

Letters

U.S. Scientists and China

I am compelled to write this letter by the coincidental arrival of the 17 November issue of *Science*, which contained T. D. Lee's letter about U.S.-Chinese relations (p. 873), and an invitation from People to People International to join a delegation of biochemists to visit China. With due respect to Lee, I must disagree with his view that "[o]nly through continuous contact with our colleagues in China can we help them in a genuine way." The stark contrast between the recent events in Eastern Europe and those in China since last June argues strongly that all scientists should continue to boycott activities in China. Any resemblance to normalcy in our interactions with our friends in China can only prolong the status quo and confirm the belief of those now in power in Beijing that memory is short and history can be rewritten overnight.

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AIDS Drug Trials

I read with interest the article by Joseph Palca "AIDS drug trials enter new age" (News & Comment, 6 Oct., p. 19) chronicling the meetings convened by Susan Ellenberg of the National Institutes of Health to discuss the implications of the AIDS Treatment Research Agenda of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) for the design of clinical drug trials. The statisticians involved and Anthony Fauci deserve to be lauded for their openness to criticisms emanating from far beyond the outermost reaches of the scientific establishment. However, I would think that scientists would be more interested in the content of the document that prompted the meeting; and in a substantive treatment of the questions it allows us to raise, than in the fact of the meeting itself, no matter how provocative or unlikely the identities of the participants.

Central to the intellectual process of ACT UP is the idea that people with AIDS should have a voice and a representation of their concerns in any process that will ultimately have an impact on their lives and health. The issue of access to and design of trials of experimental therapies has obvious

implications for the lives and health of people with AIDS. We believe that, since people with AIDS will ultimately bear the consequences of decisions about when and how they receive access to experimental therapies, they should be empowered to participate in this process.

Focusing on the trials' design process through the lens of ACT UP's concept of patient empowerment has allowed the following question to emerge: To what extent are the immediate short-term needs of people with AIDS compatible with the long-term goals of medical research? While this question is primarily ethical, the way in which we answer it has tremendous implications for the way in which we frame and solve scientific problems related to clinical trials.

Perspectives categorically deemphasizing the needs and rights of patients in favor of the primacy of data collection do not add much to the dialog and shed obscurity rather than light on the underlying issues.

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Leopard Habitat

The caption for the figure accompanying the Research News article "Entomologists wane as insects wax" (10 Nov., p. 754) indicates a waning of basic mammalian classification accuracy. The biomass of the total land vertebrate population in the Brazilian Amazon is zero if it is represented by a leopard because there are no leopards in the New World (except as collected by humans). The jaguar is the proper New World carnivore to represent the total biomass in the Brazilian Amazon.

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Neuroscience at Washington University

The recent Briefing "Neuroscience crisis at Washington U.?" (10 Nov., p. 761) suggests that *Science* has taken up the reporting of rumors, not only about possible moves of scientists, but about their impact on scientific programs at universities.

One function of strong programs, such as the one in question, is to provide leadership to less fortunate institutions. The departure of a department chairman or of a distinguished professor can be unsettling to younger faculty until the situation is restabilized, but need not mean that the program is in crisis. In the present highly competitive setting, gossip about the potential decline of a very strong program may amuse. But, it can also have negative effects. In any case, gossip spreads very effectively in this society and hardly needs a national magazine of science for its communication. If *Science* were to report all such rumored movements of senior scientists in this country, it would be a major undertaking.

This "crisis" report is a bit similar to an obituary notice about Mark Twain which caused him to comment that some reports are grossly exaggerated. Through periodic losses and replenishments, neuroscience at Washington University is likely to survive, even to flourish. After all, it has done so for more than 70 years.

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Information Policy

In his editorial "A question of information policy" (10 Nov., p. 733), Richard C. Atkinson decries what he says are plans announced by the National Library of Medicine (NLM) to impose new fees in an effort to find solutions for its "budget crunch." He questions whether it is ethical and legal for the NLM (and the Library of Congress) to charge costs over and above reproduction costs for bibliographic records produced by a taxpayer supported institution.

To set the record straight, the NLM has neither made such an announcement nor has any plans to. The NLM Act authorizes the Secretary of Health and Human Services, with the advice of the NLM Board of Regents, to determine whether and how to levy charges for NLM services. The basic philosophy, long supported by congressional appropriation and authorization committees, has been one of shared costs. That is, NLM, through the appropriation process, supports the creation costs of its databases and the user pays the cost of access. The result: the average online cost for a few citations in response to a clinical question is about \$2. The only major exception to this policy is that foreign users, who are non-