

The IBRO Simons Computational Neuroscience Imbizo

Muizenberg, South Africa

2017 - 2019 + addendum 2020



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FOUNDATION



im'bi-zo | Xhosa - Zulu
A gathering of the people to share knowledge.

HTTP://IMBIZO.AFRICA

This is the second edition of the 2017-2019 report, with appended sections for the class of 2020.

IN BRIEF, the Imbizo was conceived in 2016, to bring together and connect those interested in Neuroscience, Africa, and African Neuroscience. To share knowledge and create a pan-continental and international community of scientists. With the generous support from the Simons Foundation and the International Brain Research Organisation (IBRO), the Imbizo became a wild success. As a summer school for computational and systems neuroscience, it's quickly becoming an established force in African Neuroscience. Here, we review and assess the first three years and discuss future plans.

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All photographs were taken by students and instructors of the Imbizos '17 - '20 and used with their consent. - Muizenberg, January, 2017-2020



Contents

I

The Imbizo

Neurotheory in Africa	11
Philosophy	11
Action	11
Course Structure	13
Lectures and Projects	13
Week 1: Biophysics, physiology, disease - the fundamentals	14
Week 2: Network dynamics, spiking systems & machine learning	15
Week 3: Higher-order brain function	16
Extracurricular Activities	18
Tuesday Dinner Walks	20
Free Sundays	20
Wednesday Night Science Socials	21
Swimming, Yoga, BootCamp	21
Ending in style: The Gala Dinner	21
The Class of 2017	23
Origins	23
Gender and ethnicity	24
Levels of education	24
Student roster	24
Student Case Studies	27
Abib Duut	27

Kira Düsterwald	28
Phumlani Khoza	29
Ryan Sweke	30
Fatima Hussein	31
Kay Ayodele	32
Lungile Mtetwa	33
The Class of 2018	35
Origins	35
Gender and ethnicity	36
Levels of education	36
Student roster	36
Student Case Studies	39
Somiealo Azote	39
Hiba Abuelgasim Fadlelmoula Abdelrahman	40
Jordan Guerguiev	41
Kayaokwe Chibuye	42
Emily Shobana Mueller	43
Alex von Klemperer	44
The Class of 2019	45
Origins	45
Gender and ethnicity	46
Levels of education	46
Student roster	46
Student Case Studies	49
Roy Henha Eyono	49
Katerina Capouskova	50
Eslam Mounier	51
Dhairyya Singh	52
Adedayo Sadiq Adewale	53
Chris Fourie	54
Wambui (Fridah) Kariuki	55
The Class of 2020	57
Origins	57
Gender and ethnicity	58
Levels of education	58
Student roster	58
Student Case Studies	61
Sarah Elnozahy	61
Osama "Sama" Ahmed	62
William Dorrell	63
Wisdom Oluchi Ikezogwo	64
Lisa van Staden	65
Ruqayyah Jaji-Sulaimon	66
Candice Ramsammy	67

Tutors **69**

Alex Antrobus	(2017 - 2019)	69
William Podlaski	(2017 - 2019)	69
Athanasia Papoutsi	(2017 - 2018)	69
Merav Stern	(2017)	70
Sina Tootoonian	(2017)	70
Eszter Vertes	(2017)	70
Katharina Wilmes	(2018)	71
Friedemann Zenke	(2018)	71
Agostina Palmigiano	(2018 - 2019)	72
Callie Federer	(2019 - 2020)	72
Grace Lindsay	(2019 - 2020)	72
Richard Pang	(2019 - 2020)	73
Chris Currin	(2019 - 2020)	73
Annik Carson	(2020)	74
Everton Agnes	(2020)	74

Faculty **77**

Larry Abbott	(2017 - 2018)	77
Dora Angelaki	(2019)	77
Demba Ba	(2019 - 2020)	78
Emery Brown	(2017)	78
Adrienne Fairhall	(2017 - 2020)	79
Ila Fiete	(2019)	79
Surya Ganguli	(2017)	79
Michael Häusser	(2018 - 2019)	79
Peter Latham	(2017 - 2020)	80
Timothy Lillicrap	(2017 - 2020)	80
Máté Lengyel	(2017)	80
Eve Marder	(2020)	81
Athanasia Papoutsi	(2017 - 2020)	81
Panayiota Poirazi	(2017 - 2018)	82
Joseph Raimondo	(2017 - 2020)	82
Srikanth Ramaswamy	(2017 - 2019)	82
Rajnish Ranjan	(2017)	83
Blake Richards	(2018 - 2019)	83
Alyssa Picchini Schaffer	(2020)	83
Evan Schaffer	(2020)	84
Henning Sprekeler	(2020)	84
Tor Stensola	(2020)	84
Thomas Tagoe	(2020)	85
Andrew Trevelyan	(2019)	85
Misha Tsodyks	(2018 - 2020)	85
Tim Vogels	(2017 - 2020)	86
Arthur Wingfield	(2020)	86
Daniel Wolpert	(2017)	86
Byron Yu,	(2017 - 2019)	86

Organisation, Location, Room & Board	89
Local Organiser - Emma Vaughan	89
Lecture Hall	89
Accommodation	89
Board and Catering	90
Addendum 2020	91

II

Feedback, improvements and comments.

Feedback	97
Academic feedback	97
Imbizo 2017	97
Week 1 - Neural anatomy and higher-order brain function	97
Week 2 - Biophysics, plasticity & machine learning	98
Week 3 - Network dynamics and spiking systems	99
Imbizo 2018	100
Week 1 - Overview and higher-order brain function	100
Week 2 - Biophysics, plasticity & machine learning	101
Week 3 - Week 3: Algorithms, Networks and Spiking Computations	102
Imbizo 2019	102
Week 1 - Biophysics, Plasticity and Neural Recordings	103
Week 2 - Network Dynamics and Machine Learning	104
Week 3 - Higher Level Function, Motor Control & Decision Making	104
Administrative and general feedback	105
Imbizo 2020	106
Week 1 - Biophysics, Plasticity and Neural Recordings	106
Week 2 - Network Dynamics and Machine Learning	107
Week 3 - Higher Level Function, Motor Control & Decision Making	108
Administrative and general feedback	109
Alumni	111
The Future: Improvements and Changes	115
Progress so far	115
Future changes to implement	116
Long-term future & blue skies.	117
Addendum 2020	117
Final Comments	121
Thanks to the Funders	123
Imbizo in the news	129
Imbizo Community Efforts	131

Summary	133
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The Imbizo

Neurotheory in Africa 11

Philosophy
Action

Course Structure 13

Lectures and Projects
Extracurricular Activities

The Class of 2017 23

Origins
Gender and ethnicity
Levels of education
Student roster
Student Case Studies

The Class of 2018 35

Origins
Gender and ethnicity
Levels of education
Student roster
Student Case Studies

The Class of 2019 45

Origins
Gender and ethnicity
Levels of education
Student roster
Student Case Studies

The Class of 2020 57

Origins
Gender and ethnicity
Levels of education
Student roster
Student Case Studies

Tutors 69

Faculty 77

Organisation, Location, Room & Board 89

Local Organiser - Emma Vaughan
Lecture Hall
Accommodation
Board and Catering
[Addendum 2020](#)



Theoretical Neuroscience in Africa

Philosophy

Understanding the brain is one of the most challenging scientific problems faced by mankind. The payoffs are huge, not only for mental health, but many scientific spinoffs, like artificial intelligence, brain-computer interfacing and treatment of neurological disease. Consequently developed countries are pouring ever increasing research funds into brain science – witness the BRAIN initiative in the US and the Human Brain Project in Europe.

In this area, as in many areas, developing countries are at a huge disadvantage, simply because research is expensive. In South Africa (and the African subcontinent more generally) experimental neuroscience is a small but energetic field with a proud history; however, running a a technologically advanced lab is often financially unsustainable. Theoretical neuroscience, on the other hand, needs little more than a laptop, pencil and paper. And yet, this rapidly emerging discipline is critical for analyzing and understanding increasingly complex experimental data and for modelling the brain in its own right. With a rich background in mathematical sciences and similarly good educational programmes in physics and engineering, it should be relatively easy to create world class scientific centers focusing on theoretical neuroscience. These in turn could serve as bridgeheads for the development and strengthening of all aspects of neuroscience in Africa.

Action

To accelerate the development of neuroscience in southern Africa, we organise a 3-week long Imbizo (from Zulu - Xhosa, “a gathering to share knowledge”) in Muizenberg, South Africa. We brought together 12 world leaders in computational/theoretical neuroscience and machine-learning with 31 African and Intercontinental students. Over 21 days, we lectured and learned, coded, brain-stormed, ate, celebrated, and created a tight knit network of inspired young scientists.

In the century of the brain, African scientists and educators are poised to make important contributions to global neuroscience research. The “IBRO Simons Computational Neuroscience Imbizo” aimed to further this goal, offer insight into the status quo, and enable knowledge transfer from the current leaders of the field. In the following pages we will argue that we were largely successful.

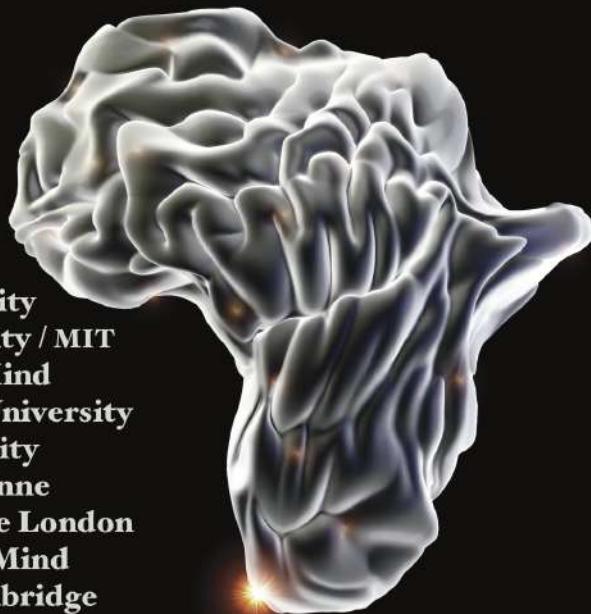
IBRO SIMONS COMPUTATIONAL NEUROSCIENCE IMBIZO

**Muizenberg Beach, Cape Town
January 9th - 29th, 2017**

**Application Deadline:
July 31st, 2016**

Faculty:

**Larry Abbott - Columbia University
Emery Brown - Harvard University / MIT
Nando deFreitas - Google DeepMind
Adrienne Fairhall - Washington University
Surya Ganguli - Stanford University
Wulfram Gerstner - EPFL Lausanne
Peter Latham - University College London
Timothy Lillicrap - Google DeepMind
Mate Lengyel - University of Cambridge
Eve Marder - Brandeis University
Joseph Raimondo - University of Cape Town
Yiota Poirazi - Foundation for Research and Technology - Hellas
Srikanth Ramaswamy - EPFL Lausanne
Rajnish Ranjan - EPFL Lausanne
Tim Vogels - University of Oxford
Daniel Wolpert - University of Cambridge
Alyssa Piccini Schaffer - Simons Foundation
Arthur Wingfield - Brandeis University**



TAs wanted! Interested?
Send your CV to
isicn.imbizo@gmail.com



**#isiCNI2017
isicni.gatsby.ucl.ac.uk**

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A gathering of the people to share knowledge.**

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The announcement poster for the first Imbizo in 2017.



Course Structure

The Imbizo is modelled after the numerous other neuroscience summer schools in the northern hemisphere. We pick the best and favourite parts of each school and bring it to the Cape of Good Hope. But the Imbizo, as the most southern of all summer schools, faces a number of special challenges that come with its location and its diverse student body. Over the past three years we have tweaked lectures, tutorials and projects, and also dining, accommodation and social activities to deliver the best learning experience for all of our students.



Intense homework sets in week one, and beach football matches over lunch. (2017)

Lectures and Projects

The Imbizo takes place in the last 3 weeks of January. Each week has a different theme and director, and features 6 working days and 1 day for social activities. Days begin with 4 hours of lectures from 9:00 to 13:00. After a common lunch, the afternoons and evenings are dedicated to work, either in the form of tutorials (in week 1) or free project time (in weeks 2 & 3). All dinners are held together at various locations around Muizenberg. In the latter part of the school, each student works with a team of tutors on a dedicated mini-research project. On the last day of the Imbizo, students present their results. Note that we have moved the weekly schedule around over the past three years but we have settled on the following structure:



The end of 2017's week one at the foot of table mountain.

Week 1: Biophysics, physiology, disease - the fundamentals

The first week is an in depth exploration (and tour-de-force) of the fundamentals of neuroscience. In the lectures, we introduce the basic anatomy and physiology of the nervous system, and then quickly focus on the electrical properties of neurons. We describe the foundations of biophysics as applied to neurons and explain the basis of membrane potentials, action potentials and synaptic conductances. Next, we focus further on ion channel function and how channels of all kinds can be studied and modelled using NEURON. By the middle of the week, we begin to explore the relevance of complex dendritic morphologies for understanding neuronal information processing.

For the second half of the week we introduce the vast, wonderful and heterogeneous world of synapses and their plasticity mechanisms. We switch gears and discuss the nature and origin of various neurological and psychiatric diseases, and finish the week with an overview of the various cutting edge experimental techniques for recording, and manipulating nervous systems.

The afternoons of the first week are devoted to hands-on tutorials, organised and run by the tutors. Our tutors generally take on a major role in shaping the syllabus – and the atmosphere – at the Imbizo, and we have been extraordinarily fortunate to have a consistently excellent group of teaching assistants. Tutorials range from building simple (single compartment) spiking models to using the NEURON simulation environment to perform biophysically realistic compartmental simulations of neurons; from hierarchical sensory processing to the basics of information theory; from models of learning and memory, and working memory, all the way to reinforcement learning.

A special highlight of week one is an opportunity for students to record action potentials from live insect neurons using Backyard Brains “spiker boxes”. Using two drawing pins (electrodes), wired up to a spikerbox bioamplifier, it’s possible to record from cockroach leg nerves. The exposure to a “real experiment” provides valuable insight into how data is collected and the associated difficulties (e.g. electrical noise). Witnessing a spike ‘in the flesh’ was an exciting experience.

Week 2: Network dynamics, spiking systems & machine learning

After the broad and comprehensive overview of week one, week two moves to the topic of neural networks. Starting with neuronal processing at a cellular level, lectures introduce spiking systems and discuss the neural code they use to communicate. Concepts such as signal propagation in feedforward and recurrent networks and the balance of excitation and inhibition as a fundamental mechanism in neural systems lead to lectures on general principles of information theory, and finishing the neuroscience part of the week with lectures on associative and working memory.



2017 Students crowded around the spikerbox amplifiers to record from real neurons.

The end of week 2 brings a significant switch of gear, leaping into a comprehensive overview of developments in machine learning over the past two decades. Following the historical narrative, the development of different network architectures for performing functions are described and compared to the nervous system. In additional machine learning tutorials students learn to use the TensorFlow open source library for performing computations using artificial neural networks. These lectures were very well received. Week 2 also features an overview of the business end of science: How to design figures and posters, how to structure papers and grants and how to present oneself in talks.

A unique feature of the Imbizo is the “Gender in Science Lunch”, an informal event in which male and female students and instructors separately discuss the status quo of gender and race based discrimination in science. Discussions are led by faculty and summaries of the conversa-



Larry Abbott and Tim Lillicrap's chat at the water cooler drew some crowds....



..and discussions could last long into the night time.

tions are recorded and exchanged between the two groups afterwards. The ability to speak freely and without worry to offend facilitates a lively and often very educational discussion on many topics.

With the exception of a few tutorials, the afternoons and evenings throughout week 2 are used for project time.

Week 3: Higher-order brain function

The final week of the Imbizo saw the students in full swing, working feverishly on the projects, and interacting between themselves and with the faculty with ease and confidence. The goal of the third week was to provide insight into the difficulty of the problems faced by the brain.

Lectures begin with a high level view of the computations performed by the brain, divided loosely into sensory processing, action selection and motor control. These topics are revisited in more detail in the following lectures, leading to learning under risk and the topic of reinforcement learning. The Imbizo comes to an end with a summary of the big picture of the brain: the problems it faces, and how neuroscientists go about figuring out how it works.



Week 2 concluded at the beach.



Science and socials in 2017....

A highlight of the third week is the “Diversity Lunch”, similar to the “Gender in Science Lunch” of Week 2, but held in one group, and with a focus on the African experience, which usually ends with a rich and lively conversation. Finally, the last lecture is led by Peter Latham as an AMA, “ask



.... in 2018.



.... and 2019.

me anything": Students are allowed one question each, anything goes, and Peter – along with the other faculty who are present, tutors, and even, sometimes, students – spend 90 minutes answering them. The students usually ask very good questions, and the discussion offers new perspectives on science for the students.

The last day of the Imbizo is spent on student presentations. Each student has 10+2 minutes to present their project and results, and the day is usually over before anyone notices that 31 young scientists have presented their ideas and results to their peers and friends. All that is left then is a party and good-byes.

Extracurricular activities and network building

The best achievement of the Imbizo in all three years was that our student body formed a cohesive, tight-knit group that transcended race, gender and national boundaries. We believe that they will provide support, networking and scientific advice to each for many years to come, also borne out in ongoing activity on all Whatsapp lists. We believe that these kinds of bonds and links are crucial for building a successful scientific career and are especially critical for students from Africa. For this reason we made every effort to ensure that relationships between students were formed early and strengthened throughout the course through social activities, and celebrated rituals such as Wednesday Night Science Socials and special dinner outings once a week.

Next page: The moon is rising on the way back from Tuesday night dinner.



Most importantly, we simply ensured that students spent a great deal of time together. Breakfasts, dinners and most lunches were eaten communally. Student interaction was amplified by the fact that lectures, tutorials and refreshments were all provided in the same room. Consequently, the students were together approximately sixteen hours per day. We also placed a large emphasis on fostering interactions between the students and both tutors and faculty. The students interacted with the teaching assistants on a daily basis to help them digest the contents of the course and also keep their projects on track. The students were also given multiple opportunities to interact with the faculty. For example, place settings were used for the majority of our dinners, which allowed students the opportunity to choose which faculty to sit next to. All of our faculty were chosen not based just on scientific quality, but also on their willingness to engage with students.

We also aimed to enhance a sense of community through planned social activities and weekend excursions. We wanted our students to work, but we also made sure they enjoyed themselves.



The 2018 group assembles to walk to dinner at the Brass Bell.

Tuesday Dinner Walks

Tuesday night dinners were organised at a restaurant by the water, about a 30 minutes walk along the coast. During the walk, there are many natural opportunities to interact with each other in an informal setting, and the students often enjoy the one-on-one time with some of our famous faculty. The dinner spot itself, the “Brass Bell”, with the backdrop of the Cape of Good Hope is spectacular. One of our faculty described it as one of the most beautiful dinner spots on Earth.

‘Free’ Sundays

The Imbizo features 2 travel days, 18 work days, and 2 free (Sun)days for activities. We provide activities for these days, both to facilitate communication, and to prevent the often stark financial inequalities within the student body to affect who can go on trips. On the first Sunday, we charter a sight-seeing “red” bus for a tour of the Cape Peninsula. We visit Kirstenbosch Gardens, Groot Constantia Winery, and Signal Hill, touristic highlights of the Cape region. The trip also allowed students to see and enjoy Cape Town’s natural splendours. For the second Sunday, students were given a choice between three exciting excursions: surfing lessons on Muizenberg beach, a trip to visit the penguins at nearby Boulders beach, or a hike up Muizenberg peak, under local guidance.



Swimming, hiking and yoga at the beach is part of the Imbizo.

Wednesday Night Science Socials

On Wednesday nights we host a social events with topical lectures by South Africans, according to who is available. In the past we had talks on the abundant local marine life, South Africa's Nobel Laureate Alan Cormack, and on the South African Astronomy project, SKA. We also had neuro-inspired magic shows, and we hosted a quiz at the local pizzeria. Students and faculty were divided into teams and required to answer questions on a wide range of topic from African general knowledge to 'how well do you know your classmates?'.

For early risers: Swimming, Yoga, Boot Camp

Outside activities on breaks was facilitated by our great location of our school at the beach-side suburb of Muizenberg, and lunch breaks are often spent at the beach, playing football and swimming. But the Imbizo offers more. Right from the start of the Imbizo in 2017, the Tutors played a large role in shaping the atmosphere and spirit of the group. It has become a habit that some of our tutors offer early morning sessions ranging from Yoga and boot camp by the beach, for those who seek exercise. Equally exciting and enthusiastically engaged with are swimming lessons in the tidal pools by the beach. Some of our African students arrive not being able to swim, and they leave not only as better scientists, but also as swimmers. We are deeply indebted to the drive and motivation of our tutors, who are joining us without financial compensation and on their own time (and especially Nassi Papoutsi who started this tradition). It is these impromptu activities through which students built strong relationships with each other, creating a well connected community.

Ending in style: The Gala Dinner

The crowning event of the school was the Gala Dinner and Party held on the final evening of the school (see picture on the next page). Students had all put a tremendous amount of work into their projects, which had been presented individually that day. As a result, the Gala Dinner gave students the opportunity to enjoy each other's company and that of faculty, and to reflect on all that had been achieved over the prior 3 weeks. In summary we believe that the shared experience of this rigorous but rewarding course will hopefully result in long standing relationships with productive international collaborations in the years to come.

Next page: Gala dinner venue.





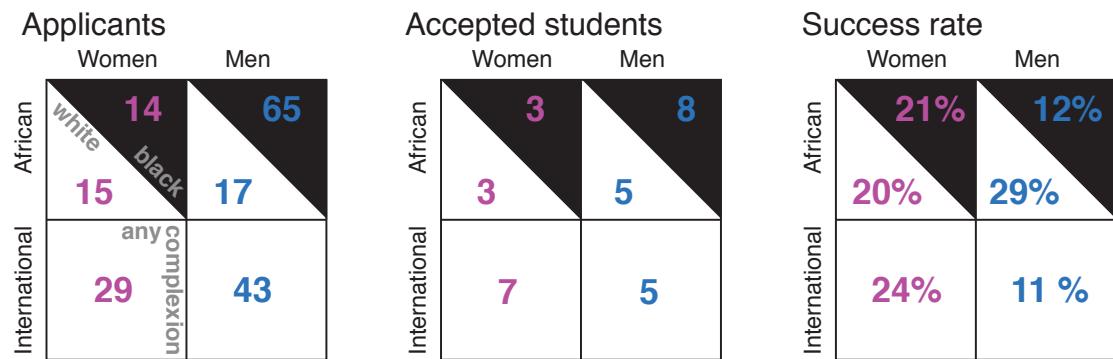
Origins

In the planning stages of the Imbizo, we aimed for 15 intercontinental and 15 African students. When we received 177 applications with over 100 applications from Africa, we created an additional studentship and, given the depth and qualifications of the African applicant pool, we admitted 19 African and 12 intercontinental students. The global distribution of their nationalities can be found in the chart below. South African participation was high, but with increasing visibility of the course, we are hoping to expand the circle of countries we recruit from in future years.



Distribution of gender and ethnicity

We aimed to create the most diverse student body possible. We separated the applicant pool along two axes: intercontinental or African applicants and male or female applicants. As such, the applicant pool comprised of: 82 (65 black / 17 white) African men, 43 intercontinental men, 23 (14 black / 15 white) African women, and 29 intercontinental women. (We did not ask for information regarding religion or sexual orientation). We evaluated each group separately through different assessors, and initially allotted roughly equal numbers of studentships to these four groups. Because of the uneven distribution of applicants in the four groups, we had to adjust the final numbers slightly, and ended up with the final roster below. The difference in success rates of African men may suggest bias, but it should be noted that the applicant pool of black men featured a high number of incomplete applications so that the realistic success rates were slightly higher.



Levels of education

With two exceptions (an early-stage principle investigator and a last-year undergraduate student), all students Imbizo were graduate students, finishing their Masters or in the first years of their PhD work.



Midnight maths at the Soul Surfer.

Student roster

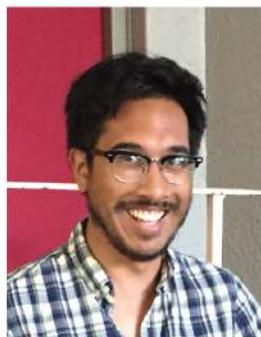
The following two pages contain the complete roster of our students.



Kayode Ayodele
Nigeria



Reshma Basak
India



Jay Bhasin
USA



Annik Carson
Canada



André, Castro
Portugal



Christopher Currin
South Africa



Kira Düsterwald
South Africa



Abib Duut
Ghana



Maxime Kepnang Pebu
Cameroon



Gift Khangamwa
Malawi



Phumlani Khoza
South Africa



Tresia Holtzhausen
South Africa



Lola Sze Ying Lam
China



Mirjana Maras
Montenegro



Stanard Mebwe Pachong
Cameroon



Lungile Mtetwa
South Africa



Laura Naumann
Germany



Lizelle Niit
South Africa



Arthur Powanwe
Cameroon



Luke Prince
United Kingdom



Yassine Ramdani
Algeria



Jonathan Rayner
South Africa



Lucas Rudelt
Germany



Victoria Shavina,
Russia



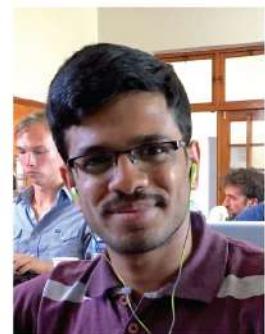
Saray Soldado Magraner
Spain



Ryan Sweke
South Africa



Luke Taylor
South Africa



Sushrut Thorat
India



Fatima Yusuf Hussein
Somalia



Girma Mesfin Zelleke
Ethiopia



Sicelukwanda Zwane
South Africa

Student case studies - "What did the Imbizo do for you? "

The next section features a closer look at some of our students, and their responses to what they particularly enjoyed at the Imbizo.

Abib Duut



Abib and Eszter working it out.

Abib Duut received his MSc. from the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS), Ghana. The need to support his siblings through school and his interest in models and data analysis led him to find a data analysis job where he applied Markov-Chains to analyze rainfall data in Ghana. The analysis supported small to medium scale farmers in the North of Ghana and helped them answer the basic question of what and when to plant. His work led him naturally to the discovery of machine learning and finally computational neuroscience. Now Abib Duut wants to primarily focus on the latter, hoping to fundamentally change existing approaches and methods of data modelling and machine learning, to eventually serve his community better. Currently, Abib Duut is volunteering at the Mathematics Department of the University of Ghana and dreaming of a PhD in Computational Neuroscience.

"I really felt privileged to be a part of the 2017 IBRO SIMONS Computational Neuroscience Imbizo in Cape Town. The travel experience, the opportunity to interact with a world-class faculty and such a diverse group of participants was really enriching. The courses were equally enriching and exciting, of course. The breath of the school covering biophysics, data analysis, and machine learning was particularly useful for a newbie like me. Some of lectures took on the life of the lecturer, it was as if the spirit of the lecturer was embodied in the lecture thus such lectures were naturally eponymously named like Mate's Lengyel's lecture, or Tim Vogels's lecture. I still carry the spirit of the place with me, the intensity and hunger for learning, in seeking to understand one of nature's mysteries: how the brain works; this spirit I will always carry. I also carry some memories of the experience with me, the runs in the morning, the chills of the winds just after noon and at night, the warmth of personalities, the confused faces during difficult lecturers, and the happy faces and the smiles during dinners. These memories I will forever carry. Ultimately, I can only imagine the worth of the experience at the school; For now, I can only say this: I have really been inspired and challenged during these three weeks, and I feel really confident about pursuing my interests, which in some sense is foreign to Africa."

Kira Düsterwald

Kira at the beach.

Kira Düsterwald is an aspiring clinician-scientist at the University of Cape Town and a Mandela Rhodes Foundation scholar. She is studying towards her MSc in Neuroscience concurrent to the completion of her medical degree. With a natural knack for numbers, and as a former participant in Math Olympiads, she also finished the equivalent of a mathematics degree during her medical studies. Part of the Raimondo Lab, Kira works on computational models of the cellular mechanisms underlying chloride homeostasis. She has broad interests in public health and social justice, and is part of the Student's Health and Welfare Centres Organisation (SHAWCO) team that sends out student-run clinics to under-serviced communities.

"I first picked up on computational/theoretical neuroscience because its problems, like those in many Olympiads, looked easy to understand yet difficult to solve, and it seemed a serendipitous mix of my interests in mathematics and medicine. I have luckily been able to explore neuroscience in a lab at UCT, but because the work in my lab is mostly experimental and there is limited neuroscience research in general in Africa, I had not been exposed formally to the field - until #isiCNI! The school was a great introduction to concepts in computational neuroscience that I knew very little about, including machine learning and approaches to problems. More importantly, I got to meet people who are interested in developing the field in our continent. This was pivotal in giving me a sense of what I need to know and do to pursue computational neuroscience alongside medicine, Emery Brown being a fantastic example of an anaesthetist-statistician-computational-neuroscientist. I am now confident that I will strive to train abroad, with the goal of practising medicine and studying/teaching computational neuroscience in Africa later, knowing that there is a system of friends and established scientists who support computational neuroscientists from Africa."

Phumlani Khoza



Phumlani (right) with André and Gift.

Phumlani Nhlanganiso Khoza is an Associate Lecturer and PhD candidate in Computer Science & Applied Mathematics at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. He is interested in developing tools to probe complex systems, aiming to apply the principles of computational neuroscience and machine learning to the development of neuroprosthetics. After working as data analyst for a bank in Johannesburg he returned to science to obtain a Master's degree in computer science. Phumlani previously worked on unstructured data analytics domains to support an asynchronous protocol for continuous electroencephalogram (EEG) labeling using commercial-grade EEG sensors to further the feasibility of affordable EEG-based brain-computer-interface technology.

“The main reasons for applying to be part of the Imbizo were to meet people who have research interests that are roughly aligned to mine, and to obtain insights from what they have learnt through performing their research. Without attending the Imbizo, it would’ve been quite difficult to have an encounter with this community, since there currently is no active research community that is operating at the intersection of computational neuroscience and machine learning in South Africa (this situation is going to change). I have both academic and entrepreneurial aspirations, and both of these aspirations require that I develop a deep understanding of machine learning, primarily. The main benefit I derived from attending the Imbizo was getting first-hand exposure to current developments in computational neuroscience and neural network inspired machine learning. I was primarily interested in the ideas presented by Emery Brown, Tim Vogels, and Tim Lillicrap. This proved to be particularly helpful in shaping the research direction for my PhD work. On a more long-term perspective, there’s the possibility of research collaboration between the people I met and myself.”

Ryan Sweke



Ryan at his recent PhD defense.

Ryan Baruch Sweke is a Ph.D. Student in theoretical physics, as a member of the Centre for Quantum Technologies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. After completing undergraduate and honours degree's at the University of Cape Town in applied mathematics and physics, a fascination with the underlying physical nature of information and computation led Ryan to an M.Sc. in quantum computing. This work continued into Ryan's current Ph.D. work, in which he is concerned with constructing algorithms which would allow for the efficient simulation of complex quantum systems on both universal quantum computers and alternative quantum information processing devices.

"The benefits of attending the Imbizo have been immediate and profound, in many different ways. I first applied to attend the Imbizo as a result of long term interest in computational neuroscience, which was sparked by both a fundamental fascination with questions of how the brain works, as well as my underlying interest in the physical nature of information and computation. The first and primary benefit of the Imbizo has been the broad picture understanding of contemporary theoretical neuroscience, and its wealth of open questions, which I have managed to obtain. Furthermore, the process of obtaining this broad picture understanding, facilitated by both the incredible faculty and students of the Imbizo, has kindled within me a strong desire to understand the answers to the plethora of open questions which currently exist, as well as a true passion for the methods of computational neuroscience. I am now particularly interested in the both the application and development of "top-down" computational neuroscience, as taught to us by Máté Lengyel, as well as the related interface between deep/machine learning (particularly reinforcement learning) and biological learning which I had the opportunity to discuss at length with both Tim Lillicrap and Surya Ganguli, amongst others. In particular, as a student at the end of his Ph.D., I am now at a position in which I feel it might be possible to change career directions, and as a result of my experience at the Imbizo I am very strongly considering applying for post-doctoral positions in computational neuroscience. In addition, another massive benefit of attending the Imbizo has been the close relationships I have managed to develop with all of the fellow students and faculty. In particular, I feel like these relationships constitute a strong and active support network which has already proved extremely useful for both academic and personal guidance. Finally, a huge benefit of attending the Imbizo was that it was extremely fun - The sense of camaraderie, enthusiasm and dedication amongst the students and faculty was palpable, and it was highly enjoyable to have the opportunity to be part of such an environment. Overall, I can honestly say that the Imbizo was one of the best scientific experiences that I have ever had, I feel extremely privileged to have had such an opportunity, and it has illuminated for me a true passion which may very possibly change the direction of my academic career."

Fatima Hussein



Fatima exploring Table Mountain with her peers.

Fatima Yussuf Hussein lives in Mogadishu, Somalia. She did her undergraduate work at the Shendi University in Sudan, and graduated with a Bachelor's in Science, focused on Physics and Maths. She continued her postgraduate studies in Mathematical Sciences at AIMS South Africa, where she received a Master's in Applied Maths. While her course work focused on quantum physics and mathematics she is interested in think more creatively about how to apply her knowledge to the real world, maybe even how the brain works. She is currently applying to graduate schools and still dreams of a career in science.

“Quite honestly, I am not sure I will pursue neuroscience. It seems too far removed from what I started with, quantum physics, and there is definitely no neuroscience in Sudan or Somalia. But that doesn’t mean the Imbizo was a waste for me. In fact, neuroscience has always been a dream for me, and maybe I can help bring neuroscience to Sudan, or Somalia in the future. What’s more, the Imbizo has helped me to understand what science is and how the scientific method works as a universal tool, no matter what the question is. For now, I would like to be part of a good scientific research group, conducting research that integrates different scientific disciplines. I want to participate in developing science in the African continent also through teaching and mentoring young promising students in African institutes. My favourite thing at the Imbizo was the experience to interact with a totally open minded, international community, talk about science and look at the ocean, all at the same time.”



The class of 2017 at the gala dinner.

Kay Ayodele



Kay at class.

Kayode Peter Ayodele is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. His background is in control and instrumentation. After his Ph.D. he developed a particular interest in modelling and analyzing of neurophysiological processes and signals. His current research includes development of brain-machine interfaces with reduced subject training times, development of EEG-based biomarkers for the diagnosis and management of schizophrenia, and EEG-based diagnosis and management of epilepsy. His honors include a MIT iLab Junior Research Fellowship (2011), a MIT sub-grant of the Carnegie Corporation "Realizing the Potential of iLabs in Sub-Saharan Africa" grant scheme (2006 - 2011), and the MIT - Total Empowering the Teachers Fellowship (2013). Kay was a co-author of the IEEE Education Society Theodore L. Batchman Outstanding paper of the year 2015.

"Coming to computational neuroscience from a background in electrical engineering, I quickly ran into two problems. First, my lack of formal training in neuroscience was making it hard to formulate and exchange ideas with potential collaborators in the health sciences. Secondly, I ran into a Catch-22, where lack of publications in the area made it harder to secure funding and attract collaborators, which in turn made it hard to do the work needed to get publications. I saw the Imbizo as a great opportunity to address both problems, and so it proved. Looking back, I am impressed by how much ground was covered in three weeks, from synaptic structure and modelling to large scale neuronal networks, along with complementary treatments of higher-order brain function and algorithms. The differences in the approach, and indeed, personalities of the instructors somehow helped to make the process feel less overwhelming. For me, two instructors stood out, representing as they did, two contrasting styles. Máté Lengyel's information-packed classes dispelled some important misconceptions for me, and I usually left Tim Vogels's talks with interesting, often out-of-the-box ideas. For me, the Imbizo has opened a door of tremendous opportunities. I am currently discussing with a researcher I met at the Imbizo about developing specific projects and proposals for a collaboration on epilepsy spanning sub-Saharan Africa. I have already, with collaborators from a nearby teaching hospital, formed what, to the best of my knowledge, is the first computational neuroscience research group in Nigeria."

Lungile Mtetwa



Fatima and Lungile catching some big air.

Lungile Victoria Mtetwa is a part-time Master's student at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and has been an Analytics Consultant at IBM South Africa for the last four years. Her background is in Computational and Applied Mathematics, in which she completed her honours degree at Wits. Lungile has always been interested in merging mathematical techniques with medicine. Her Master's research aims to use machine learning techniques in the mathematical modelling of the human brain in order to identify structures of the sub-cortical region. These methods will be applied to 3D brain MRI for automated segmentation. She aims to use her MSc. degree as a gateway to a career in Computational Neuroscience. Lungile is passionate about the development and support of women in STEM in Africa and is an active volunteers for "GirlCode ZA", an organisation that aims to create sustainable communities that foster women's continued engagement in improving their technology skills.

"The Computational Neuroscience Imbizo was an intellectual light bulb switched on for me. As I started my career in Analytics, I realized Neuroscience had become a dream deferred, so I decided to pursue a Master's degree with an application in Neuroimaging. The Computational Neuroscience Imbizo has given me foundational concepts of Neuroscience which I did not have coming into the school. The faculty was incredible, their varied background and experience gave me exposure to different research areas in computational neuroscience. I was inspired by Dr. Emery Brown's unique career path as an Anaesthesiologist / Neuroscientist, as it shows there are many different ways to navigate a career in Neuroscience. I am most grateful for the network of exceptionally talented young individuals in this field who attended the course and who consistently share updates from Neuroscience schools from around the world - this is an invaluable benefit of the school. Exploring Computational Neuroscience is not a far-fetched dream anymore."

Next page: Climbing Lion's Head Mountain for sunset.

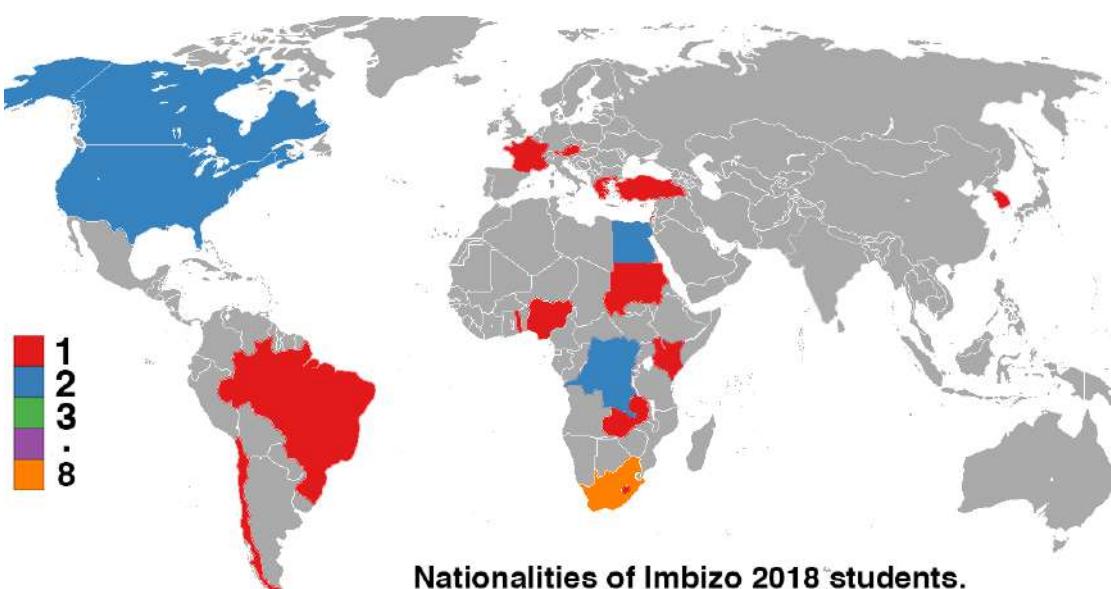




The Class of 2018

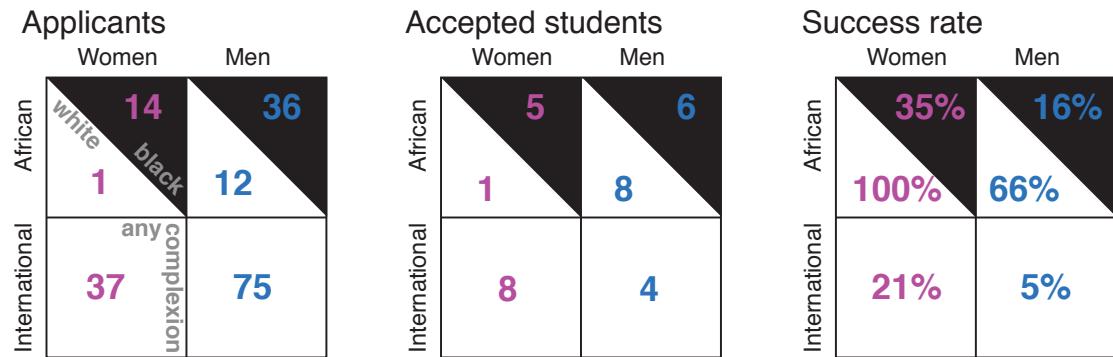
Origins

We aimed for similar composition as in 2017. We received 170 applications, with approximately 70 from Africa. We admitted 19 African and 12 intercontinental students (see chart below). The number of African applications was lower than in 2017, and we were a bit nervous that we had depleted the applicant pool. However, the 2018 applications were generally of a high standard. We assumed that we had to still work on visibility and we continue to work on expanding our circles in future years.



Distribution of gender and ethnicity

Again, we aimed to create a diverse student body. We separated the applicant pool along two axes: intercontinental or African applicants and male or female applicants. As such, the applicant pool comprised of: 48 (36 black / 12 white) African men, 75 intercontinental men, 15 (14 black / 1 white) African women, and 37 intercontinental women. (We did not ask for information regarding religion or sexual orientation). We evaluated each group separately through different assessors, and initially allotted roughly equal numbers of studentships to these four groups. Because of the uneven distribution of applicants in the four groups, we had to adjust the final numbers slightly, and ended up with the final roster below.



Levels of education

Similarly to the previous year, the student body consisted mostly of graduate students, at Masters or PhD level, but we also had some postdocs, and a young P.I. in 2018.



The lecture hall just before students arrive.

Student roster

The following two pages contain the complete roster of our students.



Samar Ahmed Mahmoud
Abbass



Hiba Abuelgasim
Fadlelmou



Mohammed J. M.
Aburidi



Einola Akin Akinboboye



Nick Kayokwa Chibuye



Ionatan Kuperwajs



Ana Cláudia Costa da
Silva



Stella Dong



Michael Ferreira dos
Santos Pereira



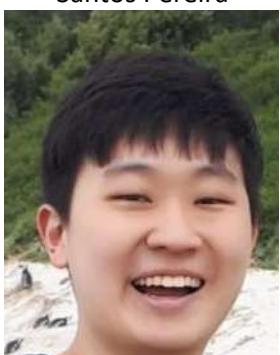
Ernst Grunow



Jordan Guerguiev



David Karpul



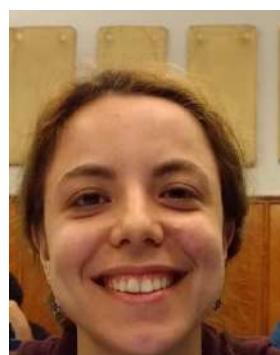
Young Wook Lyoo



Liemiso Mpota



George Obiero



Margarita Pitsiani



Jasmine Poirier



Dean Rance



Andrea Rodriguez



Samson Olayinka



Emily Shobana Muller



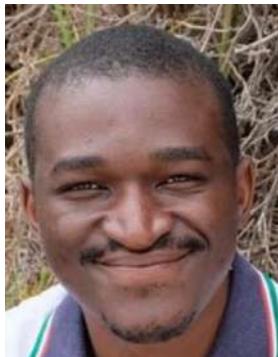
Mohamed Gomaa
Mohamed Sobeeh



Azote Somiealo



Mpassi Mahinga Désirée
Taliane



Patrick Tenga



Charline Tessereau



Gönül Uludağ



Morné Valentyn



Alexander von
Klemperer



Stiaan Wiehman



Bettina Wützl

Student case studies - "What did the Imbizo do for you? "

The next section features a closer look at some of our students, and their responses to what they particularly enjoyed at the Imbizo.

Somiealo Azote



Somiealo on a beautiful day at signal hill

Somiealo Azote wants to apply mathematics and physics to understand and solve problems of biological cell mechanics, such as cancer development and metastasis formation. After an MSc. from the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS), Senegal, and an internship in a biophysics laboratory (LIPhy) in Grenoble, France, where she used computational models to understand transmigrating animal cells, she works on her PhD in Biophysics at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. For her PhD thesis, she focused on the computational modelling of eukaryotic cell actin cytoskeletal networks during branching. Her tools include methods from graph theory, statistical and continuum mechanics. She investigates the contributions of cytoskeletal networks to the mechanical properties and stability of cells and tissue. For her Postdoc she would love to use the computational and theoretical models she has developed during her PhD (and at the Imbizo) to investigate the mechanics, structures and morphology of nerve cells in the brain.

"The 2018 IBRO-SIMONS Computational Neuroscience Imbizo was an amazing experience for me. It has been for me an opportunity to meet and interact with some of the best specialists of the fields of neuroscience who came from all over the world to share their knowledge with students, who also came from all over the world with diverse backgrounds . The school has broadly covered many subjects including biophysics, data analysis, and artificial intelligence. These were covered in detail, enabling a newbie like me to follow and understand most of the course. The passion and motivating way in which most of the lecturers and tutors were delivering their courses led me fall in love with computational neurosciences. I still carry the spirit of the place with me, the intensity and hunger for learning, in seeking to understand one of nature's mysteries: how the brain works; this spirit I will always carry. I can not forget the warmth of personalities, the bewildered faces during difficult lectures, and the happy faces and the smiles during dinners. In short I can only say the school has been amazingly exciting and enriching. The cultural diversity of the school is also has been a plus."

Hiba Abuelgasim Fadlelmoula Abdelrahman



Hiba trying out some local fashion

Hiba Abuelgasim Fadlelmoula Abdelrahman is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Neurophysiology, graduate school of Medicine, Kyoto University in Japan. Hiba is a Sudanese medical doctor graduated with honors from the University of Khartoum, Sudan in 2011. She got a master of public health degree from the department of health informatics at Kyoto University in 2014. She then joined the Department of Neurophysiology to pursue a career in Neuroscience, bringing together clinical, laboratory and community approaches. Hiba's research focuses on traumatic brain injury and its neuropsychological consequences. Hiba enjoys social and volunteer work. She is the president of the African Association in Kyoto and member of different societies and organizations.

“...Imbizo 2018 was indeed a great experience and one of a kind. It was not only about computational neuroscience, but it was about the very essence and purpose of science which is human communication, inclusion of all, diversity in all ways, innovation, and creativity. The school provided the best environment in which scientists coming from different backgrounds from all over the world can communicate together, interact and relate to each other. In Imbizo 2018, I have learned the principles and applications of computational neuroscience from the pioneers of this new field. However what was even more inspiring is the multidisciplinary approach and the collective effort to bridge the gap between different fields in neuroscience and other disciplines to come to a place where we can understand the human brain in a better way. Therefore, during Imbizo I felt the urge to spread this vision in my country Sudan. Two months later in March 2018, in collaboration with TReNDs Africa and University of Khartoum, I held three days outreach activities to advocate and stimulate multidisciplinary research and education in the field of Neuroscience in Sudan and in Africa. The advocacy events were very successful. We were able to engage stakeholders and scientists together with the community. We created a network that will be the foundation of a multidisciplinary neuroscience research center in Sudan and East Africa. Therefore, Imbizo 2018 doesn't only inspired me as an African scientist but also inspired more than 200 African researchers and scientists who attended our advocacy activities in Sudan.”

Jordan Guerguiev



Jordan, right, chatting about roach legs.

Jordan is a graduate student at the University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada. He studied mathematics and physics in his undergraduate years, with a weakness for the brain. He completed his Ph.D. in computational neuroscience in 2017. Jordan's work attempts to bridge the gap between machine learning and computational neuroscience by developing a theoretical model for how deep learning could be implemented in the brain. While his academic strengths primarily lie in mathematics and machine learning, he has been most interested in applying knowledge from these fields to the problem of understanding the brain. After completing his doctorate degree, Jordan intends to focus further on machine learning research.

"It was an incredible privilege to attend the isiCNI 2018 Imbizo. The three weeks turned out to be one of the most unforgettable and fulfilling experiences that I have ever had. Tim, Joe, Alex, Peter and Emma brought to us some of the greatest minds in neuroscience, who gave great lectures that spanned the field of computational neuroscience. Moreover, the tutorials run by the tutors provided very useful elaboration on some of these topics. As a learning opportunity for a student in computational neuroscience, this imbizo was really special. Perhaps even more important and fulfilling was the opportunity to meet some incredible people in my field, both the faculty and the students at various stages in their careers. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create strong and lasting friendships with other students from across the world. For me, one of the most important benefits of attending the imbizo was to be able to take a break from the breakneck pace of research and focus on building meaningful personal connections with others, which can be very easy to lose sight of in academia. I really look forward to seeing others from the imbizo again and potentially collaborating in the future. Ultimately, I will never forget the beautiful location of this imbizo in Cape Town, the amazing people that I was able to meet and the incredible experience that we shared."

Kayokwa (Nick) Chibuye



Kayaokwe leads the troops to dinner.

My name is Kayokwa N Chibuye and I am currently concluding a master's degree in computer science at the University of Cape Town, South Africa with a focus on Human Computer Interaction (HCI). My work focuses on the use of cross-language mapping to support speech recognition for low-resource languages. This is in turn to be used to develop small-vocabulary voice driven interfaces to facilitate human-computer interaction. This is motivated by multilingual societies such as most African countries and countries such as India in which text-based interfaces might not be very beneficial to their rural communities because they are often oral cultures. I also possesses a computer science bachelor's degree, with a bias in Software Engineering, which I obtained from the University of Zambia in 2013. My interests also include natural language processing, spoken language technology, music and linguistics.

"Being part of the 2018 IBRO SIMONS Computational Neuroscience Imbizo in Cape Town, South Africa was an amazing experience. I found the knowledge very enriching as well as inspiring, especially the stories that the faculty members shared regarding their journeys in computational neuroscience. For a person with a background in computer science, the subject matter discussed during the school was challenging as well as exciting, allowing me to explore what it would entail to pursue further studies in the Computational Neuroscience. However, filling the knowledge gaps and seeing where my background fit was all the more rewarding and motivating. The social activities were phenomenal and through them, I was afforded the opportunity to know the students and faculty members better, the connections made through these events are invaluable to my career. One of the biggest highlights was trying to learn how to swim under the instruction of very dedicated volunteers, going to the beach in the morning whenever it was possible before class began. The cultural events helped me understand South African culture and history more in spite of staying in the country for over two years. All in all, the Imbizo was a life changing experience for me. I went to the summer school knowing almost nothing about computational neuroscience and now I feel I not only understand its core components but can also identify sensory-motor neuroscience as something I would like to pursue for my PhD."

Emily Shobana Mueller



Emily and Liemiso.

Emily is a pan-african problem-solver dedicating her time to unpacking real-world problems using data analysis. She completed her BSc in Mathematics at Southampton University before coming back to Africa where she continued her mathematical studies at AIMS, South Africa. After completing a coursework masters, she wanted to further pursue a research career and found a particular interest in modelling humans. After a research project in social networks she decided to take a more empirical and objective perspective of behaviours from the individual building blocks of the human brain. After the imbizo, Emily began her research masters which uses machine learning to make individual level predictions of outcome for comatose patients using high density EEG and other objective biological parameters. Emily enjoys science communication and you can tune into her podcast @superpositionZA on twitter.

“I simply googled computational neuroscience and South Africa and the very first page to appear was the isiCNI in my home town, of all places! I couldn’t believe it! The weekly synopsis presented on the website could not have prepared me for the depth of information we covered during the 3 weeks at the isiCNI. The first lecture was mind blowing from Byron Yu showing us his lab monkey learning how to reach for a reward using a robotic arm and only his thoughts! We continued to explore the experimental aspect with our own dancing cockroaches and the information and innocent scientific curiosity just kept flowing. I have a million favourite things about isiCNI but here I will mention just two. People and Position. Position and people. Every day you would sit next to somebody new, a new conversation, a new skill-set, a new continent, a new institute and outlook. A conversation about the forefront of research and what is possible on the African continent. An honest conversation about the challenges we face and a joining together in how they can be addressed. Each position we step into communicated to our peers. Each person a potential friend, collaborator and colleague. What remains is the lingering sentiment that the Imbizo was the best summer school ever.”

Alexander von Klemperer



Alex improving his coding skills.

Alex is a medical doctor and aspiring neuroscientist from South Africa. He received his medical training from the University of Cape Town. He worked as a junior doctor at Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital before a community service year at Klerksdorp district hospital. He received a neuroscience masters degree from Oxford University where he is currently a DPhil candidate in neuroscience in the lab of Colin Akerman. His research interest is in cortical circuits, in particular how neuronal circuits recruit excitation and inhibition differently. He is fascinated by theoretical neuroscience and the computational tools that can inform and guide experimental research. He remains passionate about clinical neurology in a resource constrained settings such as South Africa and hopes to bring the tools and skills he has gained during his studies back to South Africa as a clinician scientist.

