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NEW! Posted on Feb. 10: High school students prepare for brain storm
Registration open for McMaster's first-ever "Brain Bee" competition
by Lisa Caines

First published on February 10, 2004 at 09:00 AM.

Last modified on February 10, 2004 at 02:46 PM

Brains are buzzing as Hamilton-area high school students prepare for McMaster's first annual "brain bee," a competition that will earn the winner a trip to Baltimore to compete for a honey pot of prizes including a \$3,000 US cash scholarship.

Judith Shedden, associate psychology professor, is working with undergraduate and graduate students on her "brain bee crew" to co-ordinate the first event of its kind in Hamilton, guaranteeing one participant a chance to compete with 40 other regional winners across Canada and the United States for the international title.

"The annual brain bee is a great opportunity for us to share with local high school students our fascination with brain and neuroscience research, and to encourage them to think about making brain research a career," she says. "Our brain bee crew is visiting a number of high schools to talk to students, and during the competition, high school students will have the opportunity to chat with McMaster psychology students about their own brain research."

The Feb. 17 competition is modeled after a spelling bee, with students taking turns answering questions about the brain and neuroscience on topics such as intelligence, memory, emotions, movement, stress, aging and sleep. All questions and answers for the local competition will be selected from a single document, a free downloadable 52-page primer on the brain and nervous system, published by the Society for Neurosciences.

Each contestant will receive a certificate of participation, with Titles gift certificates being awarded to the second and third place winners. In addition to an all-expense paid trip to Baltimore for the international competition, the Hamilton-wentworth area student who is awarded the title of "best brain" will receive a travelling trophy for his or her high school, and the opportunity to prepare for international competition with the help of McMaster students.

Two past winners from the University of Toronto have gone on to win first place in the international competition, receiving a cash scholarship, a trip for two to the annual Society for Neurosciences conference (held this year in San Diego), and a summer fellowship to work in a lab with a prominent neuroscientist.

"Our participation in the international competition raises McMaster's profile in the field of neurosciences during brain awareness week, putting McMaster on the map for top high school students across North America. And reaching out to the local community in this way sends a strong message about the importance of this kind of research to incoming students as well as legislators," says Shedden.

The international brain bee is part of brain awareness week, running this year from March 15 to 21.

The first annual McMaster brain bee is open to all Hamilton area high school students in Grades 9 to 12. For more information about how to register visit brain.mcmaster.ca/brainbee/ or phone Judith Shedden at 905-525-9140 ext 24345.

Photo caption: Pictured from left, Nevena Simic, fourth-year psychology student, Judith Shedden associate psychology professor, Ann Hollingshead, academic psychology advisor, and graduate psychology students Jenny Campos and George Chan.