Year Report

2018-2019

Dondrite-Study Association of the Research Master Cognitive Neuroscience



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# Introduction

This is the annual report for the study association of the research master Cognitive Neuroscience, Dondrite. The intention with which this report is written is to provide a clear overview about the progress we made as an association during the academic year of 2018-2019.

The report will start with repeating the goals that were set for the academic year of 2018-2019 by the Board of 2017-2018 in the policy plan. This report will then summarise the most important events that occurred during the past academic year. This is followed by a short reflection on every committee and the Board. Next, we will provide quantitative data as an addition to our descriptions for the sake of comparability in the future. Additionally, we will name our collaborations and sponsors throughout the year. Subsequently we will report feedback received. We will end with a conclusion that will contain our own thoughts about this year and recommendations for the future. At the end of this report the reader will find the appendices.

We hope the reader will find this report clear and complete. It was written in the name of the Dondrite Board of 2018-2019.

Sincerely,

Charlotte (treasurer), Karolis (webmaster, external affairs), Alex (secretary) & Harshil (president)

# Goals

The goals as depicted in the policy plan for the academic year of 2018-2019 are:

* To increase visibility of Dondrite and its committees towards students of the master Cognitive Neuroscience. To achieve this, we proposed to do the following;
  + Continue with merchandise.
  + Increase use of social media.
  + Increase the use of website.
* To increase the cohesion between the different members of Dondrite and to promote the integration of international members within the Dutch system and within Dondrite. Moreover, we want to keep the second years still involved in Dondrite even though they are busier with the internship that year. To achieve this, we proposed to do the following;
  + Have an information event about the Dutch university system and living in the Netherlands.
  + Set up a buddy program organized by the Activity committee in which new and existing students are paired up in groups to provide orientation and guidance.
  + Create an Organogram of Dondrite and distribute relevant information more often and more informally.
  + Organise smaller events.
* To increase awareness and interest about a position on the Board, and to ease the transition of succeeding Board members. We proposed to achieve this by:
  + Having a transition month after the General Assembly during which, in addition to the updated Board Script, the Board members who preceded the incoming members will be present to mentor them and help them gain a thorough, all-round understanding of responsibilities and practical information that may not be conveyed through the Script.
  + Having a more active presence as a Board on social media and at Dondrite events.
  + Providing drinks and snacks to encourage participation and enthusiasm for discussions during General Assemblies.
* To create a group feeling amongst Dondrites by promoting a welcoming environment and internal destressing culture. We proposed to achieve this by:
  + Non-formal active members activities every two months to stimulate socialising.
  + Introducing internal traditions by annually repeating popular activities, next to creating smaller, casual activities that people with busy schedules can attend.
  + Organising a yearly discussion panel to discuss mental well-being and the effect of studying.

# Events

Over the past academic year, Dondrite organised many events. For a complete list, please see Appendix A. Here we will highlight the more significant and novel events:

Some of these events were recurrent events, such as the monthly Dondrite Borrel. This usually occurs on the first Friday of the month and gives the members an easily accessible opportunity to catch up with each other at Cafe Maxim, this year’s pub crawl winner and now a sponsor of Dondrite.

This year we introduced a Q&A session during the introduction month for both September and February starters. The first one was organized by the board, and the second by the education committee. Both events were well received and the members found them to be quite informative.

In addition to AMBaM, the board also organized meetings with the chair of each committee over cookies, and once over dinner (with take-away food from a potential food sponsor). Both of these events were meant to allow the different committees to socialize, share ideas about collaborations, and for us to thank them for all their efforts.

Lastly, we organised three General Assemblies (GAs) throughout this year. During the first GA we approved the year report and financial year report of 2017-2018. Next we approved the policy plan of 2018-2019 and lastly approved the budget for 2018-2019. During the second GA we discussed financial updates, and amend the Bylaws with regards to the Advisory committee and alumni. Then we bestowed Honorary Membership on Tristan Looden and discussed the questionnaire. Finally, Wessel and Tabas left the Board to be replaced by Harshil, Charlotte and Karolis.