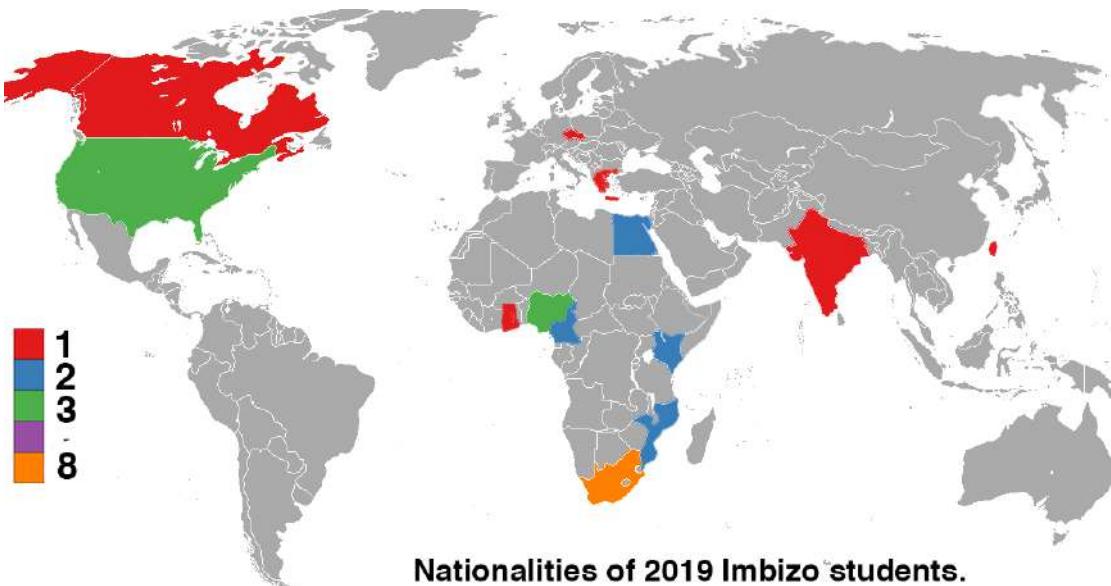
"I feel very lucky to have attended the 2018 IBRO SIMONS Computational Neuroscience Imbizo in Cape Town. Whilst I am currently completing a PHD in neuroscience in the UK, I remain committed to the development of both experimental and computational neuroscience in South Africa. I found the isiCNI to be an incredibly enriching experience in a number of ways. The course dealt with a broad range of topics that spanned both broad overarching principles of neuroscience and intricate implementational details, all offered by world class experts on their subject matter. Particularly memorable were the lectures by Larry Abbott, one of the authors of the first seminal textbook on theoretical neuroscience. Following the course I have found the lectures on balanced networks and excitation/inhibition balance in neural networks by Tim Vogels to be particularly useful in my own experimental work. However the principles and ideas that I was introduced to throughout the course have all continued to shape my thoughts. Throughout the course we were also provided with excellent practical tutorials that built off the concepts discussed in lectures. These tutorials were particularly useful for me as I had not had as much coding experience as some of the other attendee's prior to the course. What made the ISCINI particularly meaningful to me was its setting in South Africa. Neuroscience research remains a fledgling field in Africa, so it was an incredible experience having a course of this quality aim to further develop skills on the continent. I met and developed friendships with a number of students from across Africa, all of whom are equally passionate about neuroscience. It is ultimately my plan to continue my research in South Africa and I feel that this network of young African neuroscientists will be the most valuable aspect of the course for me moving forwards. "



The Class of 2019

Origins

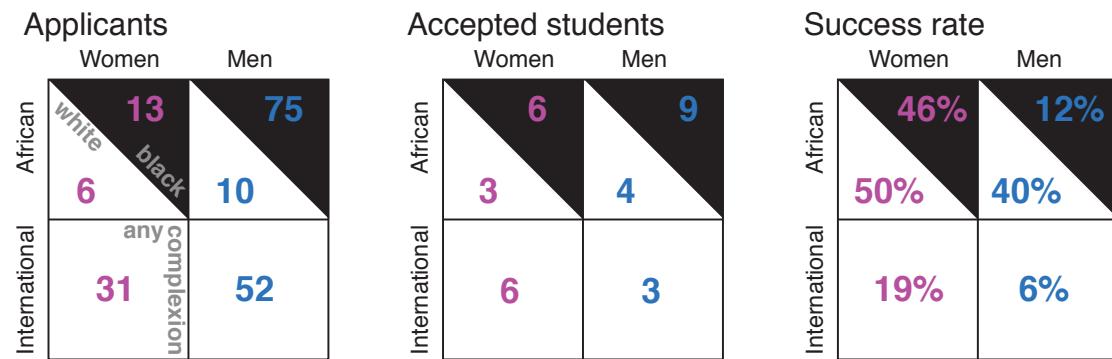
For the 2019 Imbizo we received 187 applications. Among them 104 applications from Africa, soothing our worries of depleted applicant pools with many qualified candidates. The presence of Google's Indaba Project¹ had a perceivable effect on the quality of the applications. Additionally, word-of-mouth began to bring us new applications as well. We admitted 22 African and 9 intercontinental students. Notably, for the first time we had candidates who cancelled after acceptance. We had to fill spots on short notice and opted for local students over those with potential travel or visa issues. This lead to a somewhat smaller group of intercontinental students.



¹The google <http://www.deeplearningindaba.com> initiative offers 3 day / 500 participant intense immersion workshops to bring machine learning and deep learning to Africa

Distribution of gender and ethnicity

As in previous years, we aimed for a diverse student body. We separated the applicant pool along two axes: intercontinental or African applicants and male or female applicants. As such, the applicant pool comprised of: 85 (75 black / 10 white) African men, 52 intercontinental men, 19 (13 black / 6 white) African women, and 31 intercontinental women. (We did not ask for information regarding religion or sexual orientation). We evaluated each group separately through different assessors, and initially allotted roughly equal numbers of studentships to these four groups. Because of the uneven distribution of applicants in the four groups, we had to adjust the final numbers slightly, and ended up with the final roster below.



Levels of education

As in previous years the Imbizo hosted MSc students, entry level and more advanced graduate students, and a few postdocs.



The CCFM Lecture Hall, with a new coat of paint in 2019.

Student roster

The following two pages contain the complete roster of our students.



Mai Gamal Abdelhamed



Sadiq Adedayo



Laetitia Agola



Joseph Baafi



Daniel Barabasi



Taliesin Beynon



Sebastian Bodenstein



Katerina Capouskova



Cephas Chiundidza



Chris Fourie



Monsurat Gbadamosi



Dylan Geldenhuys



Roy Henha Eyono



Shelly Jones



Wambui Kariuki



Tai-Ying Lee



Nancy Lubalo



Mamuku Mokuwe



Eslam Mounier



Daniel Musundire



Tosin Olayinka



Ioanna Pandi



Jacob Portes



Dhairyya Singh



Chloe Sole



Samuel Sowole



Alain Tene



Bahareh Tolooshams



Ineke van der Berg



David van Niekerk



Marjorie Xie

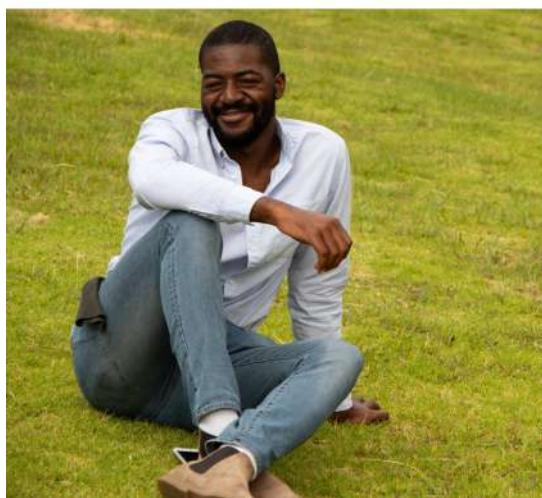
Student case studies - "What did the Imbizo do for you? "

The next section features a closer look at some of our students, and their responses to what they particularly enjoyed at the Imbizo.



The class of 2019.

Roy Henha Eyono



Roy is currently pursuing his MSc in Computer Science with focus on Machine Learning at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. His work focuses on learning methods for the credit assignment problem in artificial neural networks. Prior to his MSc, he completed an internship at Amazon Web Services in Cape Town as a Software Development Engineer and I obtained his BSc. (Hons) at the University of Cape Town in Computer Science. He is involved in science education in my home country of Cameroon, where I host workshops on Machine Learning. I am passionate about science in Africa and would definitely like to continue this in my own capacity.

"The Imbizo has been an eye-opening experience. I learned a lot about computational neuroscience, and also had the opportunity to interact with the field via conversations with world-leaders as well as through project work. Beyond computational neuroscience, the Imbizo made me appreciate the world of academia, as the Imbizo presented us the rare opportunity to interact closely with many prominent researchers in the field. This, in part, motivated me to further consider a career in research in the near future. It was a great privilege to be a part of this initiative, it really gave me that added confidence moving forward in my pursuit for a PhD. I can't thank the organisers enough for this experience, it was arguably my most memorable experience in research to date."

Katerina Capouskova



Katerina, explaining.

'Katerina received her first MSc. in Philosophy of Science from the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. Being primarily interested in Philosophy of Cognitive Science, she continued with MSc. in Neuroscience at King's College London, UK. As computational/theoretical neuroscience seemed to her like the best approach to understanding 'how the brain works' and appeared best connected to philosophical inquiry, she realized the importance of acquiring coding skills. After completing a Data Science Bootcamp (General Assembly) in San Francisco, she landed a job as a Machine Learning Research Assistant in a satellite image analysis start-up called Spaceknow.com. This furthered her data science expertise. Currently she is pursuing her Ph.D. degree in Computational Neuroscience in Gustavo Deco's laboratory at Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain.'

"The Imbizo has provided me with the most immersive academic experience of my life. And the academic part of Imbizo was not even the most personally challenging and enriching part! The Imbizo gave me an opportunity to visit Africa for the first time and learn about its amazing cultural and natural diversity. I have met many inspiring colleagues and I hope for extensive collaborations in the future. From a scientific perspective, I learned a lot about the computational neuroscience research happening worldwide and about state-of-the-art machine learning techniques that are biologically inspired, presented by Blake Richards and Tim Lillicrap. This exposure seems crucial for my further career development, as doing a Ph.D. in Europe does not provide us with advanced course work and the focus of our laboratory is very narrow. So the Imbizo broadened the potential of my research. Tim Vogel's original soft skills presentation was very beneficial, especially for students like me, who are in large labs and thus do not get that much personal attention. Hopefully, I also contributed to the scientific debate and the cultural 'pell-mell'. I cannot be grateful enough for my involvement in such a unique gathering."

Eslam Mounier



Eslam, left, with Dylan, visiting penguins.

Eslam Mounier is a research and teaching assistant in the Computer and Systems Engineering department at Ain Shams University in Cairo, Egypt. He is currently working towards his M.Sc. degree. He works in the field of visual prostheses, which aims to restore functional vision for the visually impaired. This involves dealing with extracellular recordings, data analysis and developing computational neuroscience models. Eslam is now very interested in deep learning (DL) techniques and wants to explore different DL techniques to build better computational models in neuroscience. Eslam's next goal is to pursue a Ph.D. in Computational Neuroscience.

“Joining the 2019 I was a life changing experience. In honesty, the amount of knowledge I gained was far more than I expected. The faculty and the tutors have made such a great effort in order to cover most of the topics related to computational neuroscience as well as showing us the most recent advances in the field. Coming from an engineering background, I really enjoyed a lot the lectures that covered neuroscience essentials such as: what is a neuron?; neuron structure; different neuron types; how neurons communicate; different brain areas and their functionalities. I also got to enrich my knowledge in machine learning, reinforcement learning and data analysis.

In addition to the lectures, We had a lot of fun! Cape Town is a wonderful city. We got to visit beautiful places, took a lot of photos and made cool memories. Everyone in the school was super cool. I am so happy with the friendships and connections I made.

I have to say that the school organization was flawless. Everything was very well organized, this includes travel, accommodation, lectures, food and the wonderful tours. In the end I would like to thank the faculty, tutors, organizers and the funders who made this opportunity possible for all of us.”

Dhairyya Singh



Dhairyya Singh received his B.A. and advanced diploma in Psychology and Computer Science from Ashoka University, India. He got interested in neuroscience as an undergraduate and worked in a variety of labs. He worked in Dr. Kristen Lindquist's affective neuroscience lab at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill on neuroimaging meta-analyses, then in Dr. Kaveri Rajaraman's neuroethology lab, at Ashoka University, studying zebrafish numerical cognition. He also interned in Dr. Garga Chatterjee's cognitive neuroscience lab at the Indian Statistical Institute, developing a large-scale behavioural genetics study. He is now looking to start his Ph.D. and hopes to help bridge the theory and experimental neuroscience by combining both approaches in his work.

Dhairyya, at the Botanical Gardens.

“Attending the 2019 IBRO-SIMONS Computational Neuroscience Imbizo has opened an entirely new world of learning for me. Before coming to Muizenberg, my understanding of neuroscience was restricted to the biology and I was deeply interested in experimental systems and cognitive neuroscience. At the Imbizo I began to develop an appreciation for theoretical neuroscience and the manner in which computational tools can be used to gain a deep understanding of brain function. They allow us to approach questions that remain experimentally intractable. I also now see the deep value of computational neuroscience in not just modelling to explain existing experimental work, but also actively generating hypotheses for future experiments. Thanks to the intense immersion at the summer school where I was able to start developing a deep understanding of theoretical concepts and modelling, I am now committed to pursuing computational neuroscience in conjunction with my experimental interests and exploring how they might inform each other. All the learning, however, would not have been as exciting without all the amazing people I was able to meet at the Imbizo. I am going to cherish the friendships that I developed here forever. I am exceedingly grateful to IBRO and the Simons foundation for making the Imbizo possible, and the Imbizo organizing committee for giving me the opportunity to participate. Thank you!”

Adedayo Sadiq Adewale



Sadiq with Jacob, shoulder to shoulder.

I am currently studying Biomedical Engineering (Biomechanics) at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. This is a step on my path to Neuroengineering. As a high school student, my desire had been to learn how machines are designed and built. This propelled me to study Mechanical Engineering at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Nigeria for my undergraduate. I became interested in the brain, its functionality and how to improve its functionality to help those in need. I'd love to work on nervous signal processing and its applications in Brain Computer Interfaces. I love discussing science with my siblings (a microbiologist and a chemical engineer in the making), also mechanical manufacturing with my dad who is a fellow mechanical engineer. I enjoy cooking, eating (of course!!!), swimming, ocean surfing as well as football.

"It's such a pleasure to be able to give a brief overview of my Imbizo experience and I must admit it was the best 2 or 3 weeks of my life. It all started in a grand style when I finally got my application submitted for the school, I wasn't expecting much from it but of course gave my best in the application. Although I was faced with a lot of difficulties getting the visa sorted, I am proud to say that I had the best experience. The science was very challenging and quite confusing and I appreciated the fact that it put me on my toes. I want to learn more about the human brain. It increased my passion to know how the 3 pounds fat in the skull directs one's entire being.

The extracurricular activities are not to be forgotten. From the early morning swimming classes, which gave me chance to learn swimming, to my first ever ocean surf. I was amazed by the interactions between the faculty, the tutors and the students. Everyone interacted like equals, without oppression or anyone appearing to be a figure above anyone else, that is a feeling so new to me. Especially to see top names, usually etched in glass, lowering themselves to listen to the very little sense I can make. All the faculty members were super, but I like to mention just a few of them. Tim Vogels taught me a lot. He inspired me and would corner me to build that confidence in me. You probably wouldn't know how much that meant to me, but I hope to be able to showcase that confidence in the nearest future. Joe, oh man, who would believe that such a vibrant professor would be so passionate to play beach soccer with his students! He's ever accommodating and helpful. Dora Angelaki, such a motherly figure, she will forever be special and I appreciate her presence. Peter Latham, a very funny man. He postulated that Joe will be getting his Nobel prize by 2049 and I hope that will happen. Another notable part: the South Africans. Some of the nicest people I've ever encountered in my entire life.

In all, isiCNI 2019 was such an eye opener, both about computational neuroscience and life. It taught me to believe in myself more and to know that those in leading universities are not made of gold, a strong indication that I can be like them. It also gave me my first ever trip out the borders of my Motherland. Thank you Imbizo committee, IBRO & Simons Foundations and South Africa. You have all made a great contribution into my making."

Chris Fourie



Chris (left) on a walk by the beach.

Chris is a medical doctor having studied at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg. After graduating he spent a couple years abroad in Germany and Austria, learning the language and taking part in engineering courses at the University of Salzburg to help bolster his quantitative background. He is currently enrolled in the Computer Science Masters by coursework at Wits, being a member of the RAIL Lab and supervised by Dr. Benjamin Rosman. His research interests are at the intersection of Theoretical Neuroscience, Machine Learning and Biological Computation, with a focus on how they might inform one another. He has a passion for community and education, supervising the South African Medical Students Association (SAMSA). Additionally he hopes to one day play a role in automation around primary healthcare in developing economies, especially in Africa.

“Waking up to a sunrise on Muizenberg beach, making a decision between beach yoga or grabbing a surfboard, having neuroscientists from Harvard or UCL out with you in the waves before a full day of intense lectures and tutorials is not the start to a typical day - unless you are at the Imbizo.

After leaving medical school, where there was no accessible concept of ‘theoretical neuroscience’ nor exposure to machine learning, I embarked on a multi-year excursion trying to understand the landscapes of various research fields. I hadn’t even realised the mix of these two disciplines explicitly exists and that it is absolutely awesome.

The Imbizo was an amazing introduction to a community I have been looking to join. The environment provided was rapid fire, high pressure learning with intimate expert support. The overall candor gave me a great encouragement that this subject matter is the most important thing I could be working on.

There was an emphasis on collaboration, with the formation of professional and personal bonds being integral to the process. Deep exposure to the spectrum of researchers lives from fledgling post-grad to Professor at MIT, from Cameroon to Greece, helped me reflect on and formulate my own self image as a researcher. Being able to badger individuals from the Blue Brain Project or Deep Mind with questions while casually meandering along the seaside was an absolute treat. Not knowing ‘what one does not know’ has been one of the largest hurdles in my journey towards finding a meaningful and interesting research direction. The Imbizo not only clearly showed me what I don’t know – but also what I would like to know. It’s helped provide direction and a supportive community to help me pursue that.

Wambui (Fridah) Kariuki



Wambui did her undergraduate in Biochemistry from the University of Nairobi, with a Major in Molecular Biology and Biotechnology. She is now working on completing her Masters in Bioinformatics at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Nairobi. This has brought her to the world of programming. The amount of data in life sciences means machine learning is crucial to the future of the field. Interacting with computational neuroscientists has reintroduced her to her earlier passions of mathematics and biophysics. Wambui hopes to continue in these directions for her future studies.

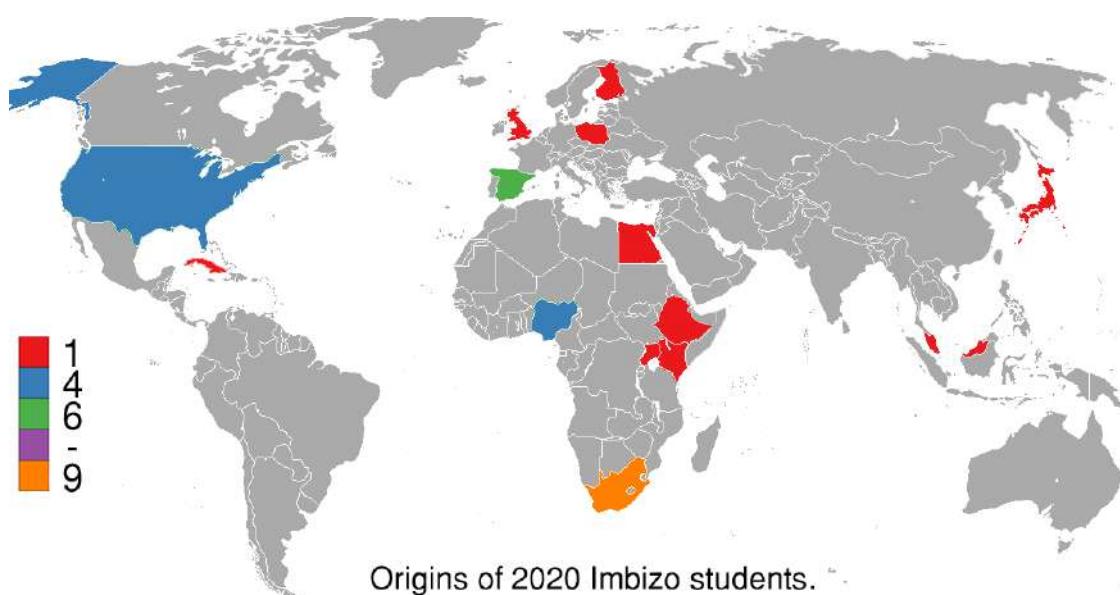
“The 2019 Imbizo was an amazing experience for me on so many levels. I applied to the Imbizo with both confidence and worry but at the end it was the confidence that took the day. Academically, it opened me to options I did not know I could pursue and revived some old interests which I had shelved. I was also able to interact with lots of brilliant people and fun people making not just people I would like to collaborate with in research but friends I’d like to keep for a lifetime. The school gave me the chance to dive right into machine learning (something I have been putting off for quite a while due to some sort of fear) but as I write this now, I have made some great progress. It also gave me the confidence to follow the path that I would like to take and the knowledge that in research no question is really stupid. I enjoyed the lectures (even those where I understood nothing) and the tutorials as well. I also benefited greatly from learning from my fellow schoolmates and sharing any knowledge I have with them. I enjoyed the talks during lunch and dinner and especially one long talk I had with Tim Vogels (Thanks Tim, that chat will go a long way for me). The school was one of the best experiences of my life and the best way to start a defining year for me. I hope that it continues for a long time as this is an experience that is needed for more students especially from Africa to make the connections, acquire the resources and improve our overall confidence. Thanks.”



The Class of 2020

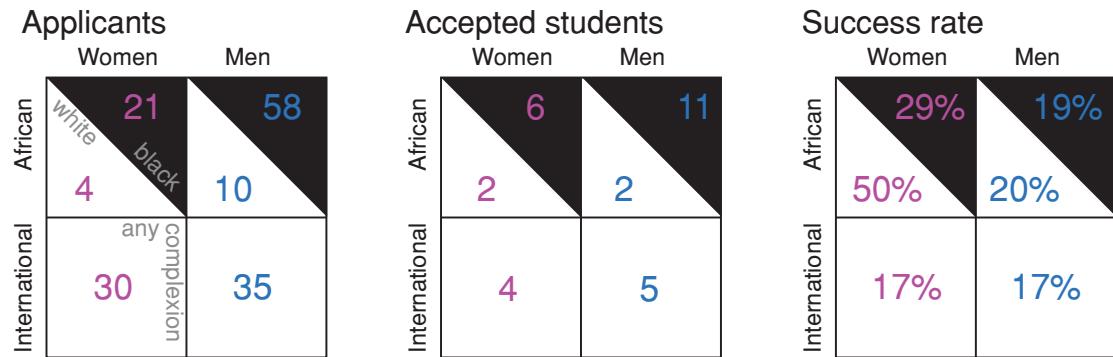
Origins

For the 2020 Imbizo we received 158 applications. Among them were 90 applications residing in Africa, with many qualified candidates. We admitted 17 African and 15 intercontinental students. Notably, for the first time we had candidates of African Black ethnicity from United States, Malaysia, Japan, and Britain. Thanks to various circumstances we had 5 cancellations. We were able to fill these spots on short (up to 24 hours) notice and had to opt for students w/o potential travel or visa issues. We still achieved a well-balanced student body.



Distribution of gender and ethnicity

As in previous years, we aimed for a diverse student body. We separated the applicant pool along two axes: intercontinental or African applicants and male or female applicants. As such, the applicant pool comprised of: 68 (58 black / 10 white) African men, 35 intercontinental men, 25 (21 black / 4 white) African women, and 30 intercontinental women. (We did not ask for information regarding religion or sexual orientation). We evaluated each group separately through different assessors, and initially allotted roughly equal numbers of studentships to these four groups. Because of the uneven distribution of applicants in the four groups, we had to adjust the final numbers slightly, and ended up with the final roster below.



Levels of education

As in previous years the Imbizo hosted MSc students, entry level and more advanced graduate students, and a few postdocs.



Timothy Lillicrap engulfed in conversation with Simphiwe.

Student roster

The following two pages contain the complete roster of our students.



Haruna Abdu



Osama Ahmed



Oluwasegun Akinniyi



Maryam Busari



Basile Confavreux



Jason Connie



William Dorrell



Mohamed El Tabbal



Sarah Elnozahy



Wisdom Ikezogwo



Ruqayyah Jaji-Sulaimon



Sarah Kagotho



Kacper Kondrakiewicz



Laura Mediavilla Santos



Alba Morató



Cebisile Mthabela



Geraud Nangue Tasse



Simphiwe Nhlanhla Zitha



Edwin Nyongesa
Mukhebi



Timothy Odonga



Adedamola Onih



Candice Ramsammy



Naixin Ren



Kevin Rusch



Veronika Samborska



Ippa Seppälä



Eran Shorer



Jared Tumiel



Lisa van Staden



Taliya Weinstein



Jiacheng Xu

Student case studies - "What did the Imbizo do for you?"

As in previous years, the next section features a closer look at some of our students, and their responses to what they particularly enjoyed at the Imbizo.

Sarah Elnozahy



Sarah at the "Amazing Race" event.

Sarah completed her bachelor's at Johns Hopkins University with a degree in Computational Neuroscience. Her research career thus far has been focused in examining the role of neuro-modulatory circuits throughout learning. This work has been part of her general interest in understanding context-dependent memory mechanisms at a systems level. She will be further developing her research in cortical circuit dynamics with a collaborating group at École normale supérieure in her post-baccalaureate year. Sarah's long-term goals include pursuing a PhD in Neuroscience and playing a large role in building scientific initiatives in the Middle East, specifically in Egypt, where she is originally from.

"Without a doubt the Imbizo was a transformative experience both personally and career-wise. I came into the Imbizo with a general understanding of both the field of Computational Neuroscience, as well as scientific development in Africa. With my background in systems neuroscience, the intensive and detailed analysis of theoretical neuroscience that was offered by the school itself has been extremely beneficial for me since. While the content was always engaging, the highlight of the school was the opportunity to work closely with incredible faculty and extremely dedicated teaching assistants. In combination with the guidance from the faculty, the strong comraderies and collaborative relationships amongst the students made the experience all the more exciting to be a part of. Throughout the course, every single one of the faculty were not only willing, but passionate about spending their time discussing with us and addressing all of our questions regarding the computational concepts, as well as insight into our career development. I personally felt extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to discuss at length with Dr. Eve Marder both her work, and her perspective as a woman in a largely male-dominated field. Furthermore, the Imbizo's emphasis on gender equality and diversity inclusion was also extremely beneficial to the summer school experience for me as well as many of the students. It is through these discussions that we learned more about one another and began to form close bonds. These relationships were further fostered throughout our many exciting and memorable ventures in Cape Town. I know I am not alone in saying that the connections that were built will last far beyond the Imbizo and continue to benefit us all as we continue building our careers. Despite still just beginning my scientific career, I am confident that these were some of the best experiences I will have, and the intellectual benefits of the Imbizo will be far-reaching as well. I feel very privileged to have been a part of the 2020 Imbizo, and I am excited to continue to build on my knowledge and network in Africa, as well as around the world. "

Osama "Sama" Ahmed



Sama with Annik and the mascot, Mr Sparkles.

