



Chilly climate? Smith chemistry department, housed in Clark Science Center, has been accused of sexism.

Smith Chemist Files Gender-Bias Complaint

Charges of sexism in the chemistry department at Smith College may get a hearing in court. A woman chemist who was denied tenure in February has filed sex-discrimination charges against the elite women's institution in Northampton, Massachusetts, alleging a pattern of treatment that made it impossible for women in the department to do the research required to win tenure.

The case of physical chemist Sharon Palmer, a popular teacher, drew widespread attention among women scientists after a college-level committee rejected her tenure bid despite unanimous support from the department's five tenured members, all men (*Science*, 5 April, p. 24). But the committee ruled that Palmer's publication record was too sparse.

On 19 August, Palmer filed a complaint against the college with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, where such charges must be registered before a plaintiff can sue. Palmer's brief says the chemistry department created a Catch-22: It gave women junior faculty

more labor-intensive teaching assignments that took time away from research, and then penalized them for not doing enough research. Indeed, an external review of the department last spring found that senior faculty were not assuming "enough responsibility for mentoring the untenured women" and concluded that "we are not optimistic that the situation regarding the place of women in the department ... can change soon."

Palmer's attorney, John Pucci, has until 17 December to file suit. Smith faculty Dean John Connolly says the college will "vigorously contest" the charges.

NSF Fills Hot Seat

A University of Virginia developmental psychologist has been invited to head a research directorate at the National Science Foundation (NSF) that has been attacked in Congress as unnecessary. *Science* has learned that Bennett Bertenthal, who studies infants' visual responses to motion, is mulling an offer to succeed Cora Marrett, the first assistant NSF director for social and behavioral sciences and economics, who is returning to academia.

If Bertenthal, 47, accepts, he will take on a job that NSF has fought hard to preserve against calls for its elimination by Representative Robert Walker (R-PA), chair of the House Science Committee. Walker is retiring, however, and last week seemed to be mellowing: While he still

has doubts about the value of a separate directorate for social science, he told a group of policy analysts that "I'm a social scientist, and social science has a lot to contribute." NSF director Neal Lane plans to study the issue as part of an organizational review.

Baltimore May Head AIDS Vaccine Panel

Nobel Prize-winning biologist David Baltimore of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is the lead candidate to head what could become the world's most powerful panel overseeing AIDS vaccine research. The possible new job for Baltimore stems from a sweeping review completed by extramural scientists last spring of the National Institutes of Health's (NIH's) \$1.4 billion AIDS research portfolio. A major recommendation was that NIH's AIDS vaccine effort—at \$125 million, the largest in the world—be restructured and run by a new AIDS Vaccine Research Committee headed by "a distinguished, non-government scientist."

Baltimore confirmed that he has been speaking with government officials, including Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, about the position. "I certainly feel very strongly that the most important thing we can do today [in AIDS research], having now produced some useful drugs, is to make a vaccine," says Baltimore. He says he has made no decision yet and faces "no deadline."

U.S. Gets Ray Project

The United States has edged out Mexico and Spain as the Northern-Hemisphere site for a huge cosmic-ray detector (*Science*, 13 September, p. 1483). The final tally by the multinational Auger Project, taken on 13 September near San Rafael, Argentina, had the U.S. over Mexico by a 5-4 vote. The site, an area the size of Rhode Island 100 miles south of Salt Lake City, will draw on expertise at the University of Utah. The detector will complement another in Argentina, which has already pledged \$15 million for the project. Participants must now seek another \$85 million from funding agencies in their countries.

Space Science Boosted In Clinton Policy

President Bill Clinton signed a policy statement last week that backs sustained exploration of the Martian surface by the year 2000 and calls for a long-term program to study planets in orbit around other stars. An unclassified version of the document, over 3 years in the making, was due for public release 19 September, marking the kickoff of wide debate in the Administration over the direction of space science and the space program.

As a policy statement, however, the document does not call for additional funds for NASA, which faces declining budgets in coming years. And science is just one of five goals for the space program—along with promoting national security, economic competitiveness, private-sector use of space technology, and international cooperation. The thorny topic of budget priorities is not discussed, but is sure to arise at a meeting on astronomical discoveries tentatively set for November that will include Vice President Al Gore and space-program scientists.

Although not specific on budget issues, the new policy also sets the stage for a December summit between Gore and congressional leaders to discuss the space program. And Gore's interest may continue: There is talk of a science summit early next year to be hosted by the vice president.

San Diego Gene-Therapy Center Courts Industry Partner

In what may become the biggest collaboration between academic gene-therapy researchers and industry, the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), and the U.S. division of the German pharmaceutical company Boehringer Mannheim are considering co-funding a commercial gene-therapy program at the La Jolla, California, campus.

By finding an industry partner, the school would fulfill its promise to make financially self-sustaining a gene therapy center started last year with \$3 million, says UCSD School of Medicine Dean John Alksne, who was to describe the plan to the UC regents this

week. Gene-therapy pioneer Theodore Friedmann, who heads the center, and his colleagues talked to a dozen companies before settling on Boehringer Mannheim. "It's very exciting for us, and we think the regents are going to love it," says Alksne.

The center hopes to sell processed stem cells (bone-marrow blood cells critical to gene therapy) and "vectors" engineered to slip genes into cells. It also plans to have a molecular diagnostics wing where people can have their genes analyzed and receive counseling. Alksne expects to present the regents with a full-fledged proposal in November.