

Neuroscience prof protests NOLA snub

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As director of neuroscience at Tulane University, Jeffrey Tasker always looked forward to the Society for Neuroscience's annual conference each fall. New Orleans was on the group's three-city rotation, giving his students an opportunity to learn from some of the best minds in the field.



Jeffrey Tasker, who holds the Catherine and Hunter Pierson Chair in Neuroscience, is spearheading a drive asking the Society for Neuroscience to rethink its decision and return to the Crescent City for its annual conference. (Photo by Jackson Hill)

But last year, after holding its 2012 conference in the Crescent City in mid-October, the group replaced New Orleans with Chicago. The official reason: threat of hurricanes.

Now, [Tasker](#) is leading the charge to persuade the society to rethink its decision and return New Orleans to the rotation with San Diego and Washington, D.C. His efforts include a petition drive and a letter-writing campaign.

“This is extremely important for the neuroscience community of New Orleans, especially graduate, undergraduate and postdoctoral students who otherwise might not have a chance to attend,” Tasker says.

It is equally important to the city, which reaps the benefits of the conference's approximately 30,000 attendees, he says.

The group began losing interest in New Orleans when it cancelled its 2006 conference in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Concerned about future storms, it cancelled the 2009 gathering as well. The conference returned in 2012, but after a few inconveniences related to Hurricane Isaac, the group dropped New Orleans for good.

Tasker's letter says the decision “fails to take into consideration the economic, social and scientific impact ... on the city and its neuroscience community as it continues in its difficult course of recovery.

“It also disregards the fact that New Orleans is one of the more popular destination cities within the society membership and a particularly well-appointed city to handle a conference the size of the SfN annual meeting.”

As of Monday (March 4), Tasker says he had collected 865 signatures on the [petition](#) , and more than 260 people had sent [letters](#) to the society.