'A child of the diaspora, Sama was born in the Sudan, moved to Oman to live on a farm for a few years, and then finally immigrated to the United States. He studied bioengineering at the University of Pennsylvania and earned his PhD in neuroscience from the University of California – San Francisco. As a graduate student, he studied the evolution of chemosensory mechanisms that control social behaviors. He is currently a Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow at Princeton University, in the lab of Dr. Mala Murthy, where he studies the neural basis of multi-tasking in *Drosophila*. He addresses this problem using brain-wide imaging, high-resolution behavioral analyses, and computational modeling, and he hopes to continue this work in his own lab in the coming years. Sama is eager to work with people as brilliant as those he met at the 2020 Imbizo.'

"It is a tremendous pleasure to share my experience at the 2020 Imbizo, but please rest assured that a few sentences cannot capture how impactful those three weeks in January have been. I first heard about the Imbizo from Tim Vogels at the 2019 Neuromodulation Gordon Research Conference. The prospect of learning computational neuroscience in South Africa appealed to me, and a single conversation with Tim convinced me to apply. In my scientific career, it has been rare to meet and work with other Black neuroscientists, let alone African neuroscientists — yet here was a course to fill that gap. Tim's honesty and candor suggested that this could be a life-changing opportunity, and he was right. The Imbizo training provided a solid foundation for my postdoctoral work as I worked on two formative projects: (1) a model of visual attention, based in convolutional neural networks, with Grace Lindsay, and (2) a model of inverse reinforcement learning inspired by a short conversation with Tim Lillicrap and guided by Annik Carson. The skills I developed in these projects now shape some of my postdoctoral research. But the impact of the Imbizo goes beyond the computational training. Every night was filled with deep and meaningful conversations about topics as diverse as Nigerian politics, scientific cultures across the globe, math puzzles, peer mentoring, and optimal durak strategies. One particular conversation stands out to me. While eating pizza with Eve Marder, Tom Tagoe, and Nassi Papoutsi, I shared my long-term dream of starting a research institute in the Sudan. Their collective input, drawing from their unique experiences and perspectives, was invaluable and gave me a framework by which to realize my dream. Each day of the three weeks in Muizenberg was sprinkled with similarly enlightening conversations. Undoubtedly the most lasting impact will be the connections I formed with scientists from all over the world, many of whom I hope will remain lifelong friends and colleagues. The possibility to continue working together, beyond those three short January weeks, is priceless. For that, I want to thank all of the professors, organizers, funders, TAs, students, Chef Phil et al., and especially Emma for making the 2020 Imbizo such a brilliant space for me to connect, to learn, and to grow as a scientist and human being. I will be eternally grateful."

William Dorrell



Will, talking a selfie after a swim.

Will Dorrell is currently a research intern at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology in Japan, studying biologically plausible reinforcement learning. Will grew up in the UK and did his undergraduate degree in Physics at the University of Cambridge. This led to a pre-doctoral fellowship at Harvard University where he focused on his chosen subfield – condensed matter, the study of large collections of matter. Eventually it dawned that he found his dog's behaviour more interesting than electrons', so when someone let slip that he could use maths and computers to study the brain (and these new-fangled neural nets), without doing any experiments, he was all ears. He will begin a PhD at UCL's Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit this September. His research plans are currently slightly nebulous, but he really enjoys thinking about the olfactory system, mechanisms for spatial reasoning, and physics approaches to understanding machine learning. He hopes to pursue these further.

"I won't lie, the scenery at Imbizo was stunning; it was a beautiful place to spend three weeks, and my surfing really came on in leaps and bounds. Similarly, the lectures were engaging, covering multiple layers of neuroscientific discovery and introducing me to a lot of new ideas. My project partner Wisdom and I have even been continuing our work on image representations, something that began during week three's coursework at Imbizo. But these were simply a favourable backdrop for my main takeaway from the whole experience: the people I met.

The Imbizo single-handedly increased the number of neuroscientists I know by about an order of magnitude. As a relative newbie to neuroscience I've been spending a lot of time trying to orient myself within the field: what are good questions? Or promising research directions? How can my skills be put to use and what other skills should I be learning? Conversations with faculty, students, and TAs at Imbizo helped me build partial answers to these questions and others. A few highlights must be listening to Profs. Marder and Sprekeler's hours long discussion on the role of theory in neuroscience; hearing Dr. Stensola talk about grid cells (they blew my mind); and the collective conversations that led to my eventual acceptance of UCL's PhD offer – I was in the process of PhD applications during Imbizo.

But beyond science, Imbizo has facilitated a group of friends scattered across the globe from backgrounds very different to my own. I was trying to think, and I reckon I've never really met someone from Africa before (I guess that's growing up in provincial England for you). These interactions are valuable, I know for a fact that conversations at Imbizo changed many of my opinions. I sincerely hope that this is only the beginning."

Wisdom Oluchi Ikezogwo



Wisdom on the Muizenberg beachfront.

Wisdom is a research assistant at the Biosignal Processing, Instrumentation and Control (BSIC) Lab at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He is interested in the application of learning algorithms and control theory in the healthcare space. His interests range from prediction, classification, control, detection, interpretation, to decision making. His undergraduate honours project focused on machine learning models for electrophysiological signals. After the completion of his BSc, he continued to work on dimensionality reduction techniques applied to EEG data, both, in his lab and as a data scientist for a media startup. His aims for Ph.D. studies in the intersection of machine learning and computational neuroscience, all towards “Auto healthcare”.

“Before the Imbizo I felt lucky to attend the school, and afterwards, I felt privileged to have been a part of the 2020 isiCNI, to have spent time with the Faculty, TAs and Students In-class and Out-of-Class as I couldn’t have asked for a better introduction to the fields of computational neuroscience and machine learning. you might ask why?, well to put it simply, I had never before been in such an encouraging environment, where everyone is positioned to do very well, learn and grow. To say it was a life-changing experience for me is, to put it mildly. I appreciate the TAs who sacrificed their time and energy and made themselves available to guide us, I appreciate the lectures by the faculty, especially those by Eve Marder, Demba Ba, Athanasia Papoutsi and Tim Lillicrap as much as I am grateful for the insights from Tim Vogels, Tom Tagoe and the Schaffer’s. In all, I learned a great lot, had great conversations, made friends, and had wonderful experiences, all in the beautiful, beautiful city of Cape Town.”

Lisa van Staden



Lisa, centre left, with friends at the beach.

Lisa did her undergraduate in Mathematical Sciences with a focus on Computer Science at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. During this time she was exposed to Machine Learning and members of its community through university courses and events. She is currently busy with her Masters in Electronic Engineering at the same university. She is working on speech processing models for low-resource languages. This involves using Deep Learning architectures to build models that can be useful for speech from languages from which it is difficult or impossible to collect transcriptions. After she completes her Masters thesis, Lisa plans on going to go work as a software engineer and then to start a PhD after a few years in speech or natural language processing (she is still thinking about Computational Neuroscience).

“Before the imbizo I didn’t have any experience with Neuroscience, but I decided to apply because I was curious about how the brain works and I thought I can at least do the computational part of Computational Neuroscience. The work ended up being quite challenging, we worked on our project until late in the evenings. Fortunately, the tutors were very helpful and the work was very interesting.

Among the best things about the imbizo are the connections you make with the other students, tutors and lecturers. I had three roommates from three different continents and by the end, we got along like best friends. It’s an amazing experience to get to know people from all over the world and to realise how much we have in common. In the first week, we experimented with cockroaches and afterwards we taught each other the word for cockroach in our home languages. Some of the evenings we played Uno and we each added a rule that we had at home – it was the most complicated and intense Uno rounds I have ever played. The other students weren’t just from different backgrounds geographically speaking but also from different academic backgrounds. To my surprise, Computational Neuroscience was new to a lot of them as well. This helped me realise that if I ever did want to change direction in terms of research it would be okay and if that direction happens to be Computational Neuroscience, there is an amazing community to become a part of.”

Ruqayyah Jaji-Sulaimon



Ruqayyah and the UCT Vice Chancellor, Prof. Mamokgethi Phakeng

Ruqayyah grew up in Lagos-Island, Nigeria and is now a junior faculty and doctoral student in the Department of Anatomy, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Her PhD research focuses on therapeutic approaches to multiple sclerosis using mice model of demyelination. Like other growing academics in the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences of the University, she teaches human anatomy to undergraduates. As an anatomist with keen interest in mathematics, she began to search how to do maths while studying the brain. She felt mathematical tools can be useful in unravelling how the brain works in health and disease. Finally after several searches of the keywords "mathematics" and "neuroscience", she discovered the field of computational neuroscience. She is in the final year of her PhD and looks forward to becoming a post-doctoral fellow in a prestigious computational neuroscience lab.

"Twenty-one of the first thirty days of the year 2020 were amazing days for me. I spent these days amongst intellectuals – in a gathering to share knowledge- Imbizo. Activities at the Computational Neuroscience School, Imbizo, which was held in Cape Town, South Africa, were so well tailored that it was a good ground to learn new skills and build on existing ones - From the early morning work-outs (though I participated in only the last), to the brilliantly delivered lectures by faculties, challenging tutorials by TAs, the walks to brass bell, the Sunday outings and of course, the food. It indeed, was a time well-spent.

I never knew I had a lot of maths to catch up with till I passed through this knowledge-packed summer school. It was an eye-opener. Really had a tough time with the maths, but I came out better. Arthur Wingfield's Challenges in understanding human cognition, the math of how we smell by Evan Schafer, a Warm-up of machine learning by Henning, how to make good figures in python by Chris and Alyssa's Review Process, are lecturers I loved and revisited after the school in a bid to pass across the knowledge to few students and colleagues in my home institution. So, Imbizo didn't just school me. More minds have been educated! And hey! Tim Vogel's unusual talks were beneficial and moments with Annik, fantastic.

Although COVID-19 might change the modus operandi of the school, future students will get the best. All faculties were highly cerebral, the TAs were always welcoming and ready to tutor, and more importantly, the 31 students from 16 countries were excellent!

I couldn't have initiated my journey into the field of computational neuroscience elsewhere. To the organizers and sponsors, a very cheerful thank you from me."

Candice Ramsammy



Candice, with UCT Vice Chancellor Phakeng.

Candice Ramsammy is a research intern at the Perinatal HIV Research Unit (PHRU) at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, Soweto. Originally from Johannesburg, she studied physiology and psychology at Wits. She focused on cognitive manifestations of neuro-physiological processes, culminating in her Master's degree in Research psychology. Candice is currently working on research exploring HIV-associated neurocognitive disorders (HAND). She is a member of Wits NeuRL (Wits Neuroscience Research Lab), a space designed to facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration. Candice is now inspired to pursue a PhD, and hopes to make a significant contribution to the ever growing knowledge in the field of HIV, specifically the disease progression in the brain. Above all, Candice is a Harry Potter enthusiast and enjoys all things Disney in her spare time.

"My Imbizo 2020 experience was a rollercoaster ride: It was terrifying, fast, had me feeling slightly light-headed, yet exhilarating and left me wanting more. My apprehension prior to the summer school was largely based on my dismal computational skills and concern that my biological knowledge would not be enough. Luckily for me, only the top-most applicants are selected, and I found myself surrounded by remarkable people who had all the patience in the world. My new found friend Jason even arranged a Python session with me to assist with syntax, and help with many debugging obstacles.

The Imbizo opened my eyes to research opportunities, and the intersection of the multiple disciplines. This was seen across the Faculty involved, the TA's and the attendees. This was invaluable, as it is not something I experienced much in university. The content was challenging but gave different perspectives on what we thought we knew. The hands on experience with the content was priceless. And I now have a network of friends as well as future colleagues and collaborators that I could have not dreamed of.

Not only was the learning experience incredible, but the energy of the Imbizo was magical. Learning how to surf was one of the many highlights. I also loved the culinary experience, especially the music Chef Phil and his team played during meal prep. Although the food was great, the company was even better. Never was there a meal with Segun without one thinking deeply about their existence and contribution to the world. It was encouraging to sit with faculty members and have them not only share their accomplishments, but also their failures. This inspired me to pursue my PhD. The Imbizo 2020 opened up my world to computational neuroscience, a path I probably wouldn't have thought about for myself. And in so doing, it has opened up the whole world for me. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity to have this once in a lifetime experience. Thank you."

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Muizenberg





Tutors

The powerhouse and engine of the Imbizo. Our six tutors, from left to right in the above picture: Merav, Nassi, Bill, Alex, Eszter, and Sina.

Alex Antrobus

Alex is a Doctoral student in the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit at University College London. He studied physics and applied mathematics at the University of Cape Town, before completing a six month internship at the Blue Brain Project, helping him transition to computational neuroscience. Alex's interest is in how network level dynamics contribute to computations being performed by the nervous systems. His current work focus on models of learning in recurrent neural networks: how learning affects the connectivity and dynamics of the network, which learning rules are stable, and whether different learning rules leave different 'signatures' in the connectivity and dynamics of the networks.

William Podlaski

Bill Podlaski is a graduate student at the Centre for Neural Circuits and Behaviour, University of Oxford, working with Professor Tim Vogels. Before that, he studied a BSc in biological sciences at Cornell University, where his first exposure to neuroscience was in rodent electrophysiology. He then transitioned to computational neuroscience through a master's degree in computer science at the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne. He is currently interested in understanding how neural network dynamics and architectures influence the computations done by a neural circuit. He also maintains an interest in more biophysically detailed neuron models.

Athanasia Papoutsi

Athanasia Papoutsi used to be a postdoctoral fellow in the Computational Biology Lab of Yiota Poirazi in Greece. She received her bachelor degree in Biology from the University of Athens and then moved to Crete, where she completed with distinction the Brain and Mind Master program. During her PhD studies she investigated the role of dendritic integration in the prefrontal cortex function using biophysically detailed computational models. After a NeuroCure visiting PostDoctoral fellowship in Humboldt University, Berlin, she is currently using a mixture of



Alex in action at the Imbizo 2017.

computational and electrophysiological techniques to study dendritic integration and neuronal function.

Merav Stern

Merav Stern is a postdoc at the University of Washington, Seattle. She received her PhD from the Interdisciplinary Center for Neural Computation at Hebrew University while collaborating with Columbia University's Center for Theoretical Neuroscience. Merav is interested in information processing. She seeks to identify brain areas that alter their activity during the course of learning a visually-guided behavioral task, to characterize these changes, and to assess for each brain area the intrinsic (local) changes versus alterations in external influences from other cortical areas. Known as an outstanding student, she excelled at the challenging task of adding a theoretical aspect to the study of the neural networks activity, and in fact her postdoctoral work will consist of beginning a new collaboration between a theoretical group of researchers at the University of Washington and experimental lab scientists at the Allen Institute for Brain Science in Seattle.

Sina Tootoonian

Sina Tootoonian is a research associate at the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit at University College London. After studying electrical and computer engineering at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, he completed a PhD in Computation and Neural Systems at the California Institute of Technology, where he carried out data analysis and modelling of the insect olfactory system. Following his PhD he was a research associate at the Computational and Biological Learning Laboratory at the University of Cambridge, where his research focused on a theoretical explication of the insect olfactory system as performing a probabilistic inference computation. His current research at the Gatsby Unit focuses on the vertebrate olfactory system.

Eszter Vertes

Eszter Vértes is currently a PhD candidate working with Professor Maneesh Sahani at the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit at University College London. Previously, she obtained her MSc



Emma and the Teaching Team 2018.

degree in Life Science and Technology from École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). She is interested in how the brain is able to deal with uncertainty while processing complex stimuli. She is studying how neural circuits learn the statistical structure of the environment and how they use this knowledge for interpreting new incoming sensory information. Her PhD work also investigates what neural representations of uncertainty are best suited for learning and performing biologically relevant computations. She maintains a keen interest in probabilistic machine learning.

Katharina Wilmes

Katharina Wilmes is a postdoctoral fellow in the Clopath Lab at Imperial College London. During her joint PhD at the Theoretical Biology, Humboldt University of Berlin and the Bernstein Center for Computational Neuroscience in Berlin, she studied how dendritic inhibition can gate excitatory plasticity in a switch-like manner by targeting dendritic signals. Prior to that, she studied Cognitive Science (BSc) at Osnabrück University, and Brain and Cognitive Sciences (MSc) at the University of Amsterdam. Her research seeks to understand the cellular and circuit mechanisms that underlie the regulation of learning in the brain. She is currently investigating the interaction of interneurons with principal neurons in functional microcircuits and how synaptic plasticity and stimulus processing are modulated during learning.

Friedemann Zenke

Friedemann studied physics at the Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms University in Bonn, Germany and at the Australian National University in Canberra. He received his PhD in the laboratory of Wulfram Gerstner at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) where he studied the interaction of synaptic and homeostatic plasticity in spiking neural network models. He then joined the laboratory of Surya Ganguli at Stanford University as a postdoctoral fellow where he used machine learning approaches to explore the role of complex synaptic dynamics for learning and memory in the brain. He currently continues this line of research as a Sir Henry Wellcome fellow in

the Vogels and Waddell labs at the University of Oxford. He is interested in biologically plausible learning and memory in (spiking) neural networks, using tools from deep learning, dynamical systems and control theory. He is also the author of an open source high-performance spiking neural network simulator, Auryn.



Slightly better for the wear: Tutor Selfie at the end of the Imbizo 2019.

Agostina Palmigiano

Agostina is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Theoretical Neuroscience, Columbia University. She completed a Licentiate degree in Physics at the University of Buenos Aires/Quilmes University before starting a PhD in Theoretical Neuroscience at the Max Planck Institute for Dynamics and Self Organization, where she graduated summa cum laude. She is interested in oscillatory networks representing synchrony in the brain and how this impacts information processing in the brain. She also has background interests in delayed dynamical systems, information theory, and attention.

Callie Federer

Callie Federer is a PhD candidate in Computational Bioscience at UC - Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus working with Joel Zylberberg. Her undergraduate work was in computer science and biology, and she spent a few years doing cancer research in her undergrad career and in beginning of her graduate work before switching over to computational neuroscience. Her first project in computational neuroscience was on a biologically plausible model of working memory. Currently she works on computer vision, evaluating how closely it resembles mammalian vision and drawing inspiration from mammalian vision to achieve better results in computer vision.

Grace Lindsay

Grace Lindsay is a postdoc at the Center for Theoretical Neuroscience at Columbia University, where she also obtained her PhD under the supervision of Ken Miller. Before that she received a Bachelor's degree in Neuroscience from the University of Pittsburgh and spent a year as a research fellow at the Bernstein Center for Computational Neuroscience in Freiburg, Germany. Her current



Project time.

research centres on building functional models of neural circuits in order to connect neural & behavioural data, and she is particularly interested in sensory processing and attention.

Richard Pang

Rich Pang is a graduate student in the Computational Neuroscience Center at the University of Washington, working with Professor Adrienne Fairhall in the Physiology and Biophysics Department. Before moving into neuroscience Rich attained a B.S. in physics at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Seeking novel applications for the quantitative skills he had developed as an undergraduate, he found new enthusiasm in using the language and methods of mathematics to understand the structure and function of neural systems. Rich is currently interested in implementations of working memory systems in biologically realistic neural network models, and in particular how they might store and retrieve relational information structures.

Chris Currin

Christopher Currin is a doctoral student at the University of Cape Town with Dr Joseph Raimondo. He started by studying a BSc with majors in biochemistry, computer science, and psychology with the goal of pursuing neuroscience. He started his graduate career as an electrophysiologist but shifted focus to computational modelling, where he has found his passion. His current interest is in biophysical modelling of chloride ion dynamics in dendrites, neurons, and epileptic networks to further understand short-term inhibitory ionic plasticity. He is also interested in machine learning and the relationship(s) between AI and the brain.

Annik Carson

Annik Carson is a doctoral student at the University of Toronto under the supervision of Blake Richards. Annik completed a BSc in mathematics and neuroscience, and discovered computational neuroscience as a way to bring both interests together. Her primary research interests have always revolved around learning and memory; for her masters, Annik focused modeling inhibitory synaptic plasticity in hippocampal pyramidal neurons. For her doctoral work, she is studying the functional role of the hippocampus in decision making using reinforcement learning models, and is particularly interested in how the brain makes use of episodic memory to guide learning in rapidly changing environments.

Everton Agnes

Everton Agnes is a postdoctoral research scientist in computational neuroscience in the group of Prof Tim Vogels at the University of Oxford, UK. After working with both experimental and theoretical physics during his undergrad in the south of Brazil, theory was the choice for Everton's career. In the meantime computational neuroscience became his passion, and after completing a MSc and PhD in theoretical physics in Porto Alegre, Brazil, he lectured physics for a year, before moving to Oxford, UK, to join Prof. Vogels' lab. Everton's current research is focused on synaptic plasticity models, neural networks and models of neuronal dynamics. His ultimate goal is to understand how synapses communicate and interact to optimise learning.





Faculty

We aimed to recruit 12 lecturers (plus three directors) for three weeks, focusing on gender balance and diverse ethnicity, as well as broad expertise. While we feel that while we generally had a very high quality faculty, we can still do better in recruiting women and non-white lecturers.

Larry Abbott (2017 - 2018)

Larry Abbott is a physicist-turned biologist who uses mathematical modelling to study the neural networks that are responsible for our actions and behaviors. Abbott's 1977 thesis work at Brandeis University was in the area of theoretical elementary particle physics. He then worked in theoretical particle physics at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center and, later, at CERN. He became an assistant professor in the physics department at Brandeis in 1979, received tenure in 1982, and became a full professor of physics in 1988. Abbott began his transition to neuroscience research in 1989 and moved to the Biology Department at Brandeis in 1993. He held both the Nancy Lurie Marks and Zalman Abraham Kekst chairs in neuroscience. While at Brandeis, Abbott in collaboration with Eve Marder developed the dynamic clamp, a technique that has now become a standard tool of experimental electrophysiology. In 2005, Abbott joined the faculty of Columbia University where he is now the William Bloor Professor of Theoretical Neuroscience and co-director of the Center for Theoretical Neuroscience.

Dora Angelaki (2019)

Dora Angelaki is a full Professor at the New York University Center for Neural Science. She received her PhD from the University Of Minnesota College Of Science And Engineering, and went on to advanced training at the University Of Texas Medical Branch and the University Of Zurich. Before NYU, she held faculty positions at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, Washington University, Baylor College of Medicine, and Rice University. Her research focuses on understanding how multi-sensory information flows between subcortical and cortical brain areas, as well as the spatial navigation, decision-making and episodic memory circuits, and how internal states modulate this information flow. She uses innovative approaches to explore and understand neural dynamics and network coding of multi-sensory and multi-modal information at multiple stages of processing

under diverse naturalistic and perceptual contexts related to navigation, planning and perceptual decisions. She is interested in the neural implementation of canonical neural computations, and how they go astray to result in sensory, motor, memory and cognitive deficits in diseases like autism and schizophrenia. Her goal is to use this knowledge to understand computational principles of disease, to inspire artificial systems, to aid the development of prosthetics and other tools for understanding and treating deficits of sensory coding, spatial orientation, cognition and action.



Peter Latham is starting the very first lecture of the inaugural Imbizo.

Demba Ba (2019 - 2020)

Demba Ba received the B.Sc. degree in electrical engineering from the University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA, in 2004, and the M.Sci. and Ph.D. degrees in electrical engineering and computer science with a minor in mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, USA, in 2006 and 2011, respectively. In 2006 and 2009, he was a Summer Research Intern with the Communication and Collaboration Systems Group, Microsoft Research, Redmond, WA, USA. From 2011 to 2014, he was a Postdoctoral Associate with the MIT/Harvard Neuroscience Statistics Research Laboratory, where he developed theory and efficient algorithms to assess synchrony among large assemblies of neurons. He is currently an Assistant Professor of electrical engineering and bioengineering with Harvard University, where he directs the CRISP group. His research interests lie at the intersection of high-dimensional statistics, optimization and dynamic modeling, with applications to neuroscience and multimedia signal processing. Recently, he has taken an keen interest in the connection between neural networks, sparse signal processing, and hierarchical representations of sensory signals in the brain, as well as the implications of this connection on the design of data-adaptive digital signal processing hardware. In 2016, he was the recipient of a Research Fellowship in Neuroscience from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Emery Brown (2017)

Emery Neal Brown is an American statistician, neuroscientist and anesthesiologist. He is the Warren M. Zapol Professor of Anesthesia at Harvard Medical School and at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), and a practicing anesthesiologist at MGH. At MIT he is the Edward Hood Taplin Professor of Medical Engineering and professor of computational neuroscience the Associate Director of the Institute for Medical Engineering and Science, and the Director of the Harvard-MIT Health Sciences and Technology Program. Brown is one of only 19 individuals who has been elected to all three branches of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Brown is also the first African American and first anesthesiologist to be elected to all three National Academies.



Adrian Fairhall is always popular.

Adrienne Fairhall (2018 - 2020)

Adrienne Fairhall is an Associate Professor in the Department of Physiology and Biophysics, and director of the UW Computational Neuroscience Program. She is a recipient of the Burroughs Wellcome Fund Career Award and was a McKnight Scholar in the Neurosciences. She received her training in Physics from the Australian National University and the Weizmann Institute of Science, and is currently unlocking secrets in neuroscience. She works closely with experimental labs to study everything from single neurons to foraging mosquitoes.

Ila Fiete (2019)

Ila Fiete is an Associate Professor of theoretical neuroscience at the MIT Department of Brain & Cognitive Sciences. She received her PhD in physics at Harvard University, under the supervision of Sebastian Seung, then did a brief postdoc at the Kavli Institute for Theoretical Physics in Santa Barbara before moving to the University of Texas at Austin in 2008, and then to MIT in 2018. She works on the mechanisms underlying memory, integration, error correction, and prediction in the brain, at the circuit level. She uses theoretical and computational modeling techniques, and performs quantitative data analysis to tackle mechanistic and function-related questions. Her recent efforts fall at the nexus of dynamics, coding, and function, and in particular how each influences the other.

Surya Ganguli (2017)

Surya began his academic career as an undergraduate at MIT, triple majoring in mathematics, physics, and EECS, and then moved to Berkeley to complete a PhD in string theory. There he worked on theories of how the geometry of space and time might holographically emerge from the statistical mechanics of large non-gravitational systems. After this, he chose to pursue the field of theoretical neuroscience, where theories could be tested against experiments. After completing a postdoc at UCSF, he has recently started a theoretical neuroscience laboratory at Stanford. He and his lab now study how networks of neurons and synapses cooperate to mediate important brain functions, like sensory perception, motor control, and memory.

