

## **The Survey** Analysis of the Program in 2008

### **Summary**

#### **Background**

The International Graduate Program Medical Neurosciences (MedNeuro) can look back on six years of successful operation. More than 80 Master and 40 PhD students have been or are still in the program. MedNeuro was the base for a number of succeeding projects such as two more DFG Research Training Groups (GRKs), the EU funded EST Cortex or the Berlin School of Mind and Brain, one of the graduate schools of the excellence initiative. In 2008, the program was awarded the label Top10 International Master Programs by the DAAD.

Never the less, the number of applicants has been stagnating on a relatively low level and the number of students quitting the program is about 12%. Combined with perceived dissatisfaction and explicit criticism, we felt that it was time to evaluate where we stand with the program. A survey amongst current and former students as well as faculty (i.e. stakeholders), prepared and carried out by artop, a Humboldt University associated personnel and organization development company and financed by the DAAD was carried out in fall of 2008. Of the 286 contacted students and faculty, about one third replied.

#### **The Key Results**

The degree of overall satisfaction with regards to the program is high, and so is the degree of identification with the program. MedNeuro not only claims bench to bedside translation on paper, it actually lives up to that claim. As main strengths of the program the following was identified:

- its high quality research and teaching/learning environment
- the high caliber of the involved scientists
- the resources provided for training and research
- uniqueness of the program and the competitive admissions' process
- Berlin as a great location

The central areas that still have room for development are:

- management and organization of the program
- international visibility and competitiveness
- career services and mentoring, both issues ranked as important

#### **Structure**

The survey was divided into six sections. First, about 60 statements regarding the program were presented, asking to what degree the stakeholders agree or disagree and if this issue is important to them. These statements were grouped into the categories application & selection, career, communication, courses, funding, identification, incentives, mentoring, performance, quality assurance, resources, structure, and supervision.

Next, a set of statements concerning the public image of the program was presented. A third section investigated the overall standing of MedNeuro in the opinion of the stakeholders. The fourth set of statements inquired about how students found out about the program and the fifth aimed at the motivation for application. Section six presented open questions about known competitors, strengths and weaknesses, as well as incentives for high performance. The survey concluded with a semantic differential opposing abstract qualities of the program.

## **Selected Results in Detail**

Of the sixty items presented in section one, evaluation of teaching, access to resources and the international character of the program received the highest score, were as mentoring, career services and funding received the lowest score. Looking at the answers sorted by stakeholder groups (MSc/PhD/faculty), there were some noticeable differences:

- International students appreciate the structure of the program more than German students.
- MSc students are less satisfied with their funding situation than PhD students and faculty. The same can be said for career development.
- The faculty assesses their own academic performance higher than viewed by the students.
- Male students are generally more satisfied with their supervision and guidance than female students.

In terms of public image, stakeholders agree that the international character of the program is emphasized and that the website communicates the positive aspects and the goals of the program. What could be made clearer is the uniqueness of MedNeuro vis-à-vis other neuroscience programs.

Overall, stakeholders are satisfied with the program. They consider MedNeuro to be the right choice for them, and they believe that the program contributes to their career development. In their opinion, the program stands up to national competition more so than to the international one. The willingness to pay tuition for the program ranks as the lowest of these aspects, yet it still averages to 2.5 on a scale of 1 to 5.

The main channel for getting the word on MedNeuro out is the website, followed by personal recommendation or word of mouth. The number one reason for choosing MedNeuro as graduate program is the fact that it is offered in Berlin. Other important reasons for their choice voiced by the students are Charité as host institution, no tuition fees, the focus on translation, and the international character of the program. The competitor most cited is the Göttingen neuroscience program followed by Munich and other Berlin based programs.

Analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the program, the study finds that, again, the translational approach is its central strength followed by very strong faculty, and the international character. The main weaknesses are attributed to program administration, the grading system, and the lack of a functioning mentoring system.

Asking about what motivates stakeholders to work hard and perform well in the program, the criteria cited most often are the transfer of knowledge (teaching/learning), personal motivation and ambition, career goals, and deadlines and examinations.

Using the semantic differential, the study identifies 3 groups of stakeholders:

- Those critical of the program make up 16.4% and consider translation to be a mere claim
- Those very satisfied with the program make up the majority with 52.5% and attest qualities like truly translational, good for your career, innovative and dynamic
- The "in-betweens" make up 31.1% and see both strong and weak aspects of the program

Lastly, using regression analysis, the study finds some interesting correlations. Overall satisfaction, for example, depends on the degree of identification with the program and perception of the admission process as fair and transparent. The degree of identification with the program, in turn, hinges on the high quality of the students and faculty involved. In other words, the better the students and the better the faculty, the higher the degree of identification with the program and thus, the higher the degree of satisfaction.

If you would like to read the entire final report of artop (in German), please e-mail to [lutz.steiner@charite.de](mailto:lutz.steiner@charite.de) for a copy.