During the first semester, the travel committee organised a day trip to Ghent in the beginning of the academic year. They organised a successful five day trip to Porto in the beginning of the second semester, which included multiple lab visits in the University of Porto, wine tasting, sightseeing and much more! These events were very well received by the participants. Another day trip took place in June, this time as a collaboration between the Activity committee and Travel committee. This trip went to Utrecht to go canoeing there.

For the third edition, the Activity committee organised a gala in the beginning of February, this time in the magnificent House Heyendaal. This gala was organised with the Donders Institute and was meant for everyone related to this institute and to the CNS master. The gala followed the theme of ‘Old Hollywood’ with amazing film props, photo sessions, a dance floor, live singer, and a DJ! In the previous two editions, we sold more tickets than expected, so we estimated this growth would continue and we would sell around 170 tickets. However, possibly due to increased ticket prices, we sold around 150 tickets instead and are therefore slightly short on the gala budget. Soon after, Education organized the third iteration of the Career event in collaboration with Mosaic and Maizena. Just like in previous years, former research master students talked about their post-academic career paths.

For the third GA this academic year, we started by updating everyone about the committees, followed by discussing the financial year report as of April 2019, the half-year report, policy plan, a small change in the budget of 2018-2019 and some remarks about the budget for 2019-2020. We then voted on feedback of the Advisory committee and welcomed in a new board candidate, Alex Titus. Lastly, we said goodbye to our very own Tineke and Viola, and Harshil subsequently took over as the new chair. Karolis signed on the role of being in charge of Dondrite’s external affairs in addition to being webmaster. Charlotte became our new Treasurer and Alex became the secretary.

During the mental health awareness month, as was discussed with Harold in last year’s Year End Report, the Board organized a panel about mental health in academia. The panel was representative of multiple levels of researchers. The event was well attended and provided a lively discussion from both the panel and the audience. Furthermore, the panel and students were able to share approaches about how to deal with stress as well as who you can approach. Overall, the event was very successful. We will hope to build from this first iteration and continue it in the coming years.

Synapsium too, organized their early conference. It was a huge success with over a hundred attendees. Prof. Kartik Sreenivasan from NYU Abu Dhabi was the keynote speaker. He gave an overview of his research into working memory. Floortje Bouwkamp was the keynote student speaker and gave a general overview of the work that is performed at the Predictive Brain lab at the Donders. Synapsium had a slightly difficult start organizing the conference with the main concern being too large of a hierarchical organization. Yet, in the end everything worked out well, especially concerning the sponsorship. This year’s edition of the conference attained the most sponsorship money.

Lastly, just before the end of the semester, Activity organized the End of Year BBQ. The location was at the Waalstrand. The organization of the event was slightly difficult, mainly do to getting the supplies to the Waalstrand. Despite this minor difficulty, the event was very well attended, with Dondrite members from past and current years. Members were very happy to be able to see each other one last time, before the summer holidays.

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# Committees

Dondrite currently exists of the Board and six committees. For a graphical representation, please see the organogram in Appendix B. We will here provide an overview of the committees, with the first person mentioned serving as chair, and a short reflection on these in total seven different organisational groups with highlights and improvement points:

*Activity committee*:the committee consists of Riv Maas, Jurriaan Freutel and Veerle Schepers. Until recently, Marta Blasco Olivier, Debora Nolte and Idil Bostan were part of the committee too. The committee is supervised by Tineke. The committee repeated many of its successful events from last year and added some new (see Events). Organising these events ran mostly smoothly and in good spirit. As a larger committee than last year, organisation was more difficult. Specifically when it came to (cultural) differences in preference in level and form of organisation. These differences were discussed internally and by that means handled in a satisfactory manner. During the Spring semester, Eva Voogd joined the committee and Alex Titus began to supervise the committee. The main event that was organized was the End of Year BBQ (see events for more detail). In conclusion, the committee ran well and had a good sense of comradery. However, it was discussed that better organization and planning could help with the events (i.e., promoting, planning, organizing). There was one main concern that the committee will attempt to address in the upcoming year, mainly, attendance at the borrels.