Michael Häusser (2018 - 2019)

Michael Häusser is Professor of Neuroscience at University College London and a Principal Research Fellow of the Wellcome Trust. He received his PhD from Oxford University under the supervision of Julian Jack. He subsequently worked with Bert Sakmann at the Max-Planck-Institute for Medical Research in Heidelberg with Philippe Ascher at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris.

He established his own laboratory at UCL in 1997 and became Professor of Neuroscience in 2001. His group is interested in understanding the cellular basis of neural computation in the mammalian brain using a combination of experiments and theory, with a special focus on the role of dendrites. His group has also helped to pioneer several new optical approaches for probing the function of neural circuits in the intact brain.



Dinner with faculty is a highlight....

Peter Latham, Co-Director (2017 - 2020)

Peter Latham was a physicist for a large portion of his career (undergrad at UC San Diego, grad at UC Berkeley and postdoc at the University of Maryland), but in 1996 he switched to theoretical neuroscience. After 1.5 years at NIH and 6 at UC Los Angeles, in 2004 he became a faculty member at the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit, UCL, where he has been ever since; he is now a full professor. He uses techniques from physics and machine learning to understand how biologically realistic networks carry out computations, with a focus on probabilistic inference and synaptic plasticity.

Timothy Lillicrap (2017 - 2020)

Timothy Lillicrap received an Hon. B.Sc. in Cognitive Science & Artificial Intelligence from the University of Toronto and a Ph.D. in Systems Neuroscience from Queen's University in Canada. He moved to the University of Oxford in 2012 where he worked as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow. In 2014 he joined Google DeepMind as a Research Scientist and became a Senior Research Scientist in 2015. His research focuses on machine learning for optimal control and decision making, as well as using these mathematical frameworks to understand how the brain learns. He has developed new algorithms for exploiting deep neural networks in the context of reinforcement learning, and new recurrent memory architectures for one-shot learning problems. His recent projects have included applications of deep learning to robotics and solving games such as Go.

Máté Lengyel (2017 - 2018)

Máté Lengyel is a Reader in Computational Neuroscience at the Department of Engineering, University of Cambridge, and at the Department of Cognitive Science, Central European University, Budapest. Máté's interests span a broad range of levels of nervous system organisation, from sub-cellular and cellular through circuit and systems to behaviour. He studies these phenomena from computational, algorithmic/representational and neurobiological viewpoints. Computationally and algorithmically, he uses ideas from Bayesian approaches to statistical inference and reinforcement learning to characterise the goals and mechanisms of learning in terms of normative principles and behavioural results. Máté obtained his MSc and PhD at the Eötvös Loránd University, followed by a post-doctoral research fellowship at the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit, UCL, and a

visiting research fellowship at the Collegium Budapest Institute for Advanced Study. He has been awarded an Investigator Award by the Wellcome Trust, and more recently a Consolidator Grant by the European Research Council.

Eve Marder (2020)

Eve Marder is a University Professor and the Victor and Gwendolyn Beinfield Professor of Neuroscience at Brandeis University. At Brandeis, Marder is also a member of the Volen National Center for Complex Systems. Dr. Marder is known for her pioneering work on small neuronal networks which her team has interrogated via a combination of complementary experimental and theoretical techniques. Marder is particularly well known in the community for her work on neural circuits in the crustacean stomatogastric nervous system (STNS), a small network of 30 neurons. She discovered that circuits are not “hard-wired” to produce a single output or behavior, but can be reconfigured by neuromodulators to produce many outputs and behaviors while still maintaining the integrity of the circuit. Her work has revolutionized the way scientists approach the studies of neural circuits with respect to the study of structural and functional behavior. The general principles that have resulted from her work are thought to be generally applicable to other neural networks, including those in humans. Marder has received numerous awards for her pioneering work in the field including memberships in the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2013, she was named to the National Institute of Health working group for the BRAIN Initiative

Athanasia Papoutsi (2019 - 2020)

In previous years Athanasia was a popular tutor in Muizenberg, but in 2019 she was awarded a Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation Research grant and a NARSAD Young Investigator Grant, both as an early career investigator. Hence, she returned to the Imbizo as a lecturer. When she is not busy teaching computational and electrophysiological techniques to study dendritic integration and neuronal function, or giving swimming lessons to our students, she is beginning to build her own group at the Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas (FORTH) in Crete, Greece.



...but so is surfing with them (in this case with Blake Richards)

Panayiota Poirazi (2017 - 2018)

Panayiota Poirazi is a Director of Research at the Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology (IMBB), Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas (FORTH). She received her Bachelor in Mathematics with honors from the University of Cyprus in 1996. She received her Master and Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering (Computational Neuroscience) also with honors in 1998 and 2000, respectively, from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. From 2001-2004 she worked as a postdoctoral/Marie Curie fellow first in the Biomedical Science Research Center 'Alexander Fleming' in Athens, Greece (2001-2002) and then in the IMBB-FORTH (2002-2004), where she has been a Principal Investigator since 2004. Her work focuses on the role of dendrites in learning and memory via the use of computational models. She has received several awards for academic excellence, including the EMBO Young Investigator award in 2005, two Marie Curie fellowships (2002 and 2008), a Starting Grant from the European Research Council (ERC) in 2012 and the "Manolis Christofides" Young Cypriot Investigator award in 2014. She is a member of AcademiaNet: a European portal for outstanding women scientists since 2013 while in 2014 & 2015 she represented the ERC at the World Economic Forum, Annual Meeting of the New Champions as a Young Scientist. She joined the Young Academy of Europe in 2015 and was the chair of the FENS-Kavli Network, a young academy of outstanding European Neuroscientists for 2015-2017.

Joseph Raimondo, Co-Director (2017 - 2020)

Joseph Raimondo is a cellular neuroscientist with a medical degree from the University of Cape Town. He received a DPhil in neuroscience from the University of Oxford where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar. He currently leads a research group at UCT where he holds a Newton Advanced Fellowship. His laboratory investigates cellular mechanisms underlying epilepsy and inhibitory signalling in the brain, with a focus on epilepsy syndromes relevant to the African context. A career ambition of his is to help develop African capacity in cellular neurophysiology and computational neuroscience.



Misha Tsodyks was part of week 2 in 2018, 2019 & 2020(!).

Srikanth Ramaswamy (2017 - 2019)

Srikanth Ramaswamy is an in silico neuroscientist working at the Blue Brain Project in Switzerland. His research is dedicated to understanding the mechanisms that regulate activity states of neocortical microcircuitry in the healthy and diseased brain. He graduated from the National Institute of Engineering in Mysore, India with a first class Bachelor's degree in electrical and electronics engineering in 2002. In 2003, he received a British Chevening scholarship by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK for a Master's in electrical power engineering at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, which he completed with commendable mention in 2004. During his Master's, he developed a keen interest in neuroscience and won a fellowship by the Fundación BBVA in 2005 to work with Profs. Gonzalo de Polavieja and Pablo Varona at the Universidad

Autónoma de Madrid to perform single unit recordings and calcium imaging in Leech motor neurons. In 2006, he joined the Blue Brain Project at the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) as one of its first scientific team members and began his Ph.D. thesis under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Henry Markram. His PhD. thesis focused on modelling synaptic interactions between neocortical neurons, and validating the model against experimental data. After his PhD., he undertook a brief postdoctoral stint with Prof. Richard Frackowiak, at the University of Lausanne Hospital, where he worked on modelling synaptic mechanisms in psychiatric disorders. In 2014, he was appointed as a senior tenured neuroscientist in the Blue Brain Project, where he leads efforts in understanding the neuromodulatory mechanisms that regulate neocortical network states. In 2015, he received the EPFL “Prime spéciale” in recognition of outstanding contributions to establishing a facility for data-driven *in silico* reconstructions of neocortical microcircuitry.

Rajnish Ranjan (2017)

Dr. Rajnish a computer science graduate, a curious software engineer got curious enough about the brain and drifted towards neuroscience. He completed his PhD in neuroscience from EPFL, Switzerland. He has worked for many years in neural simulation before moving to experimental neuroscience. Currently he is the Section Manager of Membrane Systems group in the Simulation Neuroscience Division in the Blue Brain Project, Switzerland. The goal of his group is to identify the distribution and biophysical properties of different ion channels expressed across the cell membrane. His team has developed a workflow to systematically characterize ion channel biophysics. The workflow consists of cloning individual ion channels from rat brain to generate cell line library and make use of automated patch-clamp technique to screen the biophysics of each ion channel. His team has also developed a web-based wiki-like resource Channelpedia (www.channelpedia.net) to share experimental and modelling data with the neuroscience community.

Blake Richards (2018 - 2019)

Since January 2014, Blake has been an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto in the Department of Biological Sciences (Scarborough) with a cross-appointment to the Department of Cell and Systems Biology. His “LincLab” laboratory explores the neurobiology of learning and memory from a computational perspective, with the ultimate goal of “cracking” the learning algorithms of the brain. In 2016, he became an Associate Fellow of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research in the Learning in Machines and Brains Program. From October 2011 to December 2013, he was a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow in the laboratory of Dr. Paul Frankland at SickKids Hospital, where he studied the impact of memory consolidation on statistical learning. From 2007 to 2010, he had a Wellcome Trust studentship, and completed his Doctorate at the University of Oxford in the Department of Pharmacology with Dr. Colin Akerman, where he explored visual plasticity in early life. He also did his Master’s at the University of Oxford in the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics with Dr. Ole Paulsen, studying voltage bistability in neocortical dendrites. Before his graduate studies, he worked as a programmer and research analyst in magnetic resonance imaging at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Sunnybrook Hospital from 2004-2006. He is originally from Toronto, where he received his Bachelors degree in Cognitive Science and Artificial Intelligence from the University of Toronto in 2004.

Alyssa Picchini Schaffer (2020)

Alyssa Picchini Schaffer is a senior scientist at the Simons Foundation, where she manages the Simons Collaboration on the Global Brain (SCGB). The SCGB aims to expand our understanding of internal brain processes through computational approaches and cutting-edge experimental technologies in order to discover the nature, role and mechanisms of neural activity that produce

cognition. Picchini Schaffer is a neuroscientist and science communicator with an exceptionally diverse background and expertise in neural stem cell biology, pharmacology, policy and media across business, government and academic sectors. She is passionate about fostering collaboration among multidisciplinary teams to address significant questions in neuroscience. Before joining the foundation, Picchini Schaffer was scientific director of TEDMED, an independent division of TED focused on science, health and medicine. She earned her Ph.D. from Columbia University and is an alumna of the AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellowship and Lafayette College.

Evan Schaffer (2020)

Evan Schaffer is a theoretical and experimental neuroscientist who uses both approaches to investigate the function of complete neural circuits. He is driven to understand the underlying computations in complex neural circuits that transform sensory information into intelligent behavior. Dr. Schaffer is currently a postdoctoral fellow in the laboratory of Dr. Richard Axel, where he brings computational approaches to the investigation of neural circuits of *Drosophila*. Dr. Schaffer graduated from Swarthmore College with honors in 2005, and went on to earn his Ph.D. in neuroscience from Columbia University. As a graduate student working with Dr. Larry Abbott, Dr. Schaffer developed models for how recurrently connected neural networks respond to time-varying stimuli. He believes that neuroscience as a field will increasingly require the study of complex neural networks, necessitating both theoretical and experimental approaches. His career goal is to be able to contribute from both directions, running a lab where theory guides experiments, and the data from these experiments informs theoretical models.

Henning Sprekeler (2020)

Henning Sprekeler is a computational neuroscientist. The focus of his research is on models of synaptic plasticity and its consequences for network dynamics, sensory representations and behaviour. Recently, the lab has extended its interests towards studying functional consequences of different forms of neuronal inhibition. After obtaining his PhD at the Humboldt-University Berlin, he performed postdoctoral research in the labs of Wulfram Gerstner at the EPFL and Richard Kempter at the HU Berlin. In 2011, he received the Bernstein Award of the German Ministry of Science and Education, which allowed him to start a junior research group at the HU Berlin in 2012. In 2013, he accepted a lecturer position at the University of Cambridge (UK), before returning to Berlin to take on the Bernstein professorship at the TU Berlin in 2014.

Tor Stensola (2020)

Tor Stensola is a systems neuroscientist occupied mostly with answering questions about how ensembles of neurons organise their activity into functional and behavioral phenotypes. The methods he employs towards this end is high yield electrophysiology in awake behaving animals in conjunction with optogenetic manipulation, careful behavioural experiments and quantitative approaches. Tor first became interested in the psychological basis of reality through philosophy and social anthropology, and this eventually led him to start neuroscience studies at Otago University in New Zealand, where in 2007 he completed a BSc in Neuroscience. He next went on to do a MSc in Neuroscience at Oxford university in 2007-8, working with patch clamping and in vivo electrophysiology in the labs of Ole Paulsen and Jozsef Csicsvari. In 2008, Tor started a PhD with Edvard and May-Britt Moser in Norway, studying fundamental population level properties of the grid cell system in rats. Having become deeply fascinated with internally generated neural structures, Tor became interested in combining the skill sets and approaches learned from the grid cell system with sensory neuroscience. In 2015, he traveled to the Champalimaud Centre for the Unknown in Portugal to do a postdoc with Alfonso Renart and then Zach Mainen. In this work, Tor has studied the interplay between internally generated activity and sensory signals, and the role

of the serotonin system in modulating this interplay. Tor is deeply committed to educating new generations of neuroscientists, and to help create a community that values knowledge transfer and an open source mentality.



Andrew Trevelyan lectures on neural diseases.

Thomas Tagoe (2020)

Thomas Tagoe is a lecturer at the Physiology Department of the University of Ghana. His expertise covers various aspects of neuroscience, with special interest in how the brain changes in response to experiences. Thomas holds a PhD in Physiology and Pharmacology from the University of Leicester and has multiple international publications to his name. He is also a science communicator with a passion to share science with others, this has led to features on CNN, BBC, JOY Prime and regular appearances on the StarrFM science based show, The Horizon. Thomas also oversees operations at GhScientific, an organisation he co-founded to help others build capacity in science, technology, engineering and math through public engagement and outreach activities.

Andrew Trevelyan (2019)

Andrew Trevelyan is a Professor at Newcastle University and studies how the brain regulates its activity levels. Specifically, he is interested in the neocortex and hippocampus, which are the parts of the brain concerned with higher cognitive function. These are also the parts of the brain that are susceptible to epileptic activity, and a major part of his research involves trying to understand how and why epileptic seizures occur. His laboratory uses many different experiment techniques in their research, including cellular and network electrophysiological recordings, optogenetics, microscopy, and computational simulations.

Misha Tsodyks (2018 - 2020)

Misha Tsodyks received his Ph.D. degree in Theoretical Physics from the Landau Institute of Theoretical Physics in Moscow. He then held various research positions in Moscow, Rome, Jerusalem and San Diego, before joining the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel, in 1995, where he became a full professor in 2005. Misha Tsodyks worked on a wide range of topics in computational neuroscience, such as attractor neural networks, place-related activity in hippocampus, mathematical models of short- and long-term synaptic plasticity in the neocortex, population activity and functional architecture in the primary visual cortex and perceptual learning in the human visual system. His research benefited from close collaborative links that he established with experimental neuroscientists during different stages in his career, among them Amiram Grinvald, Henry Markram, Bruce McNaughton and Dov Sagi. He held long-term visiting positions in the Institute of Advanced Studies in Delmenhorst, Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne, Frankfurt Institute of Advanced Studies, UC Santa Barbara, CNRS Paris and Columbia University.

Tim Vogels, Co-Director (2017 - 2020)

Tim Vogels is a Sir Henry Dale Fellow and Associate Professor at the University of Oxford. He is a member of the Centre of Neural Circuits and Behaviour, Oriel College, and the European FENS Kavli Network of Excellence. After studying physics at Technische Universität Berlin he obtained his PhD in neuroscience at Brandeis University and did postdoctoral work at Columbia University and the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). As a computational neuroscientist, he builds conceptual models to understand the fundamentals of neural systems at the cellular level. His lab is interested in the interplay of excitatory and inhibitory activity in neuronal networks and how these dynamics can form reliable sensory perceptions and stable memories. He has contributed to our understanding of how intricate temporal dynamics can emerge from simple excitation-inhibition balance, and how inhibitory synaptic plasticity can help to shape this balance.

Arthur Wingfield (2020)

Arthur Wingfield received his doctorate in Experimental Psychology from Oxford University after receiving a Master's degree in Speech Pathology and Audiology from Northwestern University. His research on spoken language comprehension and memory in adult aging has been recognized by two successive MERIT Awards from the National Institute on Aging, as well as an Editor's Award from the Journal of Speech and Hearing Research for his early work on time-compressed speech. He is recipient of the 2010 Baltes Distinguished Research Achievement Award from Division 20 of the American Psychological Association and the Margaret M. and Paul B. Baltes Foundation in Berlin. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Cambridge, England, the University of Copenhagen, and UCLA. His research is funded by the National Institute of Health's National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

Daniel Wolpert (2017)

Daniel Wolpert is a Professor of Engineering and a Royal Society Research Professor. He read medicine at Cambridge before completing an Oxford Physiology DPhil followed by a postdoctoral fellowship at MIT. He then joined the faculty at the Institute of Neurology, UCL and moved to the Cambridge University in 2005. In 2012 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS) and made a Wellcome Trust Senior Investigator. His research interests are computational and experimental approaches to human sensorimotor control.

Byron Yu (2017 - 2019)

Byron Yu received the B.S. degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences from the University of California, Berkeley in 2001. He received the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Electrical



Byron Yu received the feedback highest scores for his lectures.

Engineering in 2003 and 2007, respectively, from Stanford University. From 2007 to 2009, he was a postdoctoral fellow jointly in Electrical Engineering and Neuroscience at Stanford University and at the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit, University College London. He then joined the faculty of Carnegie Mellon University in 2010, where he is an Associate Professor in Electrical & Computer Engineering and Biomedical Engineering and the Gerard G. Elia Career Development Professor. Byron Yu's research is at the intersection of neuroscience, engineering, and machine learning. He is broadly interested in how large populations of neurons process information, from encoding sensory stimuli to driving motor actions. To address basic scientific questions about brain function, his group develops and applies 1) novel statistical algorithms, such as dimensionality reduction and dynamical systems methods, and 2) brain-computer interfaces.



Ila Fiete and Demba Ba enjoy the Gala dinner with students in 2019. Relief shows in the faces of Tim Vogels and Joseph Raimondo when the first Imbizo finished without a hitch in 2017.

Next page: Hiba Abuelgasim Fadlelmou and Einola Akin Akinboboye chasing bugs.





Organisation, Location, Room & Board

The Imbizo took place in Muizenberg Beach, South Africa, about 60km south of Cape Town, situated where the shore of the Cape Peninsula curves round to the east on the False Bay coast. It is considered to be the birthplace of surfing in South Africa. It shall also become the birthplace of Computational Neuroscience in Africa.

Local Organiser - Emma Vaughan

Emma Vaughan joined the organisational team in late 2017, and quickly became an integral part. As a Muizenberg Resident, her experience in local and international conference management ensures every little detail is thought-out, planned and in place long before students and faculty arrive at the Imbizo. No task is too big or small. Emma takes initiative to ensure the imbizos run smoothly and everyone is taken care of. She's there from start to finish and is always on hand to assist, whether that means organising a birthday cake or band-aid. Emma is passionate about this little piece of paradise in the South Peninsula and she loves sharing it with the Imbizo.

Lecture Hall

Lectures, tutorials, and project time took place in the lecture hall of the CCFM, a christian radio station that doubles as a church on Sundays. The locale was modest but functional, seating 40 people with ease, supplying power and (somewhat rudimentary) wifi internet (see below).

Accommodation

Accommodation has proven to be a winning formula right from the start, and we changed very little over the past three years. Aside from a few complaints about the train track nearby, all our needs are met and super-seeded.

Muizenberg Beach on False Bay. Red 'X' marks the location of the lecture hall

Student accommodation

Student accommodation is located only 30 meters from the lecture venue, at the "Stoked Backpackers". Students share rooms with between 2 and 5 students. A few students and all the tutors were accommodated at "African Soul Surfer" a second nearby backpackers. The "Stoked" with its covered roof deck overlooking the sea, sandy and shady dining area, and 'chill-out' room serves as the main social hub for the duration of the Imbizo.

Faculty accommodation

Faculty were accommodated at the "Blue-Bottle Guesthouse" which is a short walk and a flight of 100 stairs through blossoming vegetation away. The view from the guest-house more than makes up for the walk, and we hope this will be one of the many reasons faculty may wish to return for future iterations of the school.

Board and Catering

All breakfasts and half of the dinners were hosted in the garden "Stoked Backpackers", which offered a private area for the students and faculty to socialise and relax. Lunches were picnic style and could be enjoyed where-ever faculty or students chose. Popular options were either to eat on the beach to allow for postprandial swims and football, or to take lunch back to the venue to



From left to right: Lecture hall, Stoked Backpackers and Soul Surfer Hostel, and Blue Bottle Guest House.

squeeze in a few precious moments extra work on a school project. For several evenings a week, dinners were hosted at local restaurants. Tuesday dinners were at the Brass Bell, which involved an enjoyable 20 minute coastal walk to Kalk Bay. Other restaurants visited included Oven Baked pizzeria, Blue Bird Garage Food Market and Tigers Milk. The very festive gala at the end of the School was hosted at Live Bait, another restaurant with sweeping views over the ocean.



The Stoked hostel staff, fully on board with the Imbizo mission, in Imbizo 2018 shirts.

Addendum 2020

The organisation of the 2020 Imbizo remained largely unchanged but a few small tweaks were made which were positive and well received by the group.

These changes included small changes to the curriculum, with a larger pre-school package of tutorials and help sheets. This has been met with approval and we will continue to improve the pre-school experience over the next years.

In terms of locations and venues, we moved the TAs from a local Backpackers (African Soul Surfer) to self-catering apartments on the beach front. Some Faculty also stayed in the self-catering apartments instead of the Blue Bottle Guest House. The Faculty and TA feedback was very positive and the Directors have decided to use the apartments for future Imbizos. Another small change includes changing the Wednesday night restaurant and more frequent visits to the Blue Bird Garage Market on Friday nights.

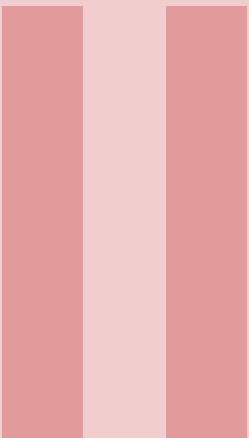
We ensured students' feedback from 2019 was addressed in respect of the catering and food variety, and Emma worked even more closely with Chef Phil to develop a more rounded menu. We were honoured to welcome UCT Vice Chancellor, Mamokgethi Phakeng, on Wednesday 15 January for the evening lecture. Her talk was inspiring and her company at dinner afterwards wonderful.

Alyssa Picchini Shaffer was able to attend the last week of the school as a Faculty member but also in her position as a Simons Foundation representative. We were so pleased for her to have the opportunity to join in the Imbizo and see it in action.

Additional funding from Google DeepMind and the University of Witwatersrand was secured

for the 2020 school which helped with additional student support. The 2020 Imbizo was another wonderful three weeks seeing a new, dedicated group of young scientists make new friendships and connections for their developing careers.





Feedback, improvements and comments.

Feedback	97
Academic feedback	
Imbizo 2017	
Imbizo 2018	
Imbizo 2019	
Administrative and general feedback	
Imbizo 2020	
Administrative and general feedback	
Alumni	111
The Future: Improvements and Changes	
115	
Progress so far	
Future changes to implement	
Long-term future & blue skies.	
Addendum 2020	
Final Comments	121
Thanks to the Funders	123
Imbizo in the news	129
Imbizo Community Efforts	131
Summary	133



During each Imbizo, the students were asked to give anonymous feedback on a weekly basis. They reviewed things like experiences with faculty members, content and structure of the academic week, food quality and recreational activities, etc. At the end of the Imbizo, they are also asked broader questions on quality of accommodation, lecture venues and school administration. Ratings were done between 1 (terrible) and 10 (excellent). They were also given the opportunity to specify things they would change / comments on their experience. The feedback gathered from 2017 to 2020 is summarised below, split into topical sections.

Academic feedback

Students were asked to rate the quality of their academic experience each week. We asked them to rate the overall quality of the lectures, the relevance to the school, quality of the scientific content and the teaching efficacy. Figure 1 explore this data, summarised across the three weeks of the school. Students could also comment on what topics they would have liked more or less of. A summary of these comments, with some representative examples, appear below for each week. Students could also rate individual faculty on their lectures and teaching performance. These numbers are also presented below.

Imbizo 2017

Week 1: neural anatomy and higher-order brain function

Students were generally happy with the content of week one, though there were several suggestions that more information about bridging the gap between computational algorithms and biological implementation might be appreciated. Bayesian analysis was used quite frequently in this week and several students suggested a slower introduction to using Bayes Theorem may have been useful. It was also suggested that receiving some educational materials before the school might be useful.

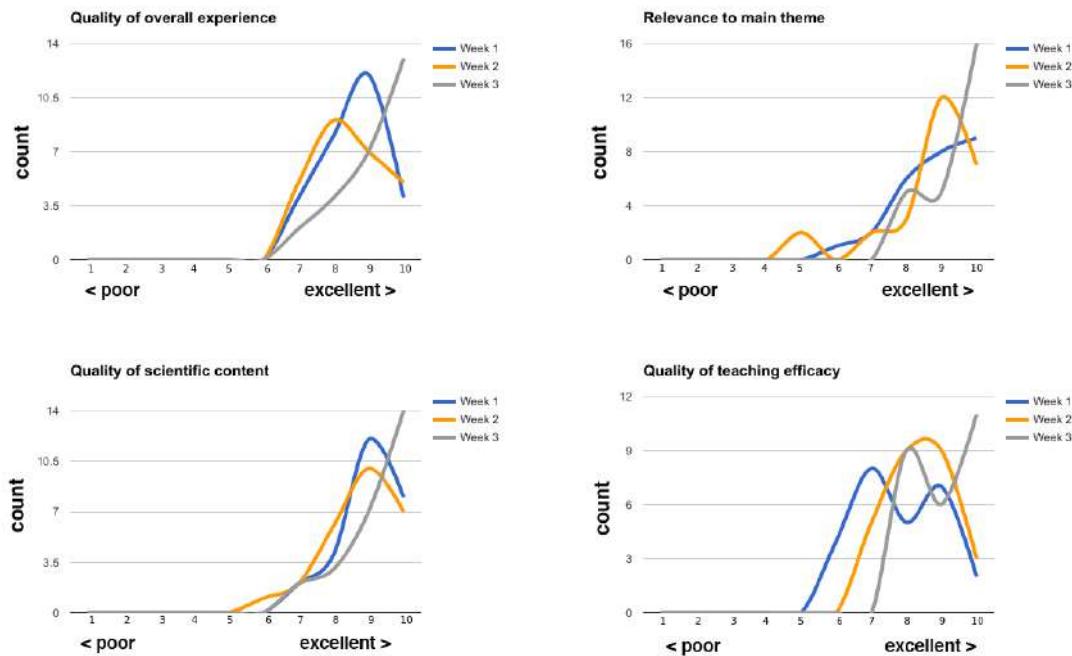


Figure 1: Summary of 2017 academic experience feedback across weeks.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 1:

"Maybe [more] basic Bayesian statistics... I felt like I needed more time to absorb that."

