

# SCIENCE

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# LETTERS

## Sound policy

Several of this week's letters discuss professional and policy concerns of the working scientist. "One in four whistleblowers reported severe consequences" to their jobs, according to a survey study. Comparing the quality of research done at national laboratories to that at universities (to determine allocation of funding) is not a simple exercise, two writers say. Another gives an example of a successful fellowship program that "strengthens ties" between universities, industry, and government. A question about equity for people who "live far away from the information highway" is raised. The ethics of using previously collected tissue samples for genetic research is discussed. And the achievement of the amateur scientist is trumpeted.



L. CARROLL

## Whistleblowing Consequences

As the project officer for the study of the consequences of whistleblowing, I was pleased to see the Random Samples item about the study (5 Jan., p. 35). Readers should also be made aware of the following important findings of the study.

Although 69% of whistleblowers in scientific misconduct cases experienced one or more negative consequences as a result of their whistleblowing, 62% perceived the consequences of whistleblowing to have had a neutral impact on their careers, professional activities, and personal lives; 28% perceived a negative impact; and 10% perceived a mixed (positive and negative) impact.

Whistleblowers attributed the negative consequences they experienced to institutional officials, the accused, colleagues, and professional societies. The most serious negative consequences were most frequently attributed to institutional officials and secondarily to the accused. One in four whistleblowers reported severe consequences, including loss of position or denial of tenure, promotion, or salary increases.

Negative consequences for whistleblowing were most likely to begin while the institution was responding to the allegation and continue after the inquiry and investigation were completed. Negative consequences were experienced whether or not the allegation was substantiated.

Negative consequences reduced the willingness of whistleblowers to blow the whistle again but did not extinguish it. More than half of the whistleblowers who experienced severe negative consequences reported that they would blow the whistle again.

Although positive consequences of whistleblowing were seldom cited, one in

four whistleblowers reported a positive impact on their self-esteem.

Readers may access the whistleblower study report on the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) Home Page at <[http://phs.os.dhhs.gov/phs/ori/ori\\_home.html](http://phs.os.dhhs.gov/phs/ori/ori_home.html)> or obtain it in hard copy or diskette from the ORI.

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## Academia vs. National Labs

The observation in *ScienceScope* of 2 February (p. 585) that "a recent National Academy of Sciences panel recommended [that] federal agencies should 'favor' universities over national labs and other research institutions because the quality of the science is generally higher on campus" does not reflect what the panel's report said. In fact, the report states that the "committee does not presume that academic research is always of higher quality than that conducted in industry, federal laboratories, or other nonacademic institutions" (1). The committee did urge that federal funding for science and technology should generally favor universities because of the greater flexibility of their programs, inherent quality control, and linkage of research to education. It also recommended that excellent, well-evaluated federal laboratories supporting the missions of their sponsoring agencies should not be diminished.

**Norman Metzger**

*Study Director, Committee on Criteria for*