

Briefings

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Jerry Bishop

Physicists Balk at Journalist's Award

The *Wall Street Journal's* Jerry Bishop won this year's science writing award from the American Institute of Physics for his reporting on cold fusion. But while he won the physicists' prize, he didn't win their hearts and minds.

Senior physicists at the American Physical Society, led by Robert Park, boycotted last week's awards ceremony in Washington, D.C., because they believe that Bishop's reports put claims for cold fusion in too favorable a light. Park, who heads the society's Washington office and is a vocal critic of cold fusion, argues, for example, that Bishop ignored Department of Energy studies critical of Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann, the scientists who first claimed to have achieved cold fusion.

In response, the AIP has changed its rules so that the journalism award, like AIP's other prizes, will have to be approved by its board of governors. But journalists on AIP's judging panel are now balking at the notion of having their choice for future awards subject to a veto by the board of governors. They are threatening to resign en masse unless the new rule is modified.

Harvard Takes Math Super Bowl

Harvard has won the annual "Super Bowl" of mathematics—the William Lowell Putnam Mathematical Competition—for the fifth consecutive year. A team of three male undergraduates copped the prize for which close to 2096 students representing 360 schools competed this year. The contest features a daylong test involving 12 problems.

Each question is worth 10 points for a possible total of 120, but most of the contestants don't get any points at all, according to Harvard math professor Clifford Taubes. In fact, the questions are so rough that 1989's average score was below 10.

The winning scores are never released, according to the competition's director, Leonard Klosinski of Santa Clara University. But he divulged that over the 50 years of the competition, only three individuals have achieved perfect scores.

Research Shuffle at NIMH

In an effort to attract more and better research proposals, the National Institute of Mental Health has reorganized its Division of Basic Science, adding new staff and new programs. Says NIMH deputy director Alan Leshner, the agency wants to "emphasize to the world our commitment to basic science."

The basic science division is now called the Division of Basic Brain and Behavioral Sciences, or DB3, and has grown from three to seven branches. The neurosciences research branch has split in two branches, and branches on neuroimaging, psychopharmacology, and basic research on "personality and social processes" have been created.

Attracting new proposals is all very well, but will Congress come through with the money

to fund them? Basic science was allotted \$100.4 million this year and is slated for a 5% increase in the President's fiscal 1991 budget. That is a far cry from the goal of mental health lobbyists, who have called for an overall increase of 46% in next year's NIMH budget.

Thinking About Mars

The United States should get together with the Soviets to plan a mission to explore Mars, says a new report from the National Research Council. But it should not sign up for a joint venture.

This is the conclusion of a panel chaired by Eugene Levy, director of the Lunar and Planetary Laboratory at the University of Arizona, which met at NASA's request to consider how the government should organize an assault on the red planet.

The panel's report says the

nation could save money and benefit technically by cooperating with the Soviet Union, which is the only other nation capable of carrying out such a huge space venture. But a close partnership at this time would be "too risky" and "would sit as a potential hostage to political events that might disrupt" Soviet-U.S. relationships. Furthermore, the report says it would be difficult to persuade either country's space authorities to yield to the other partner the development of robotic machinery or advanced launching systems needed for the program. The question of which partner would get to bring home and distribute samples of Martian soil also seemed problematic.

The advice to NASA therefore is: try living together first. Plan a series of "independently conducted" but "highly coordinated" missions, carry them out, and then consider marriage.



Cynomolgus monkeys.

Monkeys in Limbo

Fifteen hundred cynomolgus monkeys awaiting shipment to the United States from Indonesia may soon have to be destroyed unless exporter Paul Houghton can raise \$1000 a day for their maintenance and upkeep.

The monkeys, crucial to some pharmaceutical testing and biomedical research, are subject to a de facto embargo that was created last month when the Centers for Disease Control announced the presence of an Ebola-like virus in shipments of cynomolgus monkeys from the Philippines. The human form of the Ebola virus is extremely dangerous, accounting for mortality rates among infected people in Zaire as high as 88% during a 1976 epidemic. But many have questioned the threat this virus poses to their human handlers. Some were infected with it several months ago but none has yet shown any signs of sickness.

Because several airlines now refuse to carry cynomolgus monkeys, importers such as Houghton have been forced to provide facilities in the source countries to house and feed animals that have already been captured.

Houghton is now probing a number of strategies for sustaining his charges through the embargo. One is to write the medical researchers seeking monkeys from his stock, asking them if they would contribute 70 cents a day per monkey until they can be delivered. He has also asked the Army if an emergency airlift could be mounted.