

Dr. Michele Fornaro is Professor of Anatomy and Neuroscience at Northwestern University's Chicago College of Graduate Studies and serves as Chair of the Department of Anatomy. Trained at the University of Turin and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) at the NIH, his research focuses on neuroplasticity and regeneration of the central and peripheral nervous systems. With more than 25 years of research experience, Dr. Fornaro has authored over 50 peer-reviewed publications and has presented his work extensively at national and international scientific conferences.



MICHELE FORNARO, PhD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Senior academic leader with 20 years of progressive experience, 15 within Midwestern University, offering a strong record in academic quality, curriculum governance, assessment, and cross-program coordination. I am currently serving as Professor and Chair of Anatomy at a comprehensive health-sciences university, providing strategic and operational leadership for foundational biomedical education across eight professional colleges and graduate programs. Brings direct experience with curriculum development and review, academic program lifecycle management, institutional accreditation, data-informed continuous improvement, faculty governance, and shared decision-making. Committed to inclusive, collaborative leadership that advances student success and institutional excellence.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE DEAN OF NATURAL AND HEALTH SCIENCES ROLE

Academic Leadership & Coordination

- Coordinates academic programming across eight professional colleges (Osteopathic Medicine, Dental Medicine, Optometry, Biomedical Sciences, Physical Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Physician Assistant, and developing Veterinary Medicine program).
- Served as key advisor to institutional leadership on academic policy, program quality, and cross-college instructional strategy.
- Contributed to eight-year Institutional Strategic Planning Focus Group and campus-wide accreditation self-study task force.

Curriculum & Academic Policy

- Led full life-cycle curriculum redesign of high-enrollment Anatomy and Neuroscience courses: aligned learning objectives, assessment strategies, and instructional modalities to program competencies across multiple health professions programs.
- Contributed to new program launches (Dental Medicine, Optometry, Veterinary Medicine) providing curricular development leadership.
- Participated in curriculum committees across graduate and health sciences programs; contributed to university-level academic assessment and faculty affairs committees.
- Applied emerging instructional technologies (Anatomage, HoloAnatomy, SyGlass, VIBE digital whiteboards) to enhance academic delivery and student outcomes.

Assessment & Continuous Improvement

- Implemented data-driven course improvement processes using student outcomes, assessment data, and faculty workload metrics to drive ongoing academic quality improvements.
- Contributed to university academic assessment committee; participated in regional and specialized accreditation preparation and institutional self-study.
- Explored and piloted adaptive learning approaches to support diverse learner needs and improve student success metrics.

Academic Strategic Planning & Innovation

- Aligned department strategy with institutional academic priorities, coordinating instructional resources, laboratory infrastructure, and faculty capacity to support enrollment growth and new program development.
- Identified and introduced technology-enabled solutions to academic delivery challenges, championed innovation in teaching modalities across professional health programs.
- Completed MIT Professional Education Certificate in Applied Agentic AI for Organizational Transformation (March 2026), supporting future-focused academic planning.

Stakeholder Engagement & Organizational Leadership

- Supervised 14 faculty, 6 research staff, laboratory manager, and administrative coordinator; demonstrated ability to lead through influence and build consensus across diverse constituencies.
- Led or participated in 16 faculty search committees; chaired and served on Rank & Tenure Committees; developed structured mentorship programs for early- and mid-career faculty.
- Chaired University Financial Aid Committee and Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee; active on Student Promotion and Graduation Committees across three colleges.

CURRENT ADMINISTRATIVE APPOINTMENT

Chair, Department of Anatomy | *Midwestern University* | 2021–Present

- Provides strategic, academic, operational, and financial leadership for a department delivering foundational biomedical education to eight professional colleges and graduate programs.
- Leads 14 faculty (2 adjunct), 6 research staff, a laboratory manager, and administrative coordinator; administers \$2.2M operating budget.
- Oversees five research laboratories and a gross anatomy teaching facility supporting large multi-program student cohorts.
- Aligns departmental strategy with institutional academic priorities, coordinates faculty workload and instructional assignments across programs.
- Manages departmental financial planning and resource allocation; supports program development and institutional strategic initiatives.

Professor | *Midwestern University* | 2020–Present

PREVIOUS ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Associate Professor with Tenure | *Midwestern University* | 2014–2020

Assistant Professor | *Midwestern University* | 2011–2014

Assistant Professor, Human Anatomy | *University of Turin, Italy* | 2005–2011

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Neuroscience | *University of Turin / NIH (Bethesda, MD)* | 2007

Research collaboration with the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NIH)

B.S. in Biology | *University of Turin, Italy* | 1999

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE & INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Academic Policy & Faculty Affairs

- University Faculty Affairs Committee
- University Academic Assessment Committee
- Rank and Tenure Committees (Chair and Member)

Curriculum & Student Success

- Curriculum Committees — College of Health Sciences (CHS) and Graduate Studies (CGS)
- Student Promotion and Graduation Committees — CCOM, CGS, CHS

Institutional & Strategic

- Chair — University Financial Aid Committee
- Chair — Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
- Eight-Year Institutional Strategic Planning Focus Group
- Accreditation and Institutional Self-Study Task Force

FACULTY AFFAIRS & RECRUITMENT

- Recruited 6 faculty members as Department Chair (2021–present); chaired or served on 16 faculty search committees total, including program director searches for CGS and CHS.
- Guided 6 faculty through successful rank and tenure promotion as Chair; developed structured mentorship processes supporting faculty success.
- Recruited 4 research staff and 1 administrative coordinator aligned with curricular demand and program expansion goals.
- Oversaw annual faculty evaluation processes and workload planning across multi-college instructional assignments.

TEACHING, CURRICULUM & STUDENT SUCCESS

- Medical Neurosciences — Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine | 2017–Present
- Instruction across Osteopathic Medicine, Dental Medicine, Optometry, Biomedical Sciences, Physician Assistant, OT, PT, and Speech-Language Pathology programs.
- Graduate thesis committee member for 18 Master's students; faculty mentor for 15 CCOM students and 11 students at University of Turin.
- Faculty Advisor: Student Interest Group for Neurology (SIGN) 2015–Present; ENT & Ophthalmology Society (SENTOS) 2016–2024.

Teaching Recognition: Outstanding Basic Science Professor (2018, 2020, 2022, 2023, 2024) • Teacher of the Year — CCOM 2018

RESEARCH & SCHOLARLY ACHIEVEMENT

Internationally recognized investigator in neuroscience and regenerative biology with 50+ peer-reviewed publications. Active research program integrating neuroscience, biomaterials, and neuroregeneration with interdisciplinary collaborations.

Research Funding

- Intramural Research Grants — Midwestern University CGS (multiple awards, 2020–2025)
- Multidisciplinary Institutional and One Health Stimulus Research Awards (2015–2018)
- BICONERVE — Piemonte Innovation Cluster, Italy (€170,742; 2011–2014)
- NIH Research Fellowship (2003–2005)

Editorial Leadership

- Editorial Board: Neural Plasticity; Frontiers in Neuroanatomy; Biomolecules

Selected Peer-Reviewed Publications (2017–Present)

1. Fornaro M et al. (2022) Submicron Topographically Patterned 3D Substrates Enhance Directional Axon Outgrowth of DRG Cultured ex vivo. *Biomolecules* 12(8):1059.
2. Fornaro M, Marcus D, Rattin J, Goral J. (2021) Dynamic Environmental Physical Cues Activate Mechanosensitive Responses in the Repair Schwann Cell Phenotype. *Cells* 10(2):425.
3. Fornaro M et al. (2020) Role of neurotrophic factors in enhancing linear axonal growth of ganglionic sensory neurons in vitro. *Neural Regen. Res.* 15(9):1732–1739.
4. Fornaro M, Sharthiya H, Tiwari V. (2018) Adult Mouse DRG Explant and Dissociated Cell Models. *J Visualized Experiments.* 133.
5. Sharthiya H, Seng C, Fornaro M et al. (2017) HSV-1 interaction to 3-O-sulfated heparan sulfate in mouse-derived DRG explant. *J Neurovirol.* 23(3):483–491.

Full publication list (50+ articles) available upon request or via ORCID

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Executive & Leadership Development

- Applied Agentic AI for Organizational Transformation — MIT Professional Education Certificate (March 2026)
- Management Essential Leadership Training (Delegation & Accountability) - 2025
- Management at MWU Toolkit, 6-Module Leadership Series — 2023–2025

Professional Affiliations

- Society for Neuroscience
- Peripheral Nerve Society
- European Neuroscience Society
- Italian Society for Neuroscience

HONORS & AWARDS

- Outstanding Basic Science Professor — CCOM Classes 2020, 2022, 2023, 2024
- Teacher of the Year — Midwestern University, CCOM Class 2018
- Excellence in Service Award — Midwestern University 2013
- Cavaliere Ottolenghi Neuroscience Award — Italy 2009
- NIH Research Fellowship — 2003–2005