*Education committee*: the committee consists of Vaibhav Arya, Margot Mangnus, Sophie Conradi, Rebecca Wogan, Sietse Kiewiet, Serena Reverberi, and Nancy Peeters and was supervised by Karolis (Tabas until November). The committee organized events that were successful last year, such as scientific movie nights and the Career Event, and stepped out of their comfort zone by organizing a welcome Q&A session for February starters. They also organised two workshops near the end of the semester which were well received. The workshops were about learning the software LaTeX and another one on digital marketing via building one’s own website. Unfortunately, in contrast to previous years, Education organized fewer events. Generally, the committee worked well, as tasks were delegated equally and by competence resulting in a fun, intellectually-stimulating working environment.

*Scribe committee*:the committee consists of Victoria Poulton, Laura Toron, Wessel Hieselaar, Georgia Carter, Antonia Bose, and Vera van de Donk, and was supervised by Harshil. The committee only had one meeting a month, coming together to organise the monthly Dondrite News. Regardless, there was a seamless delegation of duties, and the newsletters were efficiently executed and always finished on time. They veered close to the template, consistent, but with less variability. The creation of the yearbook was a first-time trial last year, and since then, the committee has already improved drastically in their implementation of their ideas and design. They productively utilized feedback regarding the timeline of ideation and creation of the second edition of the yearbook, and it turned out to be a great success. They also piloted ideas regarding distribution of the newsletter via email as well as innovative ideas to incentivize interest in reading the same. The Scribe committee in the coming year will continue to work with these ideas to streamline their process.

*Synapsium committee*:the committee consists of Maelle Lerebourg, Alexandra Theodorou, Christos Sougklakos, Kirsten Rittershofer, Lenno Ruijters, Lisa Berg, Marleen Voorn, Sophie Conradi, Thirza Dado, Tim Vriens, and was supervised by Viola and Karolis later on. The committee is organizing the Synapsium symposium which is still to take place this year. As of now, the committee not only reached its sponsoring target, but also surpassed it, with a few new companies joining in. In the beginning there were discussions regarding the communication within the committee. The committee did well towards the end by increasing their efficiency as well as the general committee cohesion and had a successful 2019 edition of Synapsium.

*Travel committee*:the committee consisted of Chen-Pei Lin, Amy Abelmann, Anne Hoffman, Yingjie Shi, Marta Blasco Oliver (until February) and Lisa Berg (from February onwards), and was supervised by Charlotte (Viola before that, up until November). The committee organised a day trip to Ghent, a longer weekend trip to Porto and a day trip to Utrecht in collaboration with the Activity committee. The committee faced some difficulties in the beginning of the year in regards to last-minute organization of the Ghent trip, setbacks in the first stages of organizing the Porto trip and structure within the committee, but managed to improve internal communication and working later on and put together trips that were successful and well-received by participants.

*Advisory committee*:the committee consists of Arno Koning, Emma van Dijk and Rowan Sommers. The committee evaluated the documents before every GA and gave advice to the Dondrite Board throughout the year. As far as the Board can tell, the committee worked efficiently and collaborated smoothly.

*Board*: the Board started this year by saying goodbye to Tabas Shuja and Wessel Hieselaar, who were replaced by Charlotte Jonker, Karolis Degutis, and Harshil Vyas. We coordinated committees, organised several informative and social meetings, a few GAs and made decisions regarding new plans, money, unexpected difficulties, etc. We cooperated strongly in the sense that we all updated each other and weighed in on discussions about every topic. A division of labour existed in so far that Charlotte was webmaster, Viola was treasurer, Karolis was general member, Harshil was secretary and Tineke was chair. We supported each other well, learned a lot from each other and had a great time doing so. In all, we worked towards a more sustainable future for Dondrite. In April, we had to say goodbye to Viola and Tineke, and Alex Titus joined the Board. We took over new roles as chair (Harshil), secretary(Alex), treasurer(Charlotte), and webmaster and head of external affairs (Karolis). Soon after the transition, we organized a successful mental health discussion panel albeit with some technical difficulties. The new board, for the first time without any founding members, continues to work on understanding the bureaucratic procedures involved, implementing new policies, and making the third year of Dondrite a fun one.

