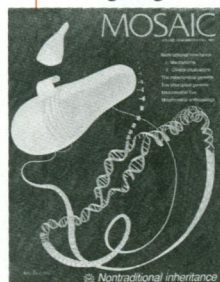


Targeting *Mosaic*

■ If National Science Foundation (NSF) director Walter Massey approves a plan now sitting on his desk, the days of *Mosaic*—NSF's slick quarterly of cutting-edge science—are numbered. On 24 January, Massey received a proposal to kill *Mosaic* after two more issues and replace it with a more popular journal, according to minutes of an NSF executive staff meeting.

This action marks the fourth attempt to kill the quarterly, according to its fans within NSF. Former director Erich Bloch, for instance, says he once considered a staff recommendation similar to the one before Massey. The journal continues to draw institutional flak because it costs a lot to publish (\$400,000 a year) and reaches a very small paid circulation (around 2000), although NSF also prints roughly 40,000 copies for distribution to grantees and other agency followers.

NSF press officer Michael Fluharty says the agency recognizes that "*Mosaic* does what it does very well...but we want to reach a broader audience." Who in particular does NSF want to reach? "Opinion leaders," says Fluharty.



Science Committee Makes Most of Far East Trip

■ Legislators frequently appear to enjoy the perks of office, and members of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee are no exception. On 19 January, four committee members, their wives, and ten staffers returned from a 9-day trip to Hong Kong and Tokyo taken to learn how American business is doing in Hong Kong and to evaluate Japan's interest in big international research projects. And if the trip itself wasn't enough of a perk, the delegation also traveled in comfort on an Air Force C-137—by a Department of Defense (DOD) calculation, a flight nearly eight times as expensive as the cheapest commercial alternative, a figure the committee disputes.

According to a spokesman, DOD calculated the total cost of flying the C-137 for the trip at \$287,000. Had all 14 official members of the delegation flown commercial first class, their tickets would have cost

about one-fourth of the DOD price—\$77,532. Business class travel would have cut that figure by 85%, to \$42,588, and coach class by 87%, to \$37,114. Furthermore, as David Eckler, an analyst for Congress Watch, points out, legislators would have to pay their spouses' fares on a commercial flight. On a military flight, spouses effectively fly free if space is available.

In an interview with *Science*, committee chairman George Brown (D-CA) said that military flights are always used for such trips. His staffers also argue that the DOD figure includes costs such as crew salaries and maintenance that would have been incurred whether the delegation had taken the C-137 or not. The only costs that should be counted, they say, are fuel and a per diem allowance for the crew—costs they estimate at about 20% of the DOD rate. Even by this figure, however—

\$57,400—the trip cost \$15,000 more than business class flight. And the legislators' spouses still traveled free.

Traveling with Brown were ranking Republican Robert Walker (R-PA), Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), and Joe Barton (R-TX).

Plagiarism Trial Delay

■ The first court test of the "plagiarism machine," the computerized brainchild of unofficial NIH fraud investigators Ned Feder and Walter Stewart, has been put off until at least May, and probably much longer.

Last year, the estate of John Marquis Converse—the author of the seven-volume textbook *Reconstructive Plastic Surgery*—filed suit against publisher W.B. Saunders Co. and Converse's former assistant editor, Joseph McCarthy, claiming that McCarthy and the company had copied chunks of the Converse textbook "almost verbatim" in a later edition of the book published in McCarthy's name. Stewart and Feder have been involved in the case since August, when an attorney for the Converse estate asked them to compare the wording of the Converse and McCarthy texts with a plagiarism detection program Stewart had written. Stewart says his analysis turned up a 57% overlap between the two texts.

But the trial, originally scheduled to begin 10 December 1991, was indefinitely delayed when its first judge withdrew because of medical problems. Now attorneys for both sides are scheduled to meet with the new judge on 1 May, with a trial date likely to be set sometime thereafter. In the meantime, both sides are busy filing pretrial motions. Attorneys for the publisher, for instance, are asking the judge not to allow Stewart and Feder to testify as expert witnesses and to bar use of "value-laden" terms such as the word "plagiarism" from the trial.



Science legislators flew an Air Force One lookalike to the Far East.

Computer Conferences to Come Together

■ Computer scientists who spend non-trivial amounts of time attending two or more of six major conferences in their field will have reason to cheer next year when all six are combined into a single megaconference—the 1993 Federated Computing Research Conference (FCRC).

There hasn't been a single, all-inclusive meeting in computer science since the mid-1980s, when an explosion of industrial trade exhibits began to drown out scientific discussion at the then annual conferences. Since then, researchers have met in smaller gatherings more narrowly focused on topics like parallel computing and computer architecture.

Recently, however, the National Science Founda-

tion decided that reuniting the fragmented field could not only save researchers time and money, but also enhance the reputation of computer science as a true scientific discipline. So it commissioned a study that recommended combining six of the specialized conferences, despite the earlier resistance of organizers who feared their meetings could lose their identity in the FCRC. "[The individual meetings] are scared to death of a big conference, but we needed to do something like this for the field," says Michael Garey of Bell Laboratories.

To avoