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The Pharmacia Biotech & Science Prize

It has been said, "Love is a great exaggeration of the worth of one person over the worth of everybody else." The same could be said of prizes, yet a world without love or prizes would be a lot duller than the one we have. Prizes play a particularly important role in science because they encourage those who succeed and provide an incentive for others to expend extra effort.

With this in mind, *Science*, helped by the generosity of Pharmacia Biotech, has established a prize for entry-level scientists at the beginning of their careers.* In 1995, the prize will recognize outstanding graduate students in molecular biology. The purpose of this international prize is to reward good research and to give students from all regions of the world encouragement and visibility at an early stage of their careers. In modern times, when grant funding is particularly important and particularly difficult to obtain, such a prize can provide a helpful boost to a beginner.

Ultimately the worth of a prize is based on the quality of the recipients, so good criteria and a wise selection committee are essential. A good example of how not to give a reward is illustrated by the subcommittee of the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) that recently equivocated on naming element 106 "seaborgium." Glenn Seaborg, who co-discovered plutonium and who led the research on that new artificial element at a time when only its radioactivity could be measured, was honored by a Nobel Prize and many other awards for a lifetime of pioneering studies. He has gone on to use his great influence for many good causes of service to higher education and to the government of the United States. The American Chemical Society and many others supported the naming, which historically has been considered the prerogative of the discoverers; but the IUPAC accrediting body did not accept the suggestion, giving as a reason that Seaborg is alive. Fortunately, a higher body will review this decision. To reward only those who are no longer living imposes a penalty for longevity and deprives the individuals and their well-wishers of the pleasures of receiving and giving recognition. Award committees need to remember that they are the temporary carriers of a torch for a long list of names that will establish the caliber of an award.

Organizations wishing to initiate new prizes should learn from past endeavors. Therefore, *Science* will take its responsibility seriously. The first Pharmacia Biotech and *Science* prize will be awarded to a student who received a Ph.D. in 1994. To qualify, the student must write an essay of 1000 words describing his or her research and putting it in perspective with the literature in the field. A committee of distinguished scientists will select the winner on the basis of the quality of the research and the quality of the writing, and the winning essay will be published in *Science*.

Because *Science* spans areas from mathematics to social science, we welcome the opportunity to co-sponsor prizes for work in other scientific fields, using the Pharmacia prize as a model. Such prizes can have a positive influence on the careers of individuals and the progress of science, provided they are awarded with insight and fairness.

There are many prizes these days, but there are many scientists. In fact, a prize probably helps to mitigate one of the negative features of modern science, the enormous pace and the lack of a chance to "savor" a breakthrough. In the "good old days" of fewer journals and fewer scientists, a major discovery was celebrated and noted by scientists in different disciplines, and then followed up at leisurely intervals by grateful successors. Today, there are so many journals and so much information that the original discovery is almost lost before eager and energetic followers take the logical next step. A prize rewarding a beginning scientist for a job well done and for placing his or her own discovery in a proper context of what has already been achieved and what might be done seems to fill a gap and will enrich and benefit the world of discovery.

The Pharmacia Biotech & *Science* Prize for Young Scientists is, we hope, an important step toward helping science in general and new investigators in particular.

Daniel E. Koshland Jr.

* For information about the Pharmacia Biotech & *Science* Prize for Young Scientists, contact *Science*, 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA; fax: 202-289-7562; internet address: science_editors@aaas.org