Being Contagious

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Many years ago I was infected with a pernicious virus. Retroviruses are fascinating things, when they infect a cell they inject their genetic material into the host and take over its metabolic machinery. Keith, John, Barbara, Bob and Ken (my own mentors) knew they were contagious, but took no precautions and infected me during the countless hours we have spent working together. They innoculated me with their passion and their ideas slipped into me without my notice. Once spliced into my own thoughts, their memes replicated within, becoming integral parts of my own. I never knew I was a host at the time, I just knew that I loved what I did more and more—I was more engaged and more passionate. I cared deeply for what I did. Insidious!

Now I too am contagious. I seek my hosts amongst the willing Loyola undergrads. We spend many hours, days, nights, weekends, doing research, talking about ideas, life, and our futures. Whether in the lab or at conferences, I see it--clear signs of transmission--devotion, passion, and curiosity—late night texts with research ideas! Most rewarding is when they infect their friends--more students every month show up at my door.

Neuroscience is an intrinsically interdisciplinary and collaborative discipline, and there is no greater joy than to work together with my student collaborators as we strive to understand the human mind and brain together. I can't imagine anything more fulfilling than walking with them as their passion builds and their paths emerge, as they become successful scholars on their own.