"I would have liked more examples of bridging the gap between the algorithmic and the implementational level."

"[I would have liked more of] the basic physiologic basis of bayesian inference and data processing from that"

"Topics were great. I like the top-down approach. In general though: Materials or links to materials regarding background to content or to learn more about the content. Perhaps even providing background material BEFORE the lecture that would help in understanding the lecture. But not sure how effective that would be..."

Week 2: biophysics, plasticity & machine learning

Week 2 had 5 faculty members which meant students had ample opportunity to engage with faculty and hear a range of opinions. It also meant a high turnover rate in lecturers - most speakers speaking for only 1 morning. This meant students hear from a diverse range of opinions and but makes achieving continuity in content a little more difficult. There was a stronger focus on basic neuro-cellular biology, which was welcomed by several students, providing a basis for the rest of the week. Suggested additions included more focus on synaptic plasticity and more focus on the intersection of neuroscience and machine learning. A visual summary of the faculty ratings for week 2 appears in the top-right plot of fig. 2.

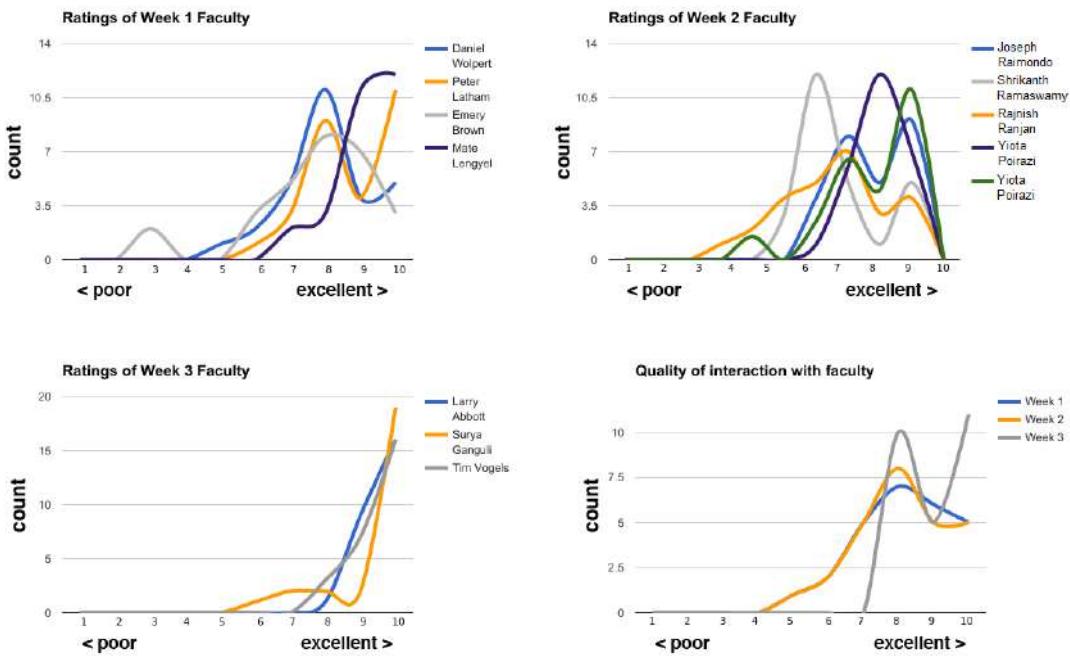


Figure 2: Visual summary of feedback on faculty

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 2:

“[I would have liked more] Plasticity on a more theoretical or modelling level”

“Everyone talked a bit about neural plasticity, but it would be nice to have one or even two lectures that systematically start from biophysical processes of plasticity to modelling techniques and the impact of plasticity for neural function.”

“Very cool introduction to state-of-the-art machine learning methods presented in a very comprehensible way and a lot of enthusiasm from his side.”

“Good coverage of complex research. Enjoyed both very biological and computational aspects. ... Appreciated the debate at the end of lecture that was insightful and well-behaved.”

“I really really enjoyed the ML content. I would have liked more discussion of the links between ML and learning in Biological systems.”

“Everything was awesome!”

Week 3: Network dynamics and spiking systems

Week three had 3 faculty, meaning students had extensive exposure to individual lecturers and faculty had ample time to introduce and build upon their teaching content. Some content in this week was somewhat mathematically “heavy” and perhaps revealed the necessity of providing adequate time/preparatory material on these topics. This week faculty varied the structure of their lecture times, between 2 sessions of 90 minutes each and 3 sessions of sixty minutes each. Students were asked to comment on which they preferred. Just over 70% of students preferred the two-90-minute session structure.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 3:

"Fantastic week - really really enjoyed it."

"[I would have liked more] Underlying mathematics in the way that Ganguli explained information theory and entropy. That was absolutely amazing."

"[I would have liked] a brief introduction on the relationship between the dynamical systems modelling paradigm and the "network modelling" paradigm. For example, why would we want to solve

the eigenvalue problem in the context of Tim's work. I don't think all of the topics can be introduced in this way, simply because there's not enough time during the school. It would be cool to get references before the school on "primers" so that the advanced concepts (i.e. one of the reasons for attending the school) can be absorbed quicker."

"It was nice to have a lecture on statistical data analysis, but I think the topic deserves at least two lectures."

Imbizo 2018

Week 1: Overview and higher-order brain function

Week one was widely popular among the students. Particularly Byron Yu's teaching was highly ranked. All the ranking of faculty can be seen in fig. 3. There were a few requests for more introductory mathematics and neuroscience content. The students were also asked to rate the tutorials. Overall these received a good rating. Particularly the tutorials given by the more senior teaching assistants were most highly ranked. The overall rankings of tutorials appear in fig. 4.

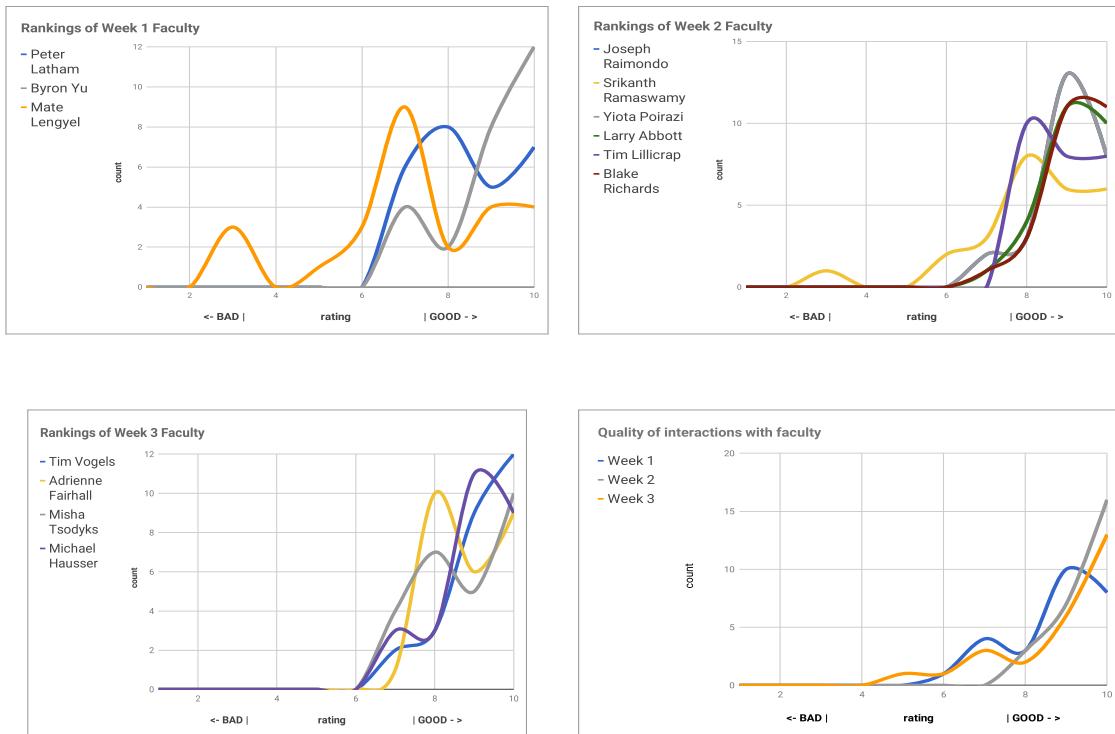


Figure 3: Summary of academic faculty feedback across weeks.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 1:

“Everything was great!”

“[I would like]more introductory time to relevant Maths topics.”

“[The Sunday outing was] fun, but got back early. Could've stayed out longer and seen more things in the Cape Town area, considering it was our only day of the week to do so”

Week 2: biophysics, plasticity & machine learning

Week 2 again had 5 faculty members, giving ample opportunity to engage with faculty and hear a range of opinions. The focus was neuro-cellular biology with a somewhat tangential discussion of machine learning. Incidentally, dendritic mechanisms have recently become an important part of new biophysical models of deep learning. This week provided the perfect atmosphere to introduce this. There were very few complaints about the content! Some suggestions were more cellular morphology and dendritic computation. We also had a more sociological Wednesday guest speaker. She discussed various issues pertaining to how local people deal with issues of sacred spaces and South Africa’s colonial history.

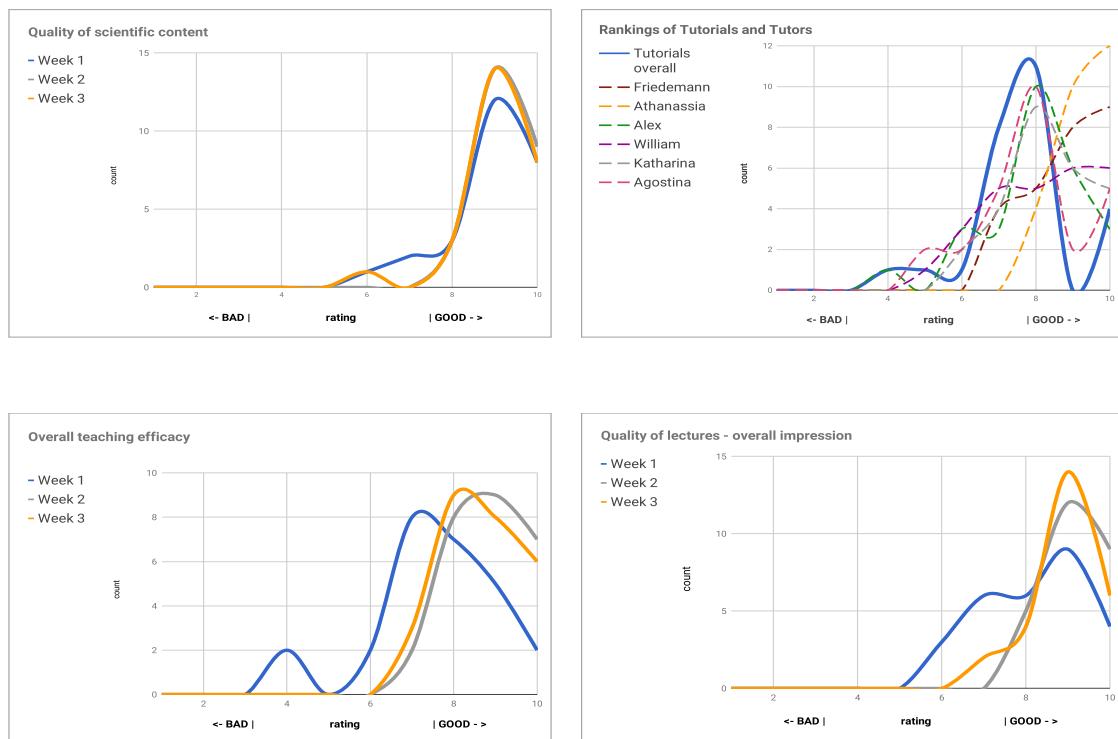


Figure 4: Visual summary of 2018 feedback on scientific experience, lecture quality and tutorials.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 2:

“I loved every lecture here.”

“ [I would have liked] more information about the history the speaker assumed we knew everything.”

“[The STEM in Africa discussion was]Very informative, and falls inline with motivating Africans to engage in CompNeuro.”

"[Blake Richards was] *Extremely interesting yet understandable. Great interactions outside of lectures too.*"

"[Larry Abbott was] *Just AWE-*

SOME :)))))))"

"[I would have liked] *A Cape Town University visit*"

Week 3: Algorithms, Networks and Spiking Computations

In contrast to week 2, week 3 had relatively senior faculty. The lectures were overall considered high quality (see fig. 4). For the first time, we also held a gender separated *Gender in Science Lunch*. This was generally rated highly, and most students either recommended doing it again. Students were also asked to give feedback on their tutors' performance. These were mostly good to excellent, with the senior tutors again being particularly strongly rated.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 3:

"The whole thing would fall apart without them. [the tutors.]"

"...room arrangement is not that great. for example, we have 5 people in our room. using bathroom and coming in and out at night are sometimes problems for us. ... can we be given some information such as abstract to us before the lectures? maybe we can arrange time to talk to faulty? like lunch time or after dinner? ... I really appreciate this opportunity since I met so many great people and had learned a lot here! Thank you all!"

"I'd just like to say thank you, once again, for the hard work on the part of the tutors. They have the hardest job of everyone."

"may be we should start lectures one hour later at 10 am instead of

9 am because most of us wake up early for workout session or swimming then they came fastly to take breakfast then went to lectures very tired. one hour may be enough to take rest before lectures. thank you so much"

"That was truly wonderful: from the attention you took in the selection process of the attendee and faculty to the organisation (Thank you Emma!!), to the scientific content of the summer school, everything was so great! Thank you :) And I know it's probably hard to find female computational neuroscientists and that you probably tried very hard, but it could be great to get closer to 50/50 ratio of female/male in the faculty.

I hope isicni can keep going for many years to come!"

Imbizo 2019

The overall experience the students had across the weeks was very positive. With all weeks having an average rating between 8 and 9. It was clear the faculty was well-chosen for their quality of interactions with the students with high scores for the weeks. These positive interactions were facilitated by the intimately arranged seating plan and including the faculty in the weeks' extra activities such as the penguin trip and walking to dinners. From the feedback scores, the faculty presented well to the diversity of students to understand, and that the content was clear and useful. Judging by the overall feedback on faculty and their interactions with the students, it is unsurprising that most of the individual faculty were rated quite highly. Highlighted faculty for each week were Byron Yu in week 1, Blake Richards in week 2, and Demba Ba in week 3. Many of the faculty had

been invited back from previous years due to their good ratings, and this trend will continue, given some natural revolving of course with newcomers such as Andrew Trevelyan and Athanassia. It should also be noted that while Athanassia was a faculty member this year, she had been a tutor in previous years. Luckily she returned as she was especially engaging with the students. This was exemplified by her leading swimming lessons for the students at a nearby tide pool each morning while she was in Muizenberg.

Week 1: Biophysics, Plasticity and Neural Recordings

Week 1 had 6 faculty members, with a new speaker per day and each tutor giving their tutorial in the afternoons. This meant the first week was packed with new faces and content. Some students felt there was a lot of content, but overall they were happy with the quality. The students appreciated starting with biophysics, but some thought more basic brain anatomy and physiology would help them understand the content better. There was already a lot to cover and digest, so one suggestion would be a primer before the school like with the mathematics. Although feedback from 2018 indicate the students would have liked more focus on synaptic plasticity, this year some seemed to be confused by all the types of synaptic plasticity. The highlight lecturer for week 1 was Byron Yu who talked about Brain-Computer Interfaces.

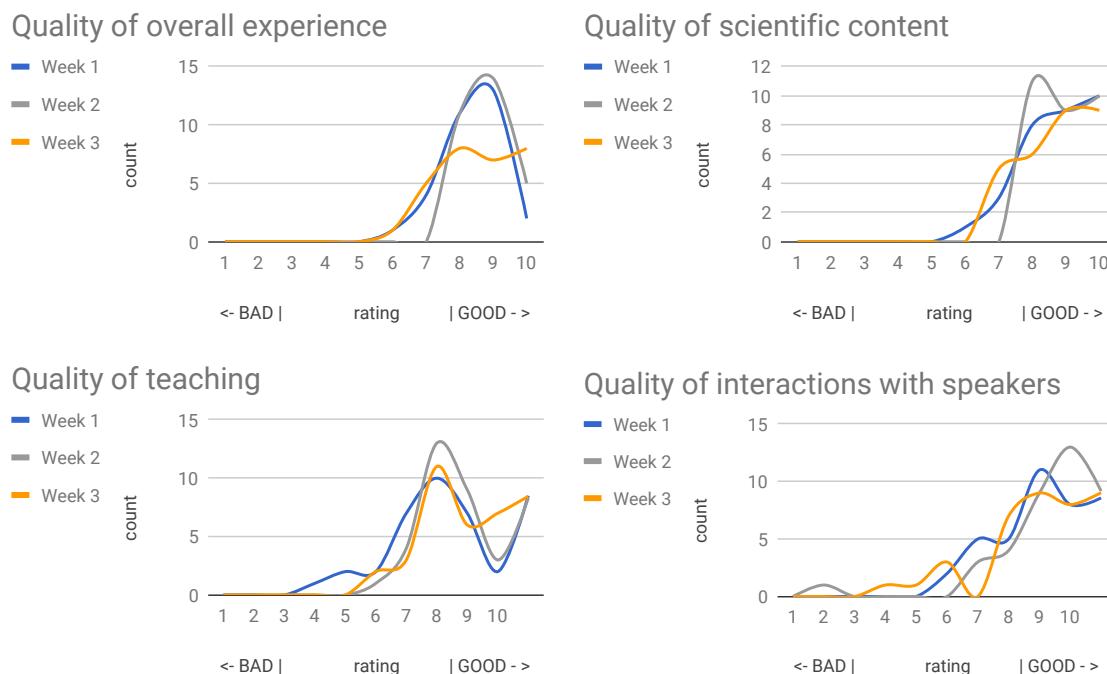


Figure 5: Summary of 2019 academic experience feedback across weeks.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 1:

"There was a great variety of topics, it is hard to say what more I would have liked to cover, perhaps 6 months from now retrospectively I would be able to say once I have become more familiar with the field, that is, this would be a good question for the alumni as well "

"In my opinion, Byron was by far the best speaker - he spoke clearly and precisely, focused on the fundamentals (going from the general to specifics), and delivered at a speed that allowed interesting discussion throughout the lecture. I learned so much from his lecture! "

Week 2: Network Dynamics and Machine Learning

Week 2 again had 5 faculty members, this time with particularly diverse backgrounds - Misha Tsodyks, who did some of the earliest influential work in neural network dynamics, to Tim Lillicrap and Blake Richards, who are pushing the boundary of how Machine Learning can guide neuroscience. The week tried to develop the connection between neuroscience and machine learning, first by examining how neural circuits might compute and then looking at how artificial neural networks compute. This grew into an active and passionate discussion between students and faculty about how similar deep neural networks really are, or are not, to the brain. This type of lively debate is a key learning component at the Imbizo. A visual summary of the faculty ratings for week 2 appears in fig. 6.

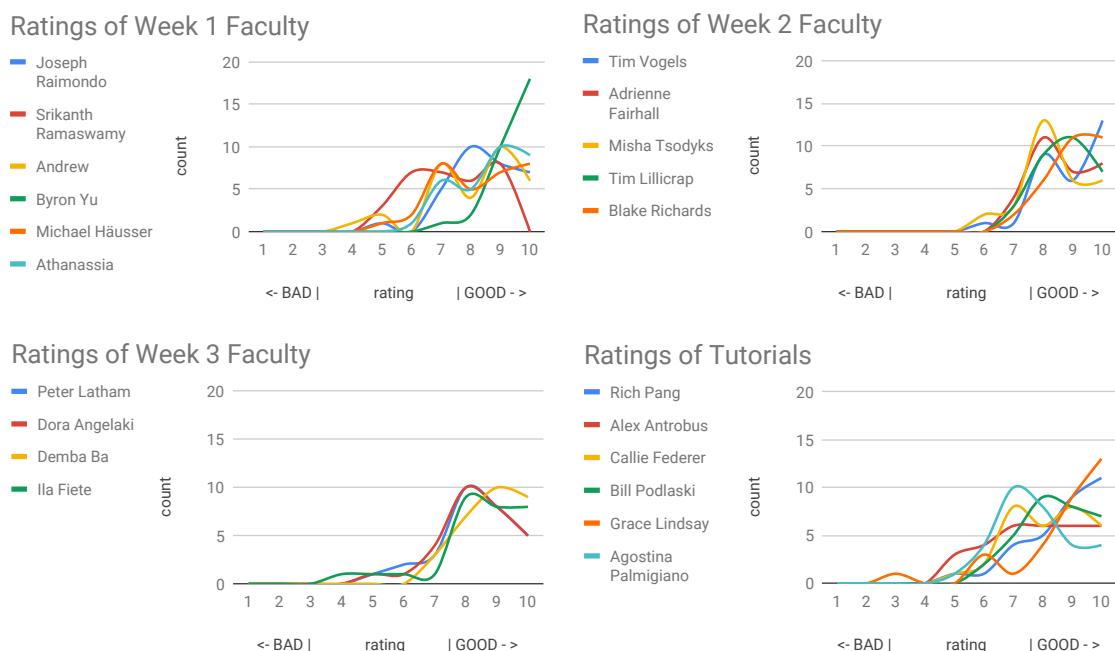


Figure 6: Visual summary 2019 of feedback on faculty.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 2:

"I was happy with what was covered. This was my favourite week"

"[I would have liked more] comparing choices of different machine learning algorithms/methods"

"[I would have liked more] Brain imaging, MRI etc."

"I really appreciated Tim Vogels' presence in the course. I felt encouraged to participate more and was inspired to make the most out of my interactions with the lecturers and students. I think Tim's scientific lectures were really interesting and a good transition between week 1 and week 2. I especially appreciated his soft skills talk."

Week 3: Higher Level Function, Motor Control & Decision Making

Week three had 4 faculty members, meaning students had extensive exposure to individual lecturers and faculty had ample time to introduce and build upon their teaching content. Some content in this week was somewhat mathematically “heavy” and perhaps revealed the necessity of providing adequate time/preparatory material on these topics. Demba Ba was unique in 2019 for doing a

purely whiteboard lecture, which was well-received among the students as it made going through his math-heavy talk more digestible.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 3:

"The whiteboard portion [of Demba Ba's talk] was on par with Byron Yu's lecture in terms of clarity. The powerpoint portion was too fast."

"this week's lectures are overall harder to understand, could potentially make the level lower..."

"Perhaps more experimental and current work would be good, to see the full picture."

"Could have given us schedule more in advance. Some of the math materials are not very relevant."

Administrative and general feedback

Students were asked to provide anonymous feedback on general properties of the school: how it was structured, the accommodation and eating arrangements, venue location what they liked and disliked and whether they had any suggestions. In general this feedback was very positive, with students enjoying their accommodation. These are things we had learnt from before and made a point to improve (see part II). The inclusion of **Emma Vaughan** as principle event organiser in 2018 significantly improved our interaction with our service providers and has lead to a more consistent interaction with them, in turn leading to better service and consistent improvement.

Sample of anonymous student comments on administration and general school experience:

"I really enjoyed the course. I especially appreciated the conversations I had with the professors and students. This was partly made possible by the arranged seating assignments for meals and unstructured project time."

"Conditions in different rooms are very different. Some had amazing rooms and view, some... well, not so much. But food was good :) Not enough salads and vegetables, though. Especially during lunch."

"amazing. very clean, 30s to lecture hall/beach, very good food, amazing view"

"Can't really comment on soul

surfer except for the bar/ chill-out area, which was kind of nice for working and playing pool. Staying at Stoked Backpackers was great. I had a very nice room, the personnel was extremely friendly and cooperative. The view from the terrace is amazing and it was really nice to hang out in the loft. The train is quite loud, but it didn't really bother me."

"Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this amazing community. You might not understand the magnitude and impact this has on my research education and career. Thank You, Asante Sana."

Morning Activities

Summer schools are very intense and work-oriented with the imbizo being no exception. Occurring spontaneously in 2017 and continuing the trend in 2018 and 2019, some tutors, students, and even

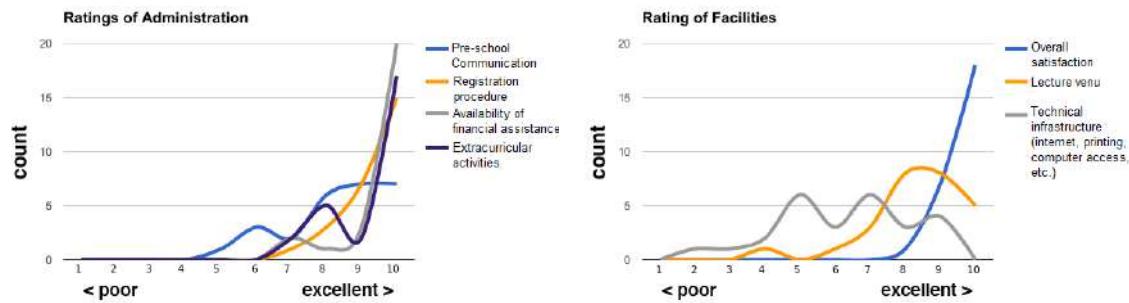


Figure 7: Summary of 2017 feedback for administration, infrastructure, and tutors.

faculty have initiated extra activities in the mornings to promote mindfulness through yoga, exercise on the beach, and also learning a new skill - swimming! In 2019, we wanted to see how impactful these morning activities have been by asking how many students participated. The activities were consistently run throughout the school. Even the swimming lessons, which started with the faculty member Athanassia, continued by being student-driven with support from some tutors. It seems the activities were well attended and clearly played an important role for many of the students.

