberal Arts or Primarily Undergraduate College/University	113	43.97%
Research College/Unviersity	65	25.29%
Did Not Answer	79	30.74%

Table 5. Demographic analysis of FUN member's self-reported institution type.

Self-reported Institution Type	n-size	Percentage (%)
Private	96	37.35%
Public	82	31.91%
Did Not Answer	79	30.74%

Table 6. Demographic analysis of FUN member's self-reported type of institution.

Self-reported Institution Type	n-size	Percentage (%)
Undergraduate Only	99	38.52%
Undergraduate & Graduate	18	7%
Undergraduate & Postdoctoral	7	2.72%
Undergraduate, Graduate, & Medical/Postdoctoral	46	17.90%
Other	8	3.11%
Did Not Answer	178	69.26%

Table 7. Demographic analysis of FUN member's self-reported type of institution.

Self-reported Department	n-size	Percentage (%)
Psychology	73	28.41%
Biological Sciences/Biology	37	14.40%
Psychology & Neuroscience	10	3.89%
Neurobiology & Behavior/Neurology	5	1.95%
Basic Medical Sciences/Biomedical Sciences	2	0.79%
Biochemistry	1	0.39%
Sociology	1	0.39%
Zoology	1	0.39%
Did Not Answer	107	41.63%

Table 8. Demographic analysis of FUN member's self-reported department.

Self-reported Model System They Work On/With	n-size	Percentage (%)
Rodents	55	21.40%
Humans	26	10.12%
Computer or Computational Modeling	15	5.84%
Humans & Other Models	15	5.84%
Aquatic Species	14	5.45%
Drosophila	6	2.34%
Non-human Primates	2	0.78%
Other	19	7.39%
Did Not Answer	114	44.38%

Table 9. Demographic analysis of FUN member's self-reported model system they work on/with.

Self-reported Area in Which They Work	n-size	Percentage (%)
Foundational ("Basic")	98	38.13%
Preclinical	22	8.56%
Preclinical, Foundational ("Basic")	21	8.17%
Clinical or Applied, Foundational ("Basic")	6	2.34%
Clinical or Applied	5	1.95%
Applied, Preclinical, Foundational ("Basic")	2	0.78%
Did Not Answer	101	39.30%

Table 10. Demographic analysis of FUN member's self-reported area in which they work.