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Salt and hypertension

LEAD STORY 1320

Everybody wants a biosafety lab



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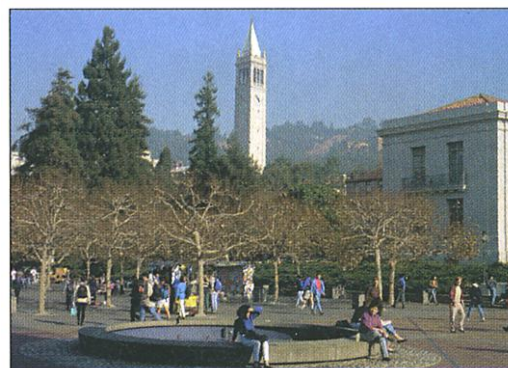
A \$1 million math challenge

on the panel's policy subcommittee. To emphasize this need, the panel included five moderate-sized space initiatives in its report. Whether they will all fit in NASA's limited budget is another matter: Although NGST and the Terrestrial Planet Finder are included in the agency's long-term budget as well as the strategic plan, several others are in the plan but not the budget.

Not everyone is happy with the NRC study. Jon Morse, an astronomer at the University of Colorado, Boulder, complains that the committee excluded the Space Ultraviolet Observatory because it favored a larger and more complex spacecraft, making it too ambitious for this decade. But Morse hasn't given up: This week he's meeting with NASA engineers and scientists to improve the observatory's chances of making the cut in the next decadal report.

—ANDREW LAWLER

battle has been whether teaching assistants are primarily students or employees. The university argued that they were not employees and could not form a union. But in



**Work in progress.** Union pact tackles conditions for grad students at Berkeley and other UC schools.

has been good; there wasn't much of anything that really needed to be fixed."

With UC grad students now in the UAW fold, Sweeney says, the number of unionized grad students in the country has doubled to about 20,000. Although the University of Wisconsin and several other public universities have had graduate student unions for some time, most administrations still oppose unionization. Illinois graduate students voted 3 years ago for a union that the university refuses to recognize, and the University of Washington has rebuffed student attempts to unionize on the grounds that state law does not allow it. "Our TAs are students first; they are only employed as a result of their continuation of successful educational pursuits," says Steven Olswang, vice

provost of the University of Washington. New York University is appealing an April ruling by a regional office of the National Labor Relations Board that graduate students can be regarded as employees.

Although Olswang argues that union membership undermines the collegial relationship and tips it toward the adversarial, UC has apparently decided to make the best of the situation. Says Westlye, "Now that we have unionization, we will proceed in as copacetic a fashion as we can."

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

## CALIFORNIA

### UC Teaching Assistants Win First Union Contract

The University of California (UC) system has agreed to a union contract covering some 8000 teaching assistants (TAs), capping a 16-year fight by graduate students for a labor agreement with their employer. The contract, between UC and the United Auto Workers (UAW), includes an immediate 1.5% pay raise and creates a mechanism for overtime pay as well as limits on the workweek. However, it exempts academic matters from the collective bargaining process, removing a major sticking point among faculty during the yearlong negotiations that ended last week. The pact must still be ratified by each of the system's eight general campuses.

"TAs are choosing unions," exults Christian Sweeney, a union spokesperson and a graduate student in history at UC Berkeley, about similar efforts by graduate students at the University of Washington and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, that so far have come up short. The UC agreement covers a small minority of UC's 39,000 graduate students and excludes some 8000 research assistants, most of whom are paid through research grants. University officials don't anticipate a major disruption of academic life. "It's unlikely to have a significant impact" on graduate education in science at UC Los Angeles, says psychiatrist Robin Fisher, associate dean of the graduate school.

The key issue in the lengthy California

December 1998, the state Public Employee Relations Board ordered the university to allow a vote on unionization among TAs as well as undergraduate tutors and readers. After a systemwide strike (*Science*, 11 December 1998, p. 1983), the students voted to join the UAW-affiliated Association of Graduate Student Employees.

The new contract gives the university "sole authority on all decisions involving academic matters" and exempts "workload" disputes from arbitration while limiting how often the usual workload of 20 hours per week can be exceeded. It also establishes arbitration for settling nonacademic complaints about health and safety, discrimination, and sexual harassment, and provides for the eventual full remission of tuition fees. Most TAs now earn about \$13,500 a year, and UC spokesperson Mark Westlye says he doesn't know where in the budget the extra money for the raises and tuition will come from.

Peter Miller, a union organizer at the University of Illinois, says the impetus for unionization has come from arts and humanities grad students, who get less money from research grants and spend more years teaching than do science majors. One UC scientist who requested anonymity calls the agreement "a reasonably good compromise," although he thinks everyone would be better off without it: "The TA-faculty relationship

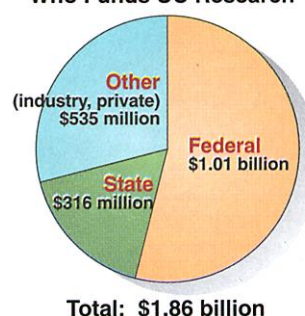
## CALIFORNIA

### State Ready to Create 3 Research Institutes

Lured by \$300 million in state money, California university officials are scrambling to compete for three planned interdisciplinary research institutes that would be set up under a bill speeding through the state legislature. The legislation—introduced this winter as a way to enhance the state's already strong science and technology base—has won bipartisan support and could be approved as early as next week.

Even before the bill is approved, researchers are putting

Who Funds UC Research\*



\* 1998-99 fiscal year