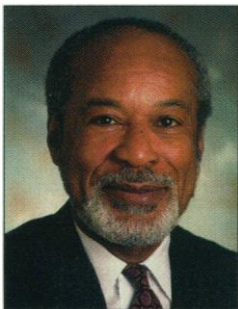


## NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

## Education Chief Quietly Steps Down

Luther Williams, the head of the education and human resources directorate at the National Science Foundation (NSF), is stepping down after 9 years on the job. But the circumstances surrounding his departure are as murky as the results of his ambitious efforts to reform the way U.S. children are taught science and mathematics.

On Monday, NSF announced that veteran administrator Judith Sunley has been named interim head of the \$689 million directorate, the keystone of the government's effort to improve U.S. rankings on international measures of student achievement in science and math. The two-paragraph "personnel announcement" said that Sunley, trained as a mathematician, would take over in 6 days. It made no mention of Williams, prompting widespread puzzlement over his status and future plans.



**Out.** Williams shaped NSF systemic reform.

NSF director Rita Colwell told *Science* that Williams, a former biology professor, is taking a position with a new program at Tulane University in New Orleans called the Payson Center for International Development and Technology Transfer. The program is a pet project of Eamon Kelly, president emeritus of Tulane and current chair of the National Science Board, NSF's governing body. She said that Williams told her of his plans "a month or so ago" and that she expects him to overlap briefly with Sunley before leaving "by the end of August."

Williams spearheaded NSF's campaign for "systemic reform" of the nation's elementary and secondary school science and math education, a high-profile effort whose impact on student achievement has been hard to measure (*Science*, 4 December 1998, p. 1800). "He can leave with a sense of accomplishment," Colwell said. "But it seemed like a good time for him to go. I think that 5 to 6 years is a good length of time in that job, and he's been doing it for nine. Even the director serves a fixed term of 6 years."

*Science* was unable to reach Williams, whose secretary said he was "on travel" and not available for comment. Tulane epidemiologist Bill Bertrand, director of the 1-year-old Payson Center, said on Tuesday that he had "been talking about the possibility" of Williams joining the center, which is begin-

ning an effort to train university teachers in French-speaking Africa and is heavily involved in using information technology to improve education in the developing world. Williams has instituted several programs at NSF aimed at using technology to broaden educational opportunities for underserved populations. Other colleagues said Williams was also weighing other offers.

—JEFFREY MERVIS

## JAPAN

## Panel Examines National Universities

**TOKYO**—A move to shrink the size and scope of the government is spreading to the country's national universities. This week a blue-ribbon panel assembled by Japan's education ministry began debating ways to loosen the government's grip on the 98 national universities. But the promise of greater independence is mixed with fears that the government's desire to cut costs may be stronger than its commitment to high-quality university education and research.

The idea for "denationalizing" the universities grew out of a December 1997 report to the government on streamlining the entire federal bureaucracy. The Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture (Monbusho) initially paid little attention to the proposal, but in June the government indicated it was serious about pursuing reform when it pushed through a law to turn 54 national research institutes affiliated with ministries other than Monbusho into so-called "independent administrative institutions." To study what a similar move might mean for universities and university-affiliated institutes, Monbusho assembled an advisory panel, which includes Leo Esaki, a Nobel laureate in physics who is currently president of the University of Tsukuba, and Hiroyuki Yoshikawa, an engineer and former president of the University of Tokyo. The panel held its first meeting on 10 August.

The plan to transform the national research institutes is modeled after the Institute of Physical and Chemical Research (RIKEN) outside Tokyo, which has had similar quasi-independent status for over 40 years. RIKEN has great leeway in managing its day-to-day affairs and uses an international review board to assess its accomplishments. The new institutes law, which goes into effect in spring 2001, envisions similar deals for the 54 national institutes.

But no such model exists for universities. Yoshikawa says that most academic administrators initially feared that any new status would be followed by budget cuts. "But now there is a recognition that there could be some good aspects [to the plan]," he adds.

Greater independence, for example, could free the universities from government-wide restrictions on staffing that make it nearly impossible to hire lab technicians. It would also give administrators more discretion over how they spend appropriated funds.

But Ikuo Amano, a professor emeritus of education at the University of Tokyo and a member of the University Council, a Monbusho advisory body, worries about the government's motives: "This discussion started not from the standpoint of how to improve the universities but from the standpoint of how to reduce government expenditures and slim government payrolls." Claims of benefits to university operations, he notes, are "not based on any evidence."

—DENNIS NORMILE

## ANIMAL RESEARCH

## 50 Monkeys Taken From Indian Lab

**NEW DELHI**—Armed with a government order and escorted by police, animal activists have released into the wild 50 rhesus monkeys that were being used for drug testing. The episode is the latest battle in a fight over the country's new animal welfare rules, which scientists fear could halt drug testing in India.

The animals were being kept at the National Center for Laboratory Animal Sciences (NCLAS) in Hyderabad for use in testing a potential drug against immune disorders. On 9 August, the activists, brandishing a government order citing NCLAS's failure to adhere to new animal welfare rules, released the primates into a forest about 400 kilometers away.

The crisis has been brewing since December, when a law went into effect that aims to safeguard animals used in 5000 labs across the country (*Science*, 11 December 1998, p. 1967). Among other things, the law requires facilities to gain approval for animal experiments from the Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals. Last month the committee threatened NCLAS with closure for housing primates in cages that are too small and for conducting experiments on captured wild monkeys instead of lab-bred animals (*Science*, 9 July, p. 180). Half of India's facilities could be shut down if held to the same standards, says microbiologist Nirmal Kumar Ganguly, director-general of the Indian Council of Medical Research.

News of the government-sanctioned action stirred up the annual meeting of the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) in New Delhi, which passed a resolution seeking to persuade Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee to intervene. Warns INSA president Goverdhan Mehta, "India's national interests are going to suffer very badly if all drug testing is halted like this."

—PALLAVA BAGLA