

REPORT

3rd Canadian IBRO School on 'Degeneration and Regeneration'

**Vancouver B.C.
28th May – 4th June 2009**

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Summary assessment

The 3rd Canadian IBRO School on Regeneration and Degeneration was an innovative and dynamic event that brought together 12 international students representing different countries from each continent of the world. The schedule was tight, informative and packed over 20 presentations and practical sessions into seven days of learning. I represented Kenya and Africa alongside a female counterpart from Morocco.

In the preceding three days before the School, participants got an opportunity to present their work at the 3rd Annual Canadian Neuroscience Meeting. This particular forum gave all IBRO School participants the unique opportunity to share and exchange ideas with resident Canadian students, Professors and other academicians as well as brush up on poster presentation skills. For me in particular it offered a chance to compare the different methodologies and scale of technologies that were used in compiling the data sets given and determine whether similar projects could be attempted in a more resource-limited environment.

My presentation focused on vector-based therapies for brain degeneration and their potential role in immunotherapy. While in recent years there have been advances in the field of Neuro-immunology, clinical advances in treating brain infections and cancers requires new ideas and approaches that incorporate our understanding of genetics and novel delivery vehicles like recombinant viruses. As such, the integration of both ethical and technological considerations in research was an important topic to me.

At the IBRO School, I found the range and depth of discussions expansive if not exhaustive. The School could be criticized for offering too many things in too short a time, without the requisite time and space to pursue methodological and theoretical issues to any final resolution. But such expectations would be unrealistic given the broad developments in the field of neurodegeneration and regeneration. It served well that all participants were exposed to some degree on the topics at hand both theoretically and in practice as the complexity of some approaches could best be understood only with such prior exposure.

The organisers managed to integrate into the schedule visits to various Canadian research laboratories and institutions, both within the UBC campus and the surrounding Vancouver area. This was a brilliant idea as much of what we saw gave a glimpse of novel technological approaches in neuroscience and the convenience they offered in simplifying intricate experiments.

The visits also served to stimulate more insightful discussions on the role of such technologies in research and their implications on society, law and ethics. I was especially honoured to attend a morning group meeting of the National Core for Neuroethics at the University of British Columbia. The group Director, Dr. Judy Illes, had stimulated much debate and interest among the IBRO participants on ethical and legal issues surrounding research in Neuroscience. I was in particular keen to learn what areas of neuroscience regulation in particular, were of major interest in the Canadian setting, as it would inevitably be mirrored later on in my country as well as in my future research work.

This being the third platform in a Canadian institution for such scholarly interchange in examining the evolving issues in Brain research, we were treated to a rare tutelage by a number of outstanding Canadian and American researchers at the cutting edge of neuroscience issues ranging from cellular, biochemical and physiological alterations in the brain to the integration of neuroinformatics, stem cell research, Neuroethics and an examination of the broad societal impact of neuroscience research.

This particular IBRO School was a successful and stimulating event in that it offered the third phase of a new kind of dialogue which revolutionized our thinking about neuroscience, society and technology. I would summarize my experience as a highly complex event with multiple exchanges and connections made, as well as potential trails not yet followed.

The need, in my view, is now to harness the momentum and channel the debates and methods learned into new and productive research agendas, building particularly on the fresh North-South-East linkages between learners and faculty that have emerged from this specific workshop experience.

My appreciation goes to International Brain Research Organisation (IBRO), the National Core for Neuroethics at the University of British Columbia and the Society for Neuroethics for their sponsorship of my attendance.

Signed: George M. Wanderi

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