Additionally, Application committees were temporarily formed to select new Board candidates. This process has been conducted successfully and has been positively evaluated.

# Quantitative data & other parties

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Start date* | *Number of members* |
| February 2016 | 1 |
| September 2016 | 1 |
| February 2017 | 2 |
| September 2017 | 30 |
| February 2018 | 9 |
| September 2018 | 42 |
| February 2019 | 5 |
| Honorary Members | 1 |

This totals to 91 members in the entire academic year of 2018-2019.

There were 31 Active members, excluding the Advisory committee.

There will be in total three GAs this academic year. The first one accounted for 23 votes with 18 attendees, the second one had 17 attendees with 31 accounted votes, and the third one will hopefully have a healthy proportion of all Dondrite members.

The Dondrite Questionnaire was filled in by 17 members.

Dondrite was sponsored by:

* The CNS Master
* The Donders Institute
* MedCat
* Brainproducts
* Studentlife
* Cafe Maxim
* Faculty of Social Sciences

Throughout the year Dondrite collaborated with:

* The Master study association of Artificial Intelligence, CognAC
* The other study associations of research masters of our faculty, Maizena and Mosaic

# Feedback

*General assemblies:* aside from discussions on the agenda points, we received additional feedback during the GA’s so far that providing free drinks during GA’s is appreciated and should definitely be repeated.

*Advisory committee:* up until April of 2019 the Advisory committee has advised the Board to reformat the budget. Additionally, Viola and Tineke met with them in November to discuss Board workload. As both Tabas and Wessel left because of time constraints, the Advisory committee and Board discussed what to do when less Board members would be available. It was decided that Dondrite could cut back on events, as it’s a relatively large and busy association. The wellbeing of all members is the first priority. The endurance of Dondrite comes second. Doing as many activities as possible is not a priority. Lastly, the changes made to the bylaws regarding the Advisory committee themselves were suggested by the Advisory committee.

*Questionnaire:* before the sixth GA (October) we sent out an online questionnaire. This was very broad and concerned several Dondrite matters. When it comes to online communication, the members were on average neutral or satisfied with the frequency. This was the same regarding the frequency of Dondrite events, although a preference was expressed for more social and group events that did not revolve around drinking. The questionnaire made clear that many people were not aware of the website, but some of the ones that did know it were not so happy with the formatting and design. Interest in Dondrite News increased since the past year, with more people reporting having frequently read the newsletters. By now, a lot of members are aware of the shared Board meeting minutes, but majority of members are still not sure they exist or do not know where to find them. Overall the Board members are considered approachable, although they differ in visibility, calling for a more increased presence of the board at Dondrite events. Regarding the call for Board members it was mentioned that many people were unsure on the amount of work it would be.

*Website form:* on the website is a feedback box meant for any questions or comments that members would like to pose anonymously. It got no entries so far this year.

# Conclusion

In this section of the year report we as the Board will reflect on the activities and developments of this year. We will then give our advice for the coming year.

2018-2019 was the second complete year in Dondrite’s official existence. We celebrated our second birthday mid-way through the academic year as we continue to strive for inclusivity and improvement, as reflected through our policies and their implementations. Looking back at the goals we had formulated at the beginning of the year, we are generally pleased with the progress made. Of the 12 concrete suggestions we formulated in the policy plan for this year, most of them were carried out albeit to different extents and with differing results. The policy of collaborations between the committees is yet its budding stages as the committees are gradually coming together to discuss ideas and brainstorm about the events they could host together.

