The Centre for Neuroscience Studies Seminar Series is proud to present
Growing Up in Science lecture:

Tuesday, January 28th, 2020
1:30 – 2:30 pm
Mitchell Hall Rose Innovation Hub

Kathleen Cullen, PhD
Professor in Neuroscience & Biomedical Engineering
Johns Hopkins University
Vice President of the Society for the Neural Control of Movement

Official Story

Kathy Cullen received a bachelor’s degree in Biomedical Engineering and Neuroscience from Brown University and a PhD in Neuroscience from the University of Chicago. Kathy was then a Fellow at the Montreal Neurological Institute. In 1994, she became an assistant professor in the Department of Physiology at McGill University, with appointments in Biomedical Engineering, Neuroscience, and Otolaryngology. While at McGill, Kathy was appointed a William Dawson Chair in recognition of her work in Systems Neuroscience and Neural Engineering and served as Director of McGill’s Aerospace Medical Research Unit. She also served as a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the National Space Biomedical Research Institute, which works with NASA to identify health risks in extended space flight. In 2016, Kathy moved to Johns Hopkins University, where she is now a Professor in Biomedical Engineering and co-Director of the Center for Hearing and Balance. She also holds joint appointments in the Departments of Neuroscience and in Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery. Kathy serves as the Program Chair and Vice President of the Society for the Neural Control of Movement and has published over 130 articles, book chapters, and patent applications and given over 170 national and international invited lectures. The central goal of her research program is to understand how the brain integrates multisensory information to ensure the maintenance of balance and posture, as well as perceptual stability in everyday life.

Unofficial Story

I grew up in a family of four daughters, where I bonded with my engineer father over a shared love of science and physics. I was a good student and like the idea of working with people, so initially set my sights on becoming a doctor. Once I started University, I began completing the premed requirements, but found that I was especially drawn to classes that focused on problem solving so began a major in Electrical Engineering. Towards the end my first year I heard a rumour that neurons use electricity to transmit information – which I thought was truly amazing! So, I began taking neuroscience courses, shifting my focus to bioengineering and neuroscience. I truly had great mentors during my undergraduate training and had the opportunity to work in a lab where we built our own electronics to complete single unit-recording experiments in visual cortex. Still it was only at the end of University that I fully realized that I did not want to attend med school but really wanted to become a scientist.

From this point on, I focused on Neuroscience first in a doctoral program at the University of Chicago, followed by a fellowship at the Montreal Neurological Inst. I was then fortunate to have the opportunity join McGill’s Department of Physiology as an Assistant professor -enjoying a wonderful career in Canada for the next ~25 years. Most recently I have moved back to the US to join the faculty at Johns Hopkins where I continue my research program. Overall, I have loved being a scientist and running my independent research program. However, I should add that a large part of my story is missing from the above narrative - namely that throughout my career I have always been aware that my science is at its best when I have the right balance with my personal life. My husband and I are both academics, and our daughter (now 19) joined us midway. We have had to employ some very creative problem solving at times to make things work – which I am always happy to share. That said, if I had the opportunity to do it all again, I might fine-tune some of the details, but this has been the most stimulating and rewarding career I could have ever imaged!

Meet & Greet at Mitchell Hall from 2:30 – 3 pm