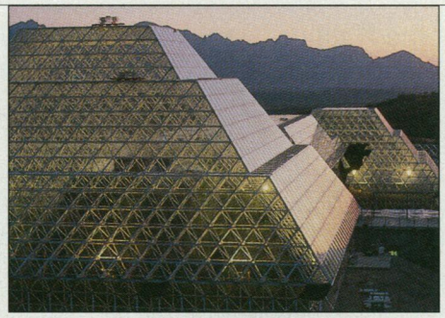
edited by JOCELYN KAISER

New Manager for Biosphere 2

The controversial Biosphere 2 facility outside Tucson, Arizona, is getting a new boss as Columbia University refocuses the glass-enclosed ecological laboratory on education as well as research. The personnel move is part of a major reorganization of Columbia's geosciences program to include the Arizona site.

The new president and executive director of the 12,750-square-meter Arizona lab will be chemist William Harris, who for the past 4 years has headed the $650 million mathematics and physical sciences (MPS) directorate at the National Science Foundation (NSF). Harris's departure next month adds to the exodus of top NSF managers (*Science*, 23 August, p. 1035).

Harris will report to materials scientist Peter Eisenberger, who leaves Princeton University this month to become vice provost and head of Columbia's new Earth Institute. The institute will encompass Biosphere 2 and the school's renowned Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.



PETER MENZEL

Clear vision. Columbia sees Biosphere 2 as ideal site for education and research.

When Biosphere 2 was first built in 1991 by Texas businessman Ed Bass, it housed eight people in a 2-year experiment that was ridiculed by scientists for a lack of rigor. In January, Columbia took control of the $200 million lab and visitors center (*Science*, 17 November 1995, p. 1111).

Eisenberger, who has worked closely with Harris as past chair of the MPS advisory panel, says he's an apt choice for achieving Columbia's vision for Biosphere 2: a model facility that combines science, training, and public outreach. "Bill's an innovative leader with experience integrating research and education. We hope to make it a prototype of what people say needs to happen in educating future scientists and society," says Eisenberger.

Canadian Scientists Told to Cut the Jargon

Scientists in Canada will soon have to figure out how to explain their work to taxpayers as well as to their peers. New grant applications for the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) require a summary "which would explain and justify their research in language that their teenage children or parents would understand," writes council President Tom Brzustowski in the latest NSERC newsletter. Brzustowski says the $450 million agency, which supported 7300 researchers in 1995, hopes the summaries will help earn Canadians' support in the face of "pretty tight competition for public funds."

The catalyst for the policy change, says an NSERC spokesperson, was a press release issued last year by Randy White, a member of parliament from British Columbia. In a move reminiscent of the "Golden Fleece Awards" handed out by U.S. Senator William Proxmire (D–WI) in the 1980s, White listed the titles of grants he viewed as a waste of money.

While it may work for Canada, this plan doesn't impress Chuck Herz of the U.S. National Science Foundation, which requires only a technical summary. "I would question who really would use" the low-tech summaries, Herz says. But the idea wins plaudits from what might seem an unlikely source: Terry Pearson of the University of Victoria. His research title—Membrane Molecules of African Trypanosomes (the organism that causes African sleeping sickness)—was one of those singled out for ridicule on White's list. But Pearson says the new, easy-to-read summaries will not only inform taxpayers, but also help him understand projects outside his field. "Real science in straight English," he says. "I love it."

Joint Venture to Tackle Cancer Genetics

In what may be a first for a major cancer research center, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City is planning a joint venture with Sequana Therapeutics Inc. to study the genetics of cancerous tumors. The project will focus on the 90% of cancers caused by nonhereditary defects, refining ways of using genetic data from tumors to predict the course of cancer and find new drugs to treat it. Memorial Sloan-Kettering will contribute its clinical expertise and 30 years' worth of tissue samples and patient data, while Sequana, in La Jolla, California, will bring to the venture its fast DNA sequencing capabilities. "Sequana has the engine; we have the gasoline," says Memorial Sloan-Kettering spokesperson Avice Meehan. The two partners, each of whom will contribute $5 million for the first 2 years, signed a letter of intent last month.

"To the best of my knowledge, no other academic group has teamed up with industry with this sort of project," says Sequana associate director of investor relations Robert Giargiari. Sequana vice president of molecular genetics Nicholas Dracopoli will be research director of the new venture, which has yet to choose a president. The partners hope to sign an agreement in 50 to 90 days, Giargiari says, and later move into a building on Sequana's campus.

Dole Targets DOE Civilian R&D

Science and technology issues may not be on the front burner of the presidential campaign, but a proposal by Republican candidate Bob Dole to eliminate the Department of Energy (DOE) and make huge cuts in its programs would drastically reshape everything from high-energy physics to renewable energy research. Dole's economic plan released last month calls for $32 billion in cuts to the department's civilian efforts over the next 6 years. That's about one-third what DOE intends to spend in that period, and virtually all of the money assigned to nondefense programs.

One reason Dole would do away with DOE is to pay for his proposed tax cut. DOE's defense labs would be transferred "to agencies more appropriate to their mission," according to the plan. (Dole assured voters in New Mexico last week that the defense labs there—Sandia and Los Alamos—would stay open.) Civilian labs would be moved to the National Science Foundation (NSF). Many civilian efforts, the document says, "are outdated and wasteful … such as a program to produce methane gas from 'tuna sludge.' "

DOE Secretary Hazel O'Leary blasted Dole's proposal last month, noting it would eliminate almost two-thirds of research at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and cripple Pacific Northwest Lab. She added that it would force the closure of Fermilab, Brookhaven National Lab, and other major DOE facilities.

Administration and congressional Democrats are concerned that while the Dole plan shifts facilities to NSF, it doesn't call for doubling NSF's budget. Some Republicans sympathetic to DOE civilian research are nervous as well, but they're taking the document with a grain of salt. Says one Republican congressional staffer: "My guess is no one will take this too seriously."