With regards to the visibility of Dondrite to its members and the students in the CNS master, we think that the improvements have carried forward from the progress that Dondrite made in this aspect from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019. The approved merchandise arrived during the summer and went on sale at the beginning of this academic year. Not only were they successfully sold to members, but they were also used as mementos for Dondrite’s guest speakers during events organized by the committees. Continuing with this increased visibility and expansion, Dondrite this year, has also drastically improved the outreach, input, and impact on online platforms such as the website and social media. The committees now regularly update on Instagram, Facebook has been used more often to gain input regarding what the members would like to do for their next event, and we continue to grow our presence on Twitter to interact with the scientific community. The website too, continues to be updated, with the recent automation of creating accounts for each new paid member, and easy access of pictures from Dondrite events, meeting minutes from the Board, and various sign-up sheets. We continue to brainstorm regarding bringing more exclusive content to the website and increasing user traffic on all our online platforms. Due to the aforementioned results, we believe we were successful in achieving this goal.

When it comes to integration within Dondrite, and integration of international students with the Dutch, it remains difficult since such processes are both hard to influence and hard to quantify. Although we have made progress on this front, we feel there is still room for improvement. The introduction day orientation, ice-breaking games, and treasure hunt (only September) were a huge success during both September 2018 and February 2019. We also organized information sessions wherein the international students could ask us questions about education and life in the Netherlands. However, the response during meet the committees event varied, with many students interested and joining the committees in September, but only one February-starter who showed interest. The Buddy program too, started out as a great idea, and we did pair new and old students in groups, though the connections did not last as long as we had hoped or expected. We improved upon how we introduced the committees to the incoming students. Given these events and the Q&A, we conclude the Board provided a good platform for integration, and the remainder of the effort depends on the active members coming together to facilitate the integration.

We believe the culture we meant to consolidate has been imbibed among the members, committees, and within Dondrite as a whole. This is eminent from successfully repeating events that have been organised since the dawn of Dondrite. Communication between the committees has improved through active member meetings and Dondrite’s online platforms, though we hope the committees will increase when and how they collaborate to organize events. However, some Active members have felt that increasing the number of activities organised for them lead to increased workload. Going forward, we therefore aim to reconsider how we can bring active members together without worsening their perception of work they are expected to do.

This year, Board transition received a lot more attention, specifically how to interact and support committees. We feel that this is still a difficult topic, but within the Board we feel that we improved greatly. Attracting new Board members is generally challenging but has shown to go smoothly when careful consideration is applied. The process of getting new Board members, transitioning them into their roles, and increasing awareness about what the board does has improved greatly since past year, leaving only minimal issues such as Board bureaucracy due to the change in schedule of submitting the year reports and policy plan. The Board will take this up in the following year by revising how and when we start involving new members into the bureaucratic procedures and documents for the general assembly

Now that we have evaluated Dondrite’s development of this year, we would like to briefly make some recommendations for the next academic year. For more detailed plans and explanations of our intentions, please consult the Policy plan for 2019-2020.

Since the visibility, Board transition and internal communication, culture and social media use increased to a level where the Board sufficiently enables committees and members to continue this progress themselves, we feel like these points do not need to be separate policies in the coming year.

# Overview of appendices

Appendix A: overview of all Dondrite events in 2017-2018

Appendix B: organogram graphically displaying of Dondrite’s organisational structure

# Appendix A: list of Dondrite events

* Introduction day September
* Info-Dinner at the Hospital Restaurant
* Meet the committees September
* Dondrite Spotlight
* GA 6
* Day trip Ghent
* Karaoke Night
* Graduation Borrel
* GA 7
* Ice Skating
* Scientific Movie Night
* Gala Theme and Travel Destination Reveal Borrel
* Board question hour
* Multicultural Sinterklaas
* AMBaM
* Dondrite Borrel
* Introduction day February
* Info-lunch session
* Dondrite Borrel
* Gala
* Meet the committees February
* Dondrite Borrel
* RAGweek PubTalks
* Big Trip Information Meeting
* Career event
* Porto trip
* Graduation Borrel
* Mental Health Discussion Panel
* Day-trip to Utrecht
* Synapsium 2019
* End of the Year BBQ

# Appendix B: graphical representation of Dondrite

