

2014-2015 PSYCHOLOGY COLLOQUIUM SERIES

Neuroplasticity of Language: From basic research to clinical and commercial applications

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ABSTRACT:

Increasingly, taxpayers, the government, and the media are holding scientists accountable to do work that contributes to the betterment of society not only through building an increasingly large and complex body of knowledge, but in applying this knowledge to solve real problems. Basic scientists, however, are not typically trained in knowledge translation, and often work on topics where practical application may still be many years away. Adding to this conundrum is the fact that lab directors are encouraged to train relatively large numbers of highly qualified personnel in basic science, in spite of the fact that between higher numbers of PhD graduates, decreasing higher education budgets, and the elimination of mandatory retirement, it is increasingly difficult for a PhD graduate to find an academic job or otherwise put her/his specialized scientific training to use. In my talk, I will provide an example of a possible response to this situation. I will outline a research program in the neuroplasticity of language that includes basic science studies of language and neuroplasticity, attempts to ask questions that are of comparatively direct relevance to “end users” such as people learning a second language or recovering from aphasia, and aims to apply the results of these studies to commercial applications. In parallel with this we have developed the RADIANT CREATE training program in neurotechnology innovation, commercialization, and entrepreneurship to promote a training model that teaches students not only scientific skills, but how to leverage these skills in areas of application beyond the lab. Our goal is to train people who can increasingly ask important questions, design innovative solutions to these questions, and understand how to put these innovations in the hands of people who can benefit from them.

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