

SCIENCE

Maintaining Diversity in Science

NEWS

Facing the Big Chill in Science	1902
Gender, Race, and Class	1903
Backlash Strikes at Affirmative Action Programs	1908
The Affirmative Action Debate	1909
Computer Culture Deflects Women and Minorities	1915
The First 'Computers'	1916
Social Science: Researchers Find Feminization	1919
a Two-Edged Sword	
Minorities at the Starting Gate	1919
Diversity Counts: Recent Data on	1921
Women and Minorities	
Advice From the Top:	
Anne C. Petersen:	1904
Learning the Trade Secrets	
Lydia Villa-Komaroff:	1905
Spinning Setbacks Into Success	
David Satcher:	1910
Reaching Out and Moving Up	
Yolanda Moses:	1920
With a Little Help From Her Friends	

POLICY FORUM

Science and Diversity: A Compelling	1817
National Interest	
Shirley Malcom	

See also Book Reviews, page 1814.

A Special Report



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The scientific world has often seemed a bit cool toward women and minorities, but today a constellation of factors ranging from budget cuts to court rulings conspire to create a frigid climate for programs designed to promote diversity in the scientific work force. In this issue, we explore how current political and economic trends may threaten recent advances made by women and underrepresented minorities in the scientific workforce, including African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians.*

Tight budgets are expected to hit women and minorities hardest, in part because diversity programs may be left out in the cold, as reported by Ann Gibbons on page 1902. But even if budgets were ample, such efforts face major legal challenges from recent rulings on affirmative action. Berkeley-based reporter Marcia Barinaga untangles the legal threads and their implications for scientists on page 1908.

Such trends play out in different ways in different disciplines, and we zero in on two fields at opposite ends of the diversity spectrum. In computer science, diversity has actually dropped recently, and on page 1915 Virginia Morell explores subtle cultural factors that may help explain why. In contrast, the social sciences are the most diverse in science. But as reported by Constance Holden on page 1919, the overall parity masks a gender split among fields. And ironically, some fear that the influx of women may coincide with lower prestige for the field.

Throughout the section, top-ranked women and minorities offer advice on how to succeed in today's competitive environment; we present the latest diversity data on page 1921. And on the World Wide Web, *Science's* Next Wave presents an on-line forum on maintaining diversity. Visit it at <<http://sci.aaas.org/nextwave/public.html>>.

Despite the frosty atmosphere, women and some minorities are still making strides. Stay tuned for updates on how current trends affect their progress.

—Elizabeth Culotta
Editor, Women and Minorities '96

* Asian-Americans, although they face some obstacles common to other minorities, are not underrepresented in science and so are not a focus of this issue. See *Science*, 12 November 1993, p. 1117, and 13 November 1992, p. 1224, for articles devoted to Asian-Americans.