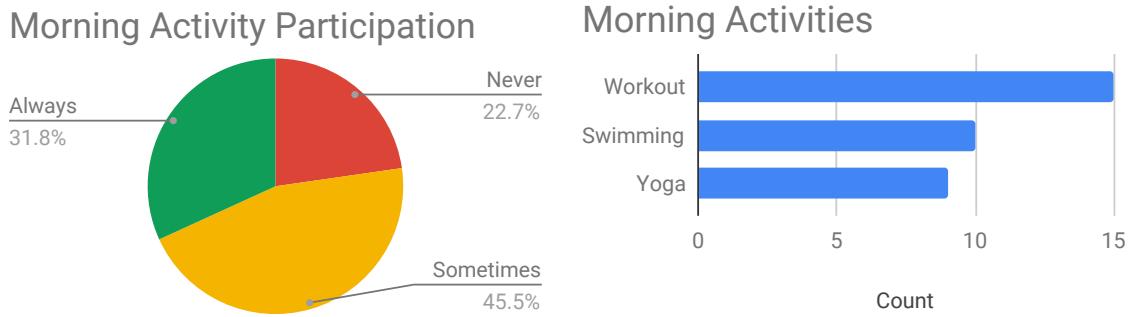


Figure 8: Visual summary of student participation in the student and tutor-lead morning activities during 2019

Imbizo 2020

The overall experience (specifically, the quality of the lectures), was very positive, with week 1 being a highlight for many of the students. It was clear the faculty was well-chosen for their quality of scientific content and teaching ability. However, some faculty had a teaching style which produced mixed results from the students. Regardless, there were very positive interactions between students and faculty, facilitated by the intimately arranged seating plan and including the faculty in the weeks' extra activities.

Stemming from the weekly feedback on faculty and their interactions with the students, individual faculty were highly rated. Highlighted faculty for each week were Tor Stensola in week 1, Tim Vogels in week 2, and Alyssa Picchini Schaffer in week 3. Many of the faculty had been invited back from previous years due to their good ratings, and this trend will continue, given some natural revolving of course with newcomers such as Henning Sprekeler and Alyssa Picchini Schaffer. It should also be noted that, along with the directors, Athanassia, Misha, and Tim L have been a part of the course every year, with consistently good ratings.

Week 1: Biophysics, Plasticity and Neural Recordings

Week 1 had 6 faculty members along with 6 tutors giving their tutorial in the afternoons. Given the breadth of students' backgrounds some appreciated the biology aspects while for others it

negatively reminded them of dense biology lectures during undergraduate courses. Week 1 had some brilliant lecturers who gave a coherent and well-organised story for the students to digest. Week 1 of the Imbizo showcased both established researchers and those building strong careers, with students appreciating the mix.

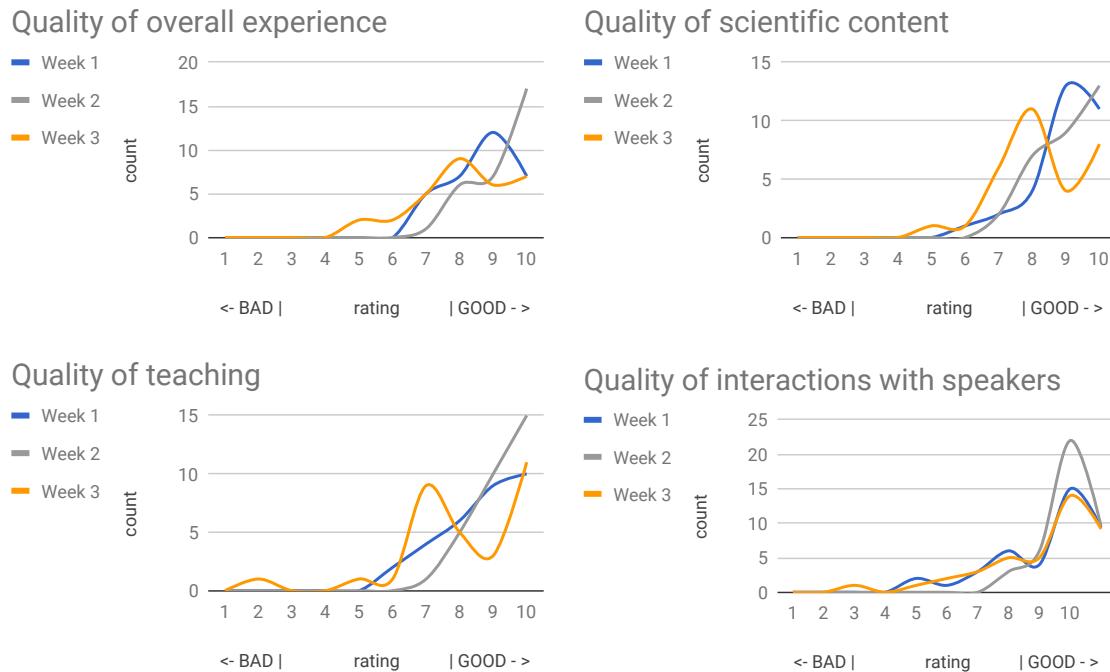


Figure 9: Summary of 2020 academic experience feedback across weeks.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 1:

"He [Joseph] showed a mastery in the subject and I could relate to whatever he talked about "

[Thomas was a] "great lecturer, but maybe too much specific information "

"She [Athanassia] showed very actual papers of where the field is going, and I think that is very important"

"She [Eve] was awesome both in knowledge and every other aspect

both in lecture and out of lectures. She had an intuitive angle of approaching all the problems"

"His [Tor's] lecture on grid cells really really blew me away - crazy stuff, really well presented. The cortical stuff was less up my street, but I guess important to know."

[Arthur] "Offered a more general understanding of cognition that is necessary for a lot of computational people to know! "

Week 2: Network Dynamics and Machine Learning

Week 2 had 5 faculty members, with many returning from 2019. The week tried to develop the connection between neuroscience and machine learning, first by examining how neural circuits might compute and then looking at home artificial neural networks compute. A staple of the Imbizo by now is the lively discussions around how similar deep neural networks really are, or are not, to the brain. A visual summary of the faculty ratings for week 2 appears in fig. 10.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 2:

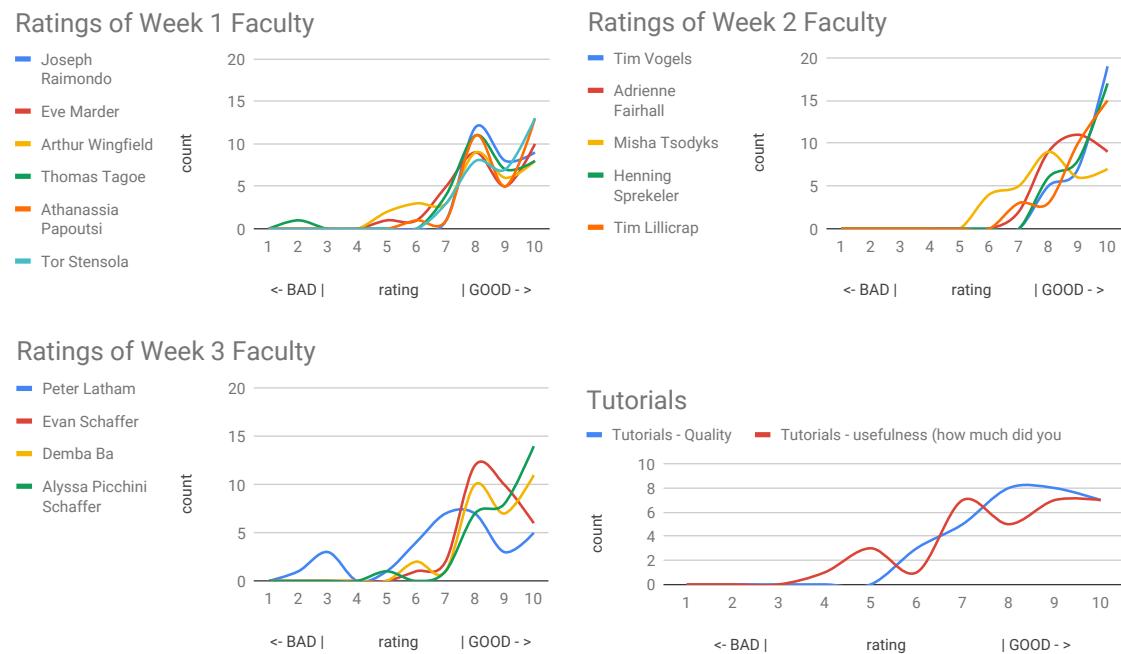


Figure 10: Visual summary 2020 of feedback on faculty.

"Really great second week lineup. Engaging lecturers and overall enjoyment of the social aspects."

"It would be nice to have a session on the link between computational neuroscience and real world application. Or the bridge between computational/theoretical and experimental and actual practical applications"

"Henning's explanations were proper proper sensei levels"

"Week two lecturers worked amazingly well with each other in the way they delivered the content."

Week 3: Higher Level Function, Motor Control & Decision Making

Week 3 had 4 faculty members, with Alyssa being particularly interactive with the students early on. Both Tim Vogel's "soft skills" talk in Week 2 and Alyssa's more technical lecture, "How to give a talk", really resonated with many students who do not receive formal training on these topics. In contrast, the math-heavy talks by Peter, Evan, and Demba Ba was well-received among the students, but highlighted the continued need to provide adequate mathematical preparatory material for the Imbizo. The students appreciated Evan's ability to link the math of week 3 to the biology and biophysics of week 1.

Sample of anonymous student comments on academic content of week 3:

"Nice combination of experimental and theoretical work "

"Alyssa's lessons will impact on all future presentations. She also opened my eyes to opportunities outside of academia"

"[Peter] spoke a bit too fast and inaudibly at times. Good use of the board and when i could follow, the content was interesting"

"He [Evan] knew to simplify complex concepts and make them palat-

able to everyone"

"I enjoyed the science and the means of presentation. I was a bit stressed about the project and strug-

gled to listen."

"[Demba] went slow to make sure no one was lost in the math "

Administrative and general feedback

Once again, students were asked to provide anonymous feedback on general organisation of the school, with very positive responses.

Sample of anonymous student comments on administration and general school experience:

"Probably the most impressive event I have ever attended. The impact it has had on me is huge, and I think my life will change significantly because of it. I can't believe the energy and interactions that have occurred here, nor can I believe how organised and innovative the school is"

"Thank you so much for the most intense experience of my life. The most extreme learning, extreme exercising, and extreme dancing. I will never forget it"

"Whoever planned the school this way is a genius."

"I'm really grateful for this awesome opportunity. I met amazing people, and superb faculty. I'm sure my career has been forever improved by this experience."

"It has been really smooth and the experience has been amazing. It will change my life forever! Thanks a lot for the opportunity"

School organisation

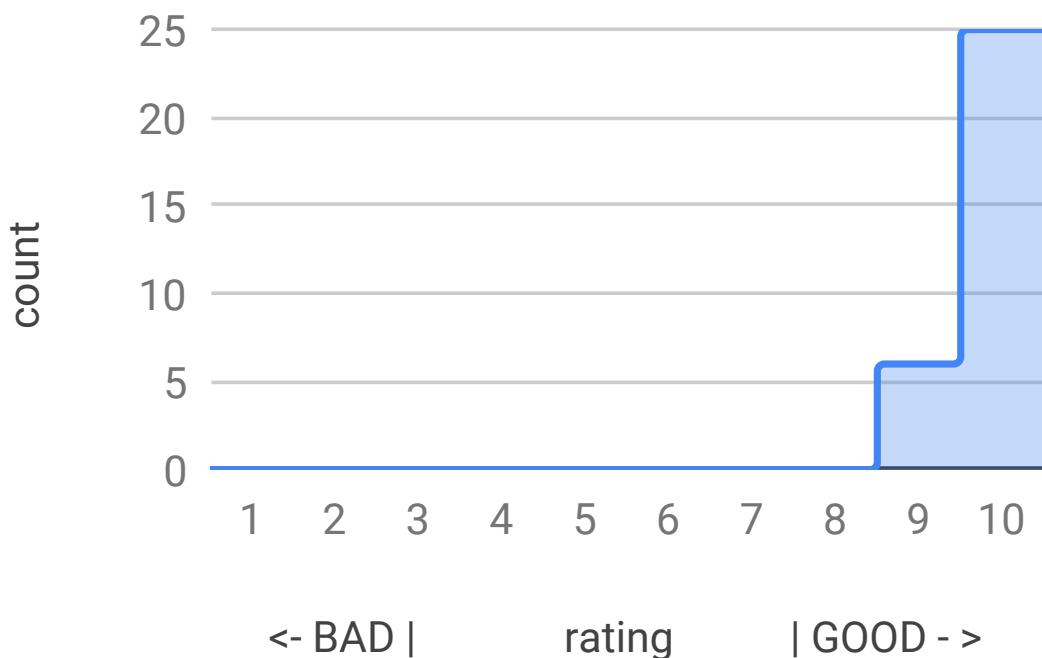


Figure 11: Overall school organisation for 2020



Emma Vaughan joined the Imbizo Management team in 2018, adding organisational skill, heart & soul.

Alumni

At the time of writing, we had successfully hosted three IBRO-Simons Computational Neuroscience Imbizos. We are slowly reaching the stage where we can start asking how this "Imbizo experience" has effected the lives of the students who pass through. In the below section, we give some update news from some of our 2017 alumni, to see how the Imbizo has effected their lives and careers.

Abib Duut - Imbizo'17



Abib and his tutor, Eszter, *IMBIZO 2017*

The Computational Neuroscience Imbizo has opened a whole new world of scholarship, mentorship and for me; and I am ever grateful of being part of it in 2017. I recently returned from Germany to Ghana, after an exciting one year

Masters in computational neuroscience and machine learning - a direct result of being a part of the Imbizo 2017. The Imbizo provided me with access to information, a broad overview and preliminary research experience in the field of computational neuroscience, helping me qualify for the position in Germany. My research skills have definitely advanced and now feel more confident about my chosen field for PhD studies: theoretical machine learning. One summer, some of the Imbizo2017 alumni met up in Berlin for a "mini-reunion". It was such a delight I didn't have any family in Europe, so life could get really lonely and even depressing. The conversations and giggles with friends who I once shared a room with, just a few months before, reminded me of "Imbizo spirit". In addition, the somewhat chilly month Cape Town prepared me a little for the very chilly winters in Germany!

I am really delighted to have been a part of the School in 2017. My Imbizo peers have become my family, it has opened doors of opportunity for me, and boosted my confidence in my academic work. As I continue to be apart of this family, I hope to share future experiences and support future generations of the Imbizo - to extend this life changing endeavour. Thanks greatly!

Kira Düsterwald - Imbizo'17



Kira at her graduation

Since Imbizo 2017 I have finished my Masters (in computational neuroscience) and medical degrees at the University of Cape Town. The contacts and exposure from the Imbizo made a big difference in the opportunities that I could apply for: I was able to attend summer schools like the Deep Learning Indaba, for which I would never have even considered applying without

the machine learning basis taught at the isiCNI, and the Woods Hole Methods in Computational Neuroscience Course. The Imbizo helped me get into and maximise my learning at the latter school, which is dominated by US-based scholars. Thanks to the Imbizo, I had already met some of the faculty and felt better prepared for the course material. I have learned a lot from these schools, which are vital given the lack of formal training in comp neuro in South Africa. I was able to publish my MSc work in eLife, thanks to the collaborative experimental-theoretical environment in the Raimondo Lab. This year, I started my internship as a medical doctor in Port Elizabeth. Clinical medicine will be my focus for the next few years, after which I plan to pursue a PhD in computational/theoretical neuroscience, hopefully abroad. In general, I wholeheartedly attribute my Imbizo experience to my continuation of the clinician-scientist pathway in neuroscience. It also allowed me to make excellent friends and contacts along the way!

Sicelukwanda Zane - Imbizo'17



Sicelukwanda (right) being awarded the prize for best poster at the Deep Learning Indaba 2018.

The [project work at the] Computational Neuroscience Imbizo was my first research experience. I was also introduced to deep reinforcement, by Timothy Lillicrap, as well as information theory and probability. The summer school served as a catalyst and gave me the topic I wanted to pursue in my MSc. It also gave me access to an amazing network of professionals and researchers in the domain.

During my MSc I worked with DDPG, a deep reinforcement learning algorithm for continuous environments, and extended the algorithm to multi-task scenarios in robotics. I was able to present this work at the Deep learning Indaba where I was awarded a travel prize to NeurIPS 2017 in

California. The experience was beyond my expectations and would not have been possible had it not been for the Imbizo. As an added bonus i saw Surya Ganguli, one of the Imbizo speakers, which was awesome. I came back from NeurIPS with a different outlook on what quality research looks like and I got to meet notable researchers and students from all over the globe.

Last summer I had the opportunity of presenting at the Black in AI workshop at NeurIPS 2018. My work was one of eight submissions from a pool of 250+ submissions. The presentation was well received and led to an invitation to "This Week in Machine Learning and AI", a well-known machine learning podcast series, which hosted me on their show.

My Imbizo experience coupled with other efforts to increase inclusivity in ML allowed me the opportunity to interact with possible PhD. supervisors and research labs to do a PhD in transfer learning and robot learning. I'm currently preparing the applications.

I appreciate the work done by the Imbizo and have not only seen the impact that it has had on my life but also in the lives of the peers that I met at the summer school.

Luke Taylor - Imbizo'17



My time at the Imbizo gave me a good overview over the field of artificial intelligence and neuroscience. I met lots of driven and passionate people, many of whom have remained invaluable contacts to this day. In addition, I was fortunate enough to be introduced to the field of reinforcement learning, which has played a big part in my life ever since.

As part of my undergraduate thesis I worked

to adapt reinforcement learning algorithms to certain non-stationary environments using a Bayesian selection approach. This algorithmic extension was shown to empirically outperform the popular Deep Q-Network published by DeepMind. After my undergraduate I enrolled for an applied mathematics honours at UCT. Being a modular degree, I tailored it to focus on reinforcement learning. My thesis aimed at developing a low cost robot and training it using reinforcement learning, work I presented at the Deep Learning Indaba in 2018. Having completed my honours degree I now seek to enrol in a masters in neuroscience and am in the process of applying to various universities overseas.

I would link many of these amazing opportunities to the Imbizo. The Imbizo introduced me to reinforcement learning, provided amazing contacts that have helped me with reference letters and helped me develop a deeper interest in the field of neuroscience. I am happy to report I will be going to Oxford for a Masters.

Kayode Ayodele - Imbizo'17



When I attended the Imbizo in 2017, I was extending a research interest in machine learning and computational neuroscience. The Imbizo has impacted both my teaching and research. While I still primarily focus on the engineering aspect of problems, the Imbizo fundamentally improved my knowledge of models and techniques in computational neuroscience. This has changed how I conceptualise problems and improved my work with researchers from the health sciences. We

collaborate on epileptic seizure detection, stroke neurorehabilitation and brain machine interfaces research. A group that started with me and a single neurologist in the Department of Medicine now has close to a dozen researchers in Ile-Ife and Ibadan, along with a very close collaborator in Australia, and a number of graduate students. We have already presented preliminary results of our first few studies at conferences, and I expect the quantity and impact of our research to increase as the community grows. I was also able to lead the development of a Biomedical Engineering curriculum, co-hosted by my department and the College of Medicine. The curriculum is currently being processed for approval by my university. I have encouraged three students and a colleague to apply for subsequent Imbizos, and two have been accepted. I have always hoped that the lasting legacy of the Imbizo, as it concerns me, would be the rapid growth of a computational neuroscience community in Nigeria with participation from engineers/physical scientists and life scientists. I am happy that progress towards that goal is happening.





The Future: Improvements and Changes

As each Imbizo draws to an end, we ask students, tutors and faculty about the improvements they would like to see. Below is a list of their answers and items that we've implemented thus far.

Implemented changes.

Pre-school study materials were provided one month before the 2018 Imbizo, following suggestions from the 2017 group. This effectively amounted to the Introduction to Maths you need to know tutorial (tutorial 1 at isiCNI2017) being re-structured into a pre-school learning tutorial. The contents of this tutorial were further amended and extended for 2019 - to include a separate tutorial on basic neuroscience (produced principally by Rich Pang) and some introductory Python programming skills. The material was also released earlier to the 2019 group (2 months before the Imbizo). We have tried to send this content shortly after the acceptance notifications, but it has proven less organised than we had hoped. Going forward, it may be interesting to create about 10 hours of content from a combination of various sources, such as MOOC, Neuromatch and previous in house tutorials. We will seek out volunteers from previous years to put this together.

Centralising student accommodation . Following feedback from the 2017 group, we opted to house all students in one facility for 2018.

However, in 2019 we reverted to a semi-split accommodation arrangement for students. Having tried this in 2017, and then centralised all accommodation in 2018, we concluded from student feedback that having all students in Stoked Backpackers was just a little too cramped.

Improved internet access. A key direction for improvement into Imbizo 2018 was improving internet access at the venue. Major progress was made in this regard by our host venue, CCFM, who had a new internet line installed for the lecture venue and opened up a new network specially for our purposes. This significantly improved internet access.

Course Structure . In both Imbizo 2017 & 2018, a comment raised by students was the ordering

of the weeks. In 2017 and 2018 we began with Week 1 having a fairly high-level cognitive content. Some students said that this was sometimes difficult to follow as they had not been thoroughly acquainted with the underlying biophysical information – cellular and synaptic level. In 2019, we resolved this issue, beginning with biophysics and cellular level content in week 1 and building through network level neuroscience and machine learning, before covering theories of cognition and computation, as well as some philosophy of neuroscience, in week 3.

[Scientific soft skills]: It was noted that many students want to also hear about how to prepare for grant applications, interviews and grad-school. We thus expanded the lecture time on Soft skills, and offer additional one-on-one training and advising students on the core scientific skills of preparing and mastering interviews and applications. This is particularly useful for African students who wish to apply for academic programs abroad. We will continue to improve this facet of the course.

Gender and ethnic diversity in Neuroscience To address the issues pertaining the ongoing imbalance of power and status allocated along lines of gender and ethnicity in neuroscience, we created the ‘Gender in Science Lunch’, and the ‘Diversity Lunch’. Both are informal events in week 2 &3. In week 2, male and female students and instructors separately discuss the status quo of gender and race based discrimination in science. Discussions are led by faculty and summaries of the conversations are recorded and exchanged between the two groups afterwards, and the ability to speak freely and without worry to offend facilitates a lively and often very educational discussion on many topics. In week three the discussion is continued but as one group. With the help of our trusty tutors we are still calibrating the event for best procedures.

Cultural exposure International and African students alike felt that conversations about the legacy of colonialism, the de-colonial project and current affairs could have been more guided. We noted that amongst students and faculty frequent topics of conversation related to Africa, it’s place in the world, the challenges it faces, the history of colonialism and race-relations both on the continent and globally. In 2018 we started to host speakers (e.g. our Wednesday evening sessions) from outside of computational neuroscience (when we could attract them with backgrounds in social activism), who can explore some of these important topics with students.

Future changes to implement

R Access and use of high-performance computing resources. Some Imbizo students are pushing beyond the capacity of their personal machines during their research projects! We hope to support their research better by gaining access to high performance computing facilities.

R Journal club demonstration: It has been suggested that having ‘mini journal club’ presentations could push student to improve their scientific reading, reasoning, speaking and analytic skills.

R Continued funding for Academic exchanges: Improve the Structure of the newly established follow-up funding scheme by Simons and the isisCNI, that was designed to overcome the lack of funding for PhD student exchanges and travel grants as a major obstacle for

African students to participate in international neuroscience events and conferences. While a small amount of funding is now available for Imbizous, our alumni, we need to clarify application and selection procedures in the future.

Long-term future & blue skies.

The Imbizo is here to stay. We believe there is a long term future for the Imbizo and for Computational Neuroscience in Africa. To guarantee the survival and growth of both, we must make long-term plans.

- ④ **Director turn-over** We have already had substantial turn-over of faculty and tutors but we have not shuffled the board of directors. A mechanism is needed for what happens when directors step down.
- ④ **3rd party funding.** We are currently funded through the graces and generosity of IBRO and the Simons Foundation. While there is no sign of waning support from our funders, it would be good to create a list of potential funders for increasing cost or other eventualities.
- ④ **Administrative Support:** So far, the Imbizo is often running on ad-hoc planning, creative solutions and the energy and goodwill of the organisational team. To make the Imbizo sustainable, it will be beneficial to think about a long-term, paid administrator who will take ownership and guarantee stability when the directorship changes.
- ④ **A physical home:** We are dreaming of a physical location to give the imbizo a permanent home. This may come in the form of a buy-in into existing infrastructure, like in Woods Hole, USA, or though the establishment of (or incorporation into) an umbrella institute such as AIMS, or the new Neuroscience Institute at UCT.
- ④ **A franchise of Imbizos:** To reduce the administrative cost of a single course, and to expand the spectrum of courses, it may be beneficial to create Imbizos for other subjects and species, e.g. a Drosophila Imbizo, an Imaging Imbizo, etc.

Addendum 2020

The 2020 Imbizo saw the establishment of the Simons Trust Imbizo Follow Up Grant (STIFUG), a new funding stream for small grants. The grant is available to past alumni and supports their future endeavours – benefiting their careers and facilitating their success. In 2020 we awarded 8 grants totalling approximately USD 7,000. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Simons Trust for their generous support with this new initiative.

At the time of writing, the authors of this report sit in some state of lockdown due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. South Africa's borders have been opened; however, restrictions on many countries and their citizens wishing to visit South Africa are still in place. As a result of the ongoing global health crisis, the Directors decided to postpone the 2021 Imbizo given the uncertainties around hosting an event in January 2021. Past students and Faculty have been notified and the Imbizo website updated. All funders have signalled their support for our decision and have committed to fund the next Imbizo in 2022.

The impact of COVID-19 has been global and local, with Muizenberg no exception. We are very sad to report that Stoked Backpackers, the social hub of the Imbizo, has shut its doors for good. Stoked has provided a safe and comfortable place for our students to stay and a fun dining and socialising area for the past 4 years. We have been told the building has been bought by developers and will be turned into residential apartments. And so the closing of Stoked has forced us to look at other suburbs and rethink the format of the Imbizo. Our Administrator is looking at all possible options within Cape Town's South Peninsula, and we remain confident that we will find a new location, likely even in Muizenberg.

We remain optimistic the 2022 Imbizo will go ahead and are working towards this goal. The Directors will be reviewing the situation again in mid-2021.





Final Comments

Below are some of comments from students across the years after they finished the IBRO-Simons Computational Neuroscience Imbizo.

2017

"I really feel EXTREMELY privileged and lucky to have had this chance. I learned an incredible amount, and I'm leaving with a gigantic amount of motivation."

"Great school, truly awesome and a game-changer for my research. Faculty, tutors and students were all great. I think the people made the school, but the quality of content was excellent."

"The school has been a great experience for me, And I would add that It was the greater school I ever attend. Big thank you to the organisers. It was a big privilege to be part of this great advanture. I enjoyed

every part, from lectures to social activity"

"This has been beyond amazing in so many ways. I can't stop thanking the isiCNI committee for making this happen and letting me be a part of it."

"We have said this many times, but I think Alex Antrobus did a fantastic job running things. Of course Tim Vogels and Joe Raimondo were also fantastic; I like that they have different styles. Tim's ability to be a little more in-your-face led to what I thought to be the most enjoyable classroom exchange during the program."

2018

"If I am to rate isiCNI2018, I will give 95%, thanks to the organizers and sponsors."

