Scientists Win Big at MacArthur

A sizable number of scientists are among the 25 winners of this year's half-million-dollar MacArthur awards. Although often referred to as the "genius" awards, the 5-year, no-strings-attached MacArthur Fellowships are often bestowed on community activists as well as artists and scholars.

So far, just 13% of the 588 fellows named since 1981 are scientists. This year, it's 28%. They include Daniel Schrag, the 34-year-old Harvard geochemist who recently helped revive the controversial notion of "snowball Earth"—that a pole-to-pole freeze 600 million years ago jump-started evolution. The others are K. Christopher Beard, 38, a paleontologist at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh; Hideo Mabuchi, 28, a physicist at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech); Margaret Murnane, 41, a physicist at the University of Colorado, Boulder; Gina Turrigiano, 37, a biologist at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts; Erik Winfree, 30, a computer scientist at Caltech; and Horng-Tzer Yau, 40, a mathematician at New York University.

The abundance of scientists is balanced by the presence of McGill University classics professor Anne Carson, 49, who, as commentator in a quirky 1995 TV series called *The Nobel Legacy*, came out with such utterances as "[the] delusion that there are such things as facts ... underlies the whole progress of science ..."

COMPENSATION, AND COMPENSATING

Field	Pay hike*	Regrets†
Physics	17.5%	24.4%
Elec. engineering	15.8	9.8
Computer science	11.7	6.8
Economics	10.0	12.6
Mech. engineering	9.1	16.5
Biological science	6.6	18.2
Math sciences	5.3	22.4
Geoscience	2.5	20.3
Chemistry	2.0	23.9
Psychology	0.0	10.8
Agric. science	0.0	20.7
Socio./anthro.	–2.7	15.5
Civil engineering	–3.8	20.9

Note: Figures are for recent graduates (1 to 5 years post-Ph.D.).
*Change in median salary, 1995–97.
†Percent "not likely" to choose field second time.
Source: *Science and Engineering Indicators 2000*

Money Doesn't Buy Happiness, NSF Says

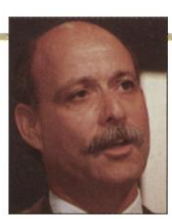
There seems to be little relationship between pay raises and job satisfaction among young scientists, according to the National Science Foundation (NSF)—especially if you're a physicist. The biennial *Science and Engineering Indicators 2000*, released this week, reports that physicists who earned their Ph.D.s within the past 5 years get larger raises than other scientists—reflecting a greater tendency to work in industry rather than academe—but are more likely to regret their career choice. Newly minted life scientists, on the other hand, get smaller raises—a measure of the high postdoc population—but have fewer regrets. The median salary for recent Ph.D. graduates was $41,000 in 1997, with a high of $72,000 for private-sector computer scientists and a low of $27,000 for biology postdocs. New physicists pulled down $43,000, compared with $32,000 for biologists.

The latest, two-volume version of *Indicators* now comes with a CD-ROM and is on the Web at www.nsf.gov/sbe/srs/stats.htm. It opens with a comparison of science and technology now and immediately after World War II, and closes with a look at the growing significance of information technologies.

Brobdingnagian Crystals

A geode—a rock cavity lined with crystals—is ordinarily something you can hold in your hand. But a Spanish geologist has found a whopper the size of a cave, in an abandoned silver mine on the northeast coast of Spain. Javier García-Guinea, a geologist at the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Madrid, made the extraordinary find last month, following up on rumors from rock collectors. The geode is 8 meters long and 1.7 meters high and is studded with half-meter-long crystals of gypsum. Scientists say the cave may have been formed about 6 million years ago when portions of the Mediterranean were evaporating, leaving behind large, crystal-forming mineral deposits. But sightseers will have to wait: The cave entrance has been blocked with rocks and guards while scientists examine the crystal palace.

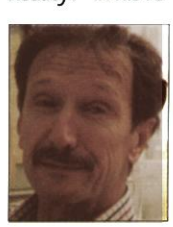
Rifkin Strikes Out With Swiss Scientists



Rifkin: Talking "garbage"?

Jeremy Rifkin, the tireless crusader against genetic engineering, sparred with hostile Swiss scientists at a public forum in Bern last week, where he was heckled by a Nobelist.

Rifkin, who heads the Foundation on Economic Trends in Washington, D.C., was the featured speaker at a government-sponsored forum titled "The Risks of Gene Technology: Phantom or Reality?" In his remarks, Rifkin described the potential dangers of gene splicing and cloning experiments and accused many researchers of losing their objectivity on the subject because of their ties to biotech companies. He also urged scientists to use information from genomics to "create a sophisticated wellness approach" by, for instance, tailoring diets and drugs to "genetic predisposition."



Zinkernagel: Irate Nobelist.

The comments drew darts from numerous scientists in the audience. "This is garbage!" shouted University of Zurich immunologist and Nobel laureate Rolf Zinkernagel during the talk. He and other prominent Swiss scientists got in more swipes during the question period, complaining that Rifkin was "playing on public fears" and could offer no hard evidence that gene splicing had caused harm. They also blasted the Swiss environment agency, BUWAL, for paying Rifkin to participate. Concluded Bern University biologist Beda Stadler: "This is theater, not science."

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