Editorial & Letters

EDITORIAL

Opening *Science*'s Compass

An admired mentor of mine once described the attempt to absorb the onslaught of new scientific data as being like trying to drink from a firehose. Without question, the breadth, depth, and pace of today's research have never been greater. Such rapidity and ever-increasing complexity pose real problems for the reader who is curious about the direction of today's science and trying to anticipate what new critical developments may be expected.

Surveys of *Science* readers suggest that some are interested in general advances in fields outside their own, whereas others are anxious to see the latest results in their field as presented in our Research Articles and Reports. For many readers, especially those whose interests are infrequently covered in the original research section, the published research may on occasion seem far too complex, providing no entry point for the curious scholar. For these reasons, *Science* begins in this issue a new section intended to provide a better, more efficient way to communicate the current thinking in the scientific community to all active scientists and to interested observers of the scientific scene.

This new section, *Science*'s Compass, is placed physically in the intellectual space it intends to fill—between the objective reporting of science policy and scientific news by our team of journalists and the original research papers. *Science*'s Compass, to be coordinated by Senior Editor Katrina Kelner, will provide views from the community by insiders with particularly broad or knowledgeable perspectives, aiming to attract the wider audience of the global scientific community.

Initially, *Science*'s Compass will contain some elements familiar to our readers: **Policy** commentaries (previously called Policy Forums), coordinated by Senior Editors Brooks Hanson and Barbara Jasny from the suggestions of all editors, will offer scientists' views on the big policy questions of the moment. Often these will be written by senior figures but will communicate at a level that is accessible and enjoyable for all of *Science*'s readers. On occasion, these debates may be extended by online discussions. **Books and New Media** will review important books about science that our advisors anticipate becoming major works in their field, as well as potentially important electronic tools (both software and CDs). We will seek here to provide information of interest to the broad readership and to cover a wide variety of fields. The annotated harvests of our professional Web watchers will continue to appear regularly. **Research** commentaries (previously called Perspectives) will continue to reflect on the significance and opportunities found in today's hot research papers, but with the explicit goal of making their information accessible to the general reader. These Perspectives will draw on original research in all relevant journals. For now, *Science*'s Compass will also contain frequent **Reviews** (previously called Articles) that are short enough to be engulfed by the hungry reader with little time, yet comprehensive enough to retain their currency and utility. Over the course of the year, other features will be added to *Science*'s Compass, some of which we hope will be shaped by expressions of reader opinion about how best to sail the often turbulent seas of the scientific literature.

Another major change begins with this issue. As announced in the past five issues, Technical Comments will now be summarized each week in the printed journal, while the full text will be available to all *Science* Online readers, not just *Science* Online subscribers. This change will allow presentation of much more extensive details, data, and arguments than was previously possible. The change also recognizes that technical details are often of interest to limited numbers of our readers, but that these dissenting views are of great importance to all readers and to the scientific record. The change will conserve space for other general interest items and allow our editors to accelerate the pace at which technical comments are presented. Moreover, the digital archives will link to this dissent whenever an online browser searches by topic or authors. The additional online detail should also permit interested readers to assess our previously reported data more effectively.

"The winds and waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators."* Open *Science*'s Compass and tell us how we can help you sail.

Floyd E. Bloom

*Edward Gibbon, *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Strahan & Cadell, London, 1776), p. 68.

LETTERS

Diversity

Proposals for a mutation database initiative and a genetic diversity survey are evaluated. Our understanding of sexual violence is debated. Cancer therapy and a vaccine for AIDS are discussed. A use of indirect costs is likened to a Ponzi scheme. A NASA digital multiwavelength survey, SkyView, is pointed out. And a photograph that was identified as a lizard lung turns out to have been of a chick heart.

The HUGO Mutation Database Initiative

In 1994, an initiative began to form a community of those interested in genetic mutations and their documentation with a view to developing a considered, integrated, and systematic approach to the massive problem of mutation documentation. Its major aim is to have up-to-date lists of mutations of genes available by computer on the World Wide Web. Its history and progress as the "Mutation Database Initiative" can be seen on its Web site (*1*). There has been tacit agreement that the size and complexity of the problem is such that the initiative should go ahead with a system of locus-specific databases working with central databases.

The nomenclature is nearly agreed on (*2*). It is proposed that the systematic name of a mutation be based on the nucleic acid change, and the common or trivial name on the amino acid change. The content of locus-specific databases is being discussed (*3*), and a method for searching dispersed databases has been proposed (*4*). Future themes to be addressed include quality control, recommended software, funding, publication, privacy, copyright, and collection of mutations.

The initiative has been fortunate to obtain infrastructure support for meetings from the Human Genome Organization (HUGO) and, most recently, has been invited to become part of HUGO; hence the name "HUGO Mutation Database Initiative." The March of Dimes has also supported meetings and most recently staff to help coordinate the initiative.

Those having suggestions and those interested in assisting in the tasks of and joining the initiative should contact one of us.