"Incredible experience. Thank you so much for the opportunity!! "

"Really most of what I have to say is positive feedback, this is such a great summer school. It has helped me to such a great extent with my work and will have a huge impact on the opportunities and decisions I find and make in the future. Honestly, I am in awe of the experience so I am finding it difficult to find suggestions or complaints but if I do think of something I will be sure to let you know."

"No words can explain how much i am happy of being a part of this school, million thanks to everyone

shared and supported this event. I suggest we could spend more time with focusing i details of the content, and do more sessions on how to reach degree grants. Thanks A Lot"

"That was truly wonderful: from the attention you took in the selection process of the attendee and faculty to the organisation (Thank you Emma!!), to the scientific content of the summer school, everything was so great! Thank you :) And I know it's probably hard to find female computational neuroscientists and that you probably tried very hard, but it could be great to get closer to 50/50 ratio of female/male in the faculty.

I hope isicni can keep going for many years to come!"

2019

"It has been an adventure and it exceeded my expectations in every way. "

"Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this amazing community. You might not understand the magnitude and impact this has on my research education and career. Thank You, Asante Sana. "

"This school is amazing and life changing"

"This has been an absolutely life changing experience and my interest in computational neuroscience has been fuelled and inspired by all the people I have met and things I have learned. "

"Perhaps more experimental and current work would be good, to see the full picture"

"Love you guys soooooo much!!!! This has been one of the most interesting things I have ever done - I felt like the work done during this last 3 weeks were utterly important!"

"I have to thank you, guys! You are the best. I loved it."

"I think Emma, Alex, and Chris did an amazing job - thank you so much for this experience!"

"Life changing."

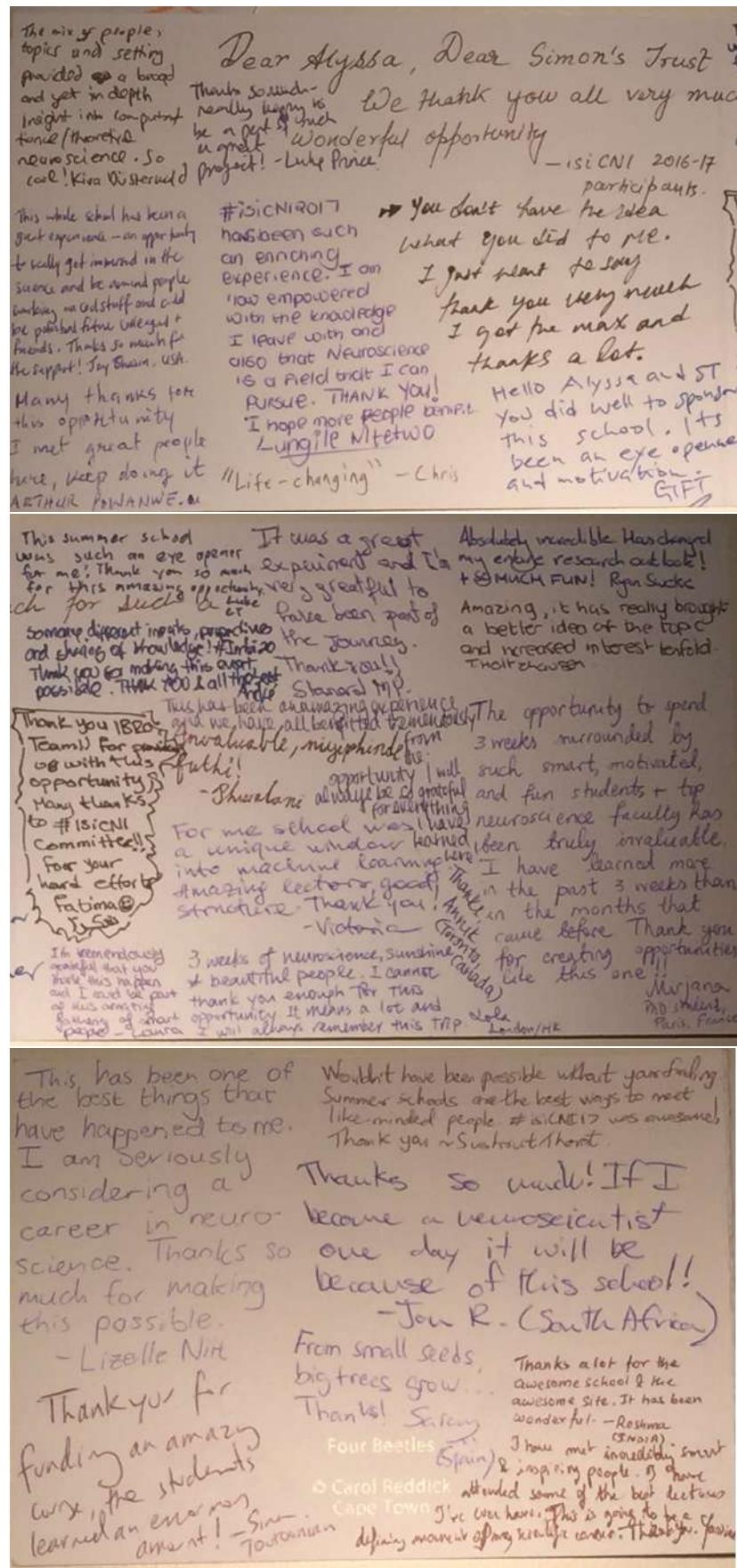


Thanks to the Funders

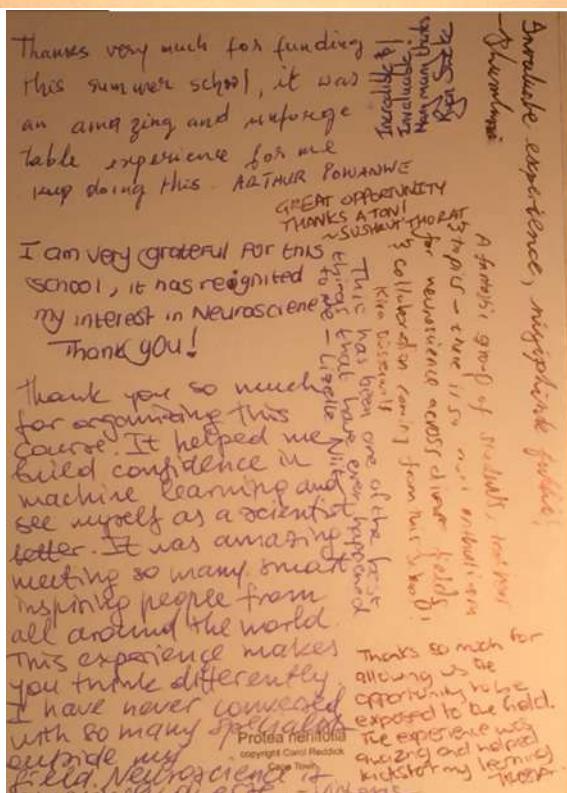
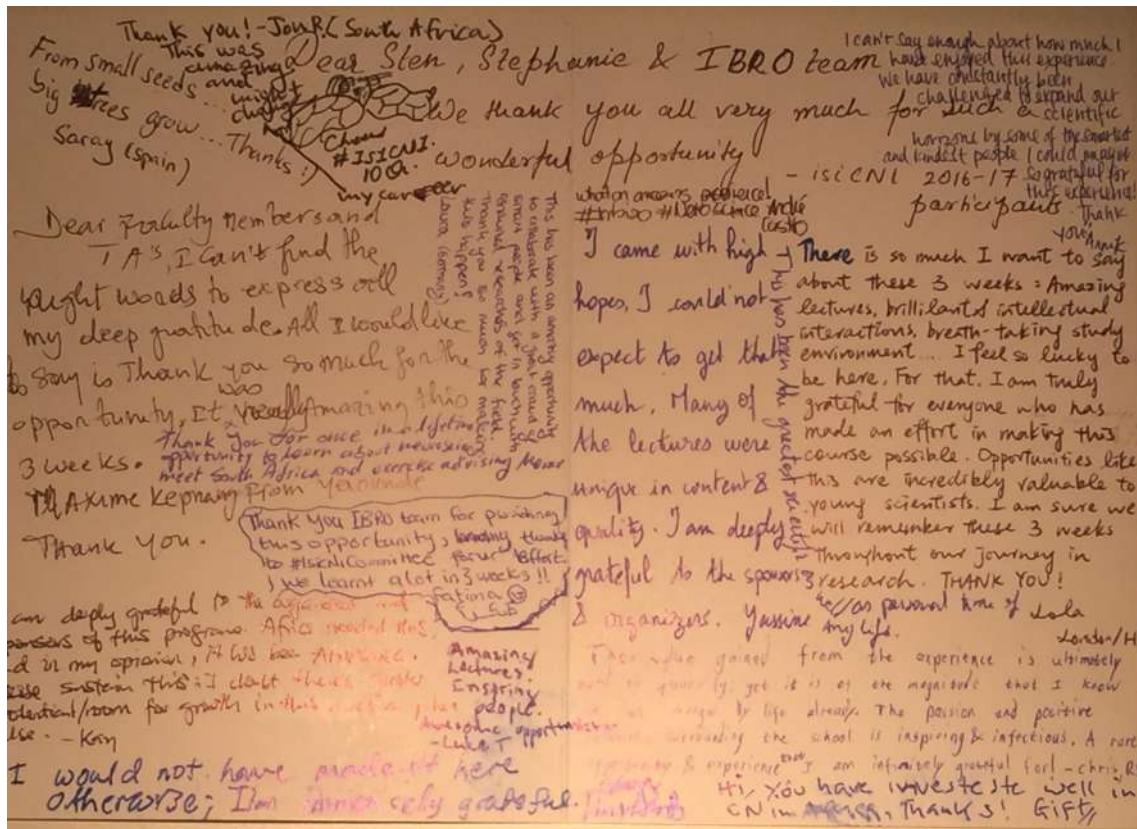
We wanted to take this opportunity to thank our funders, the Simons Foundation, IBRO, and the Wellcome Trust. Your financial support, and your faith in us made this possible. Thank you. Below you will find photographs of the “Thank You” cards the students prepared for the two main funding bodies, the Simons Foundation and IBRO.



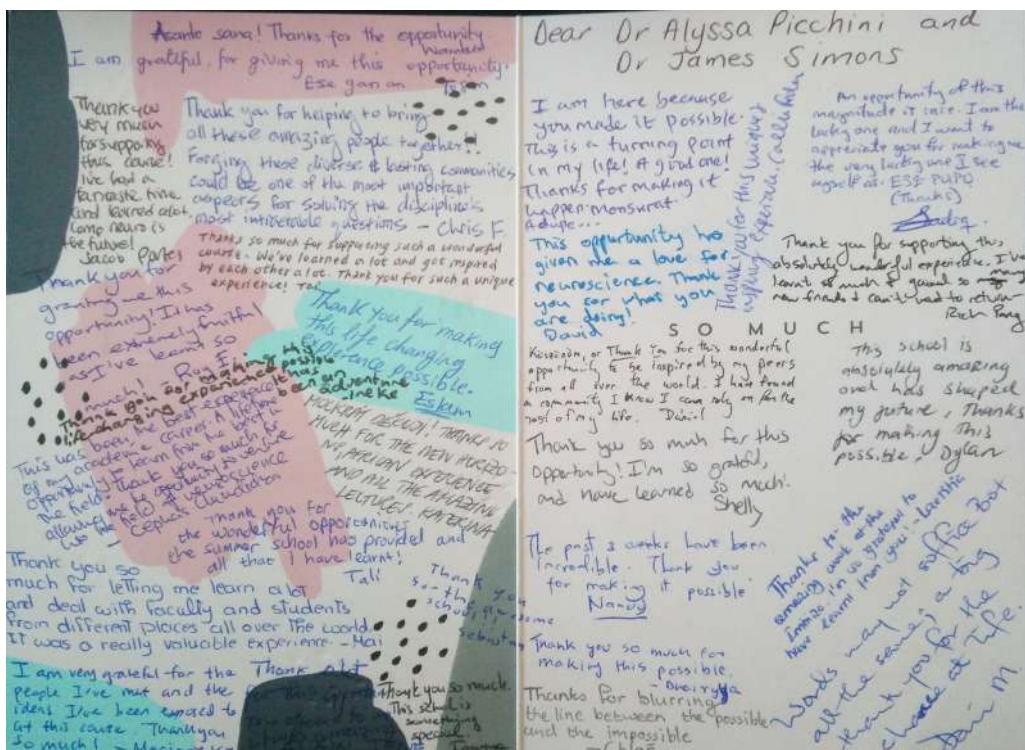
From the feedback we received, it's fair to assume most students were very happy.



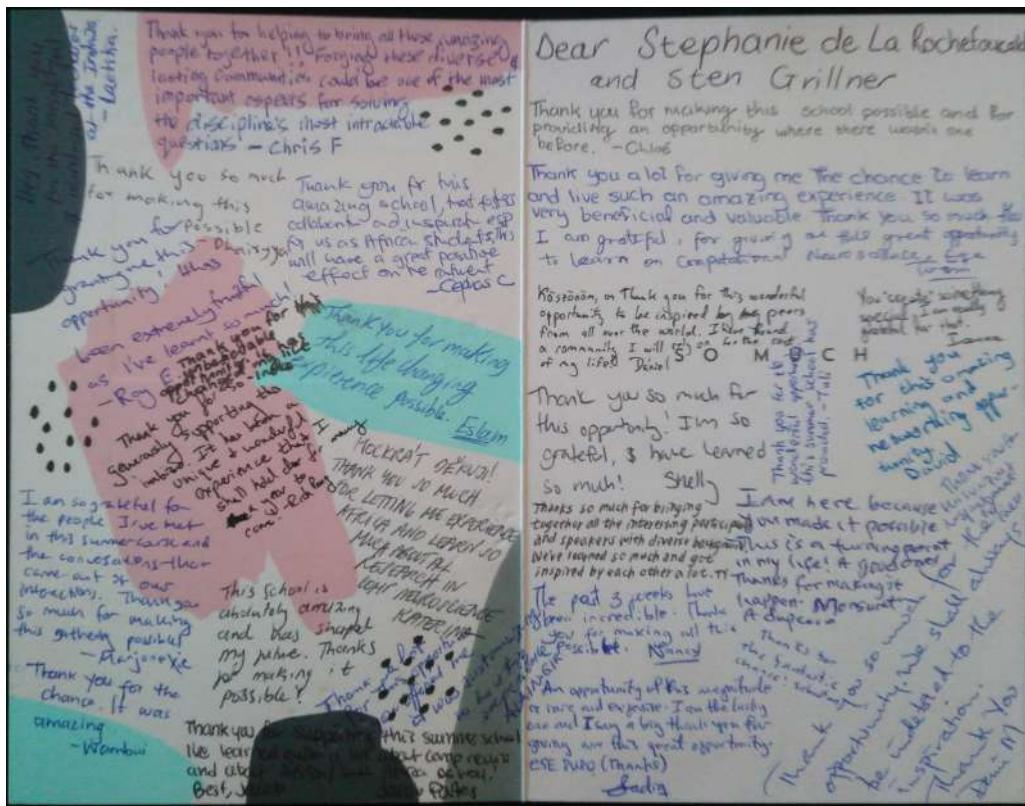
Students' Thank- You card for the Simons Foundation 2017.



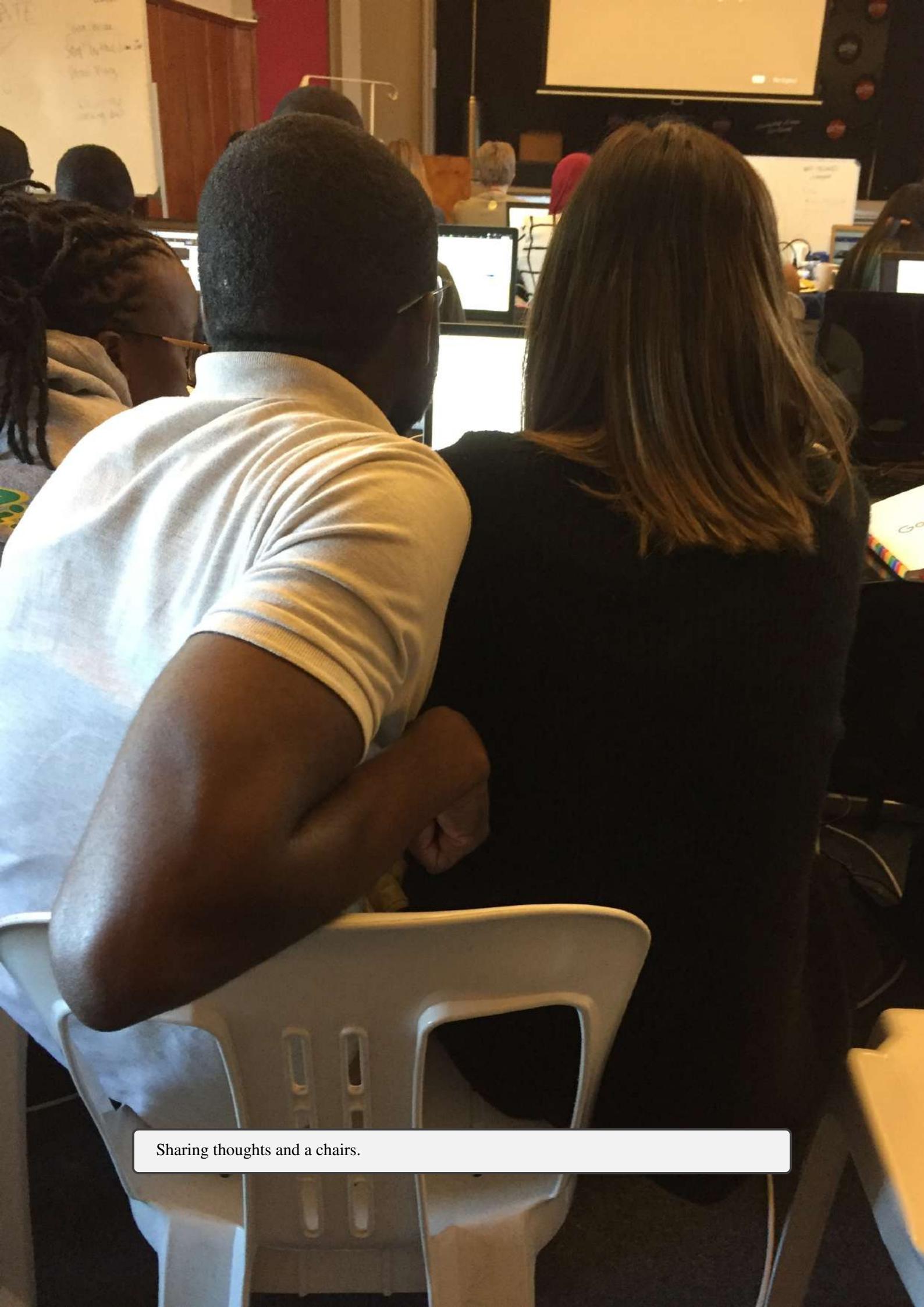
Students' Thank-You card for IBRO 2017.



Students' Thank-You card for the Simons Foundation 2019.



Students' Thank-You card for IBRO, 2019.



Sharing thoughts and a chairs.

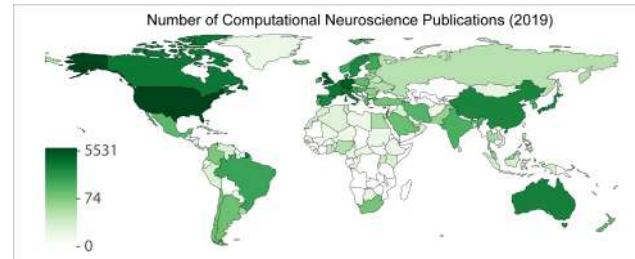
Imbizo in the news

PLOS Computational Biology

Think: Theory for Africa

In the century of the brain, African scientists and educators are poised to make important contributions to global neuroscience research. We believe that theoretical sciences, and specifically computational and theoretical neuroscience are the ideal discipline for the African continent...

By Christopher B. Currin, Phumlani N. Khoza, Alexander D. Antrobus, Peter E. Latham, Tim P. Vogels, Joseph V. Raimondo on July 11, 2019



Scientific African Magazine

Brains by the sea: Computational neuroscience gains a foothold in Africa

The rich waters of False Bay, near Cape Town in South Africa, have sustained nomadic human tribes for tens of thousands of years. But over the last three years it has also become the starting point of an African journey to answer one of humanity's great unsolved questions:

By Alex Antrobus on December 5, 2019

The Simons Collaboration on the Global Brain

A Summer School in Africa Breaks Barriers in Neuroscience

how does the brain work?

**Scientific
African
Magazine**

NEXT
EINSTEIN
FORUM

How we facilitate the formation of a cohesive community that transcends race, gender and geographic boundaries in just three weeks...



By Chris Currin on May 27, 2020

The 2020 BiasWatchNeuro Award for Equity and Inclusivity

The Imbizo received an honourable mention. The school did not fall under the 2020 call for nomination, however the programme was acknowledged for it's contribution to increasing diversity in neu-

roscience.





Imbizo Community Efforts

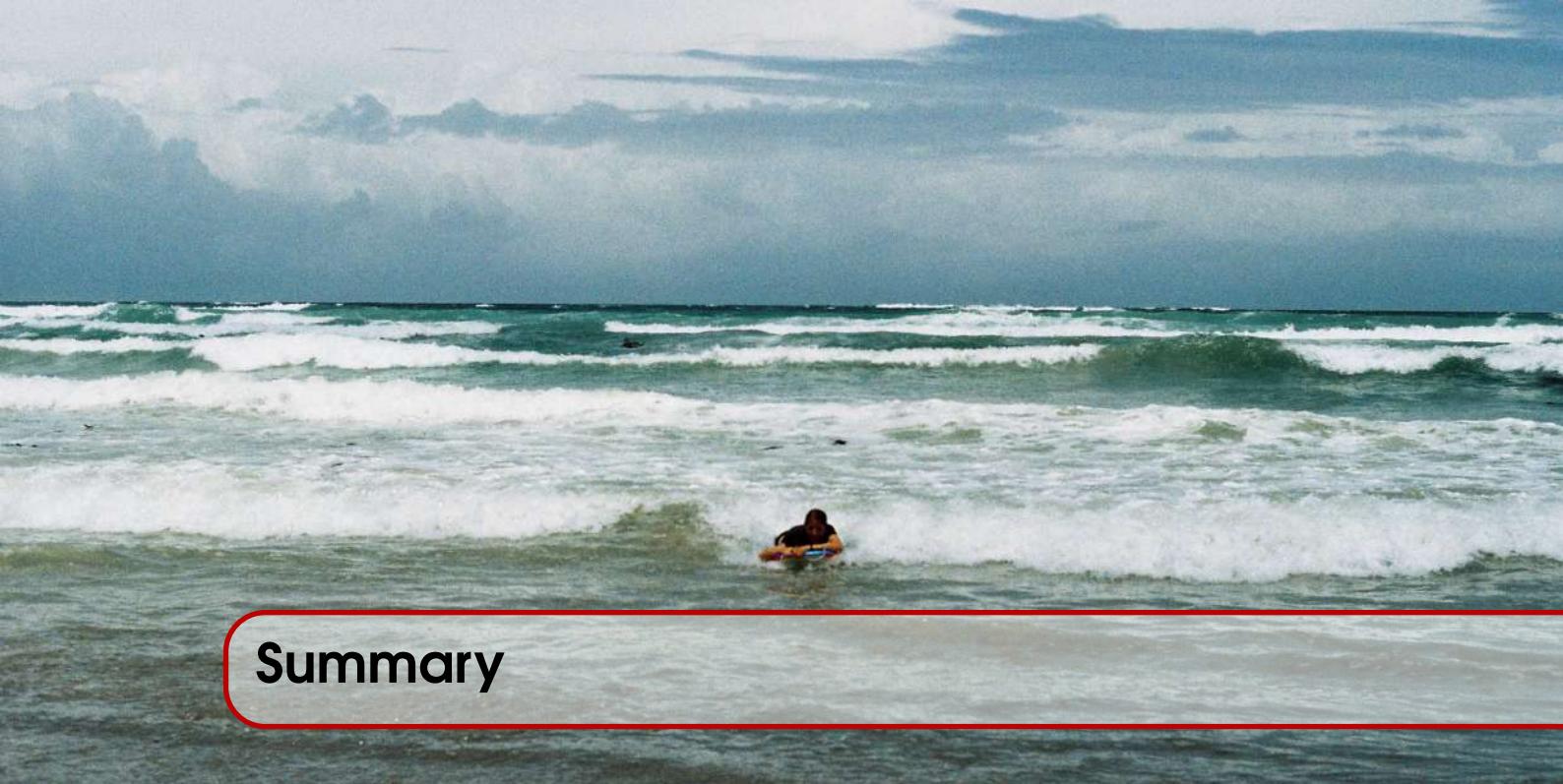
THE IMBIZIAN

The Unofficial Post-Imbizo Newsletter

Some passionate alumni have continued the Imbizo spirit by creating newsletters, informal meetings, and more to strengthen connections across the world.

The Imbizian newsletter

Started by some of the '20 alumni on May 20, 2020, the Imbizian has original content developed by and for the Imbizo community. With inside jokes, a birthday calendar, student spotlights, and puns galore, the content is rich with passion, humour, and insight into the people of '20.



Summary

In the words of one of our faculty,

"This Imbizo is like summer schools used to be, some 20 years ago. It feels like something is moving. People come thirsty, motivated, enthusiastic, and maybe a bit naïve. They work hard and they play hard, and they leave with their hearts and minds changed. It feels like this has a large impact on their lives."

Despite the little time that has passed since the first Imbizo, we can already report on consequences of the course (see above). For example, one of our students has successfully applied for a “smart start” graduate program in neuroscience in Germany. Two other African students of ours have started working on a computational neuroscience initiative in South Africa, and yet another pair have begun a collaboration between Nigeria and South Africa. International collaborations have also been born, with one Canadian student and a South African student currently collaborating on a research project.

In other words, the IBRO Simons Computational Neuroscience Imbizo has made a difference. It’s filling a void for African neuroscience and begins to deliver on its promise to serve as the bridgehead and glue for a growing community. We daresay the inaugural Imbizo has been a tremendous success. We would like to thank everyone who made the Imbizo possible: The faculty, the tutors, and of course the funding agencies who had faith in us.

After three successful years we have all the infrastructure in place to settle into a routine, and continue the summer school as an annual event. Many of our faculty are on board and excited to return to Muizenberg in coming years. We hope our funders will also extend their support to future iterations of the Imbizo for the benefit of neuroscience in Africa and beyond.

Sincerely,

Peter Latham

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Latham".

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Peter Latham

Joseph Raimondo

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph Raimondo".

Tim Vogels



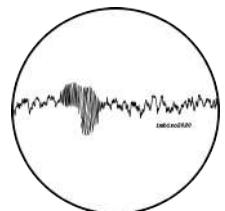
2017



2018



2019



2020



**IBRO-SIMONS
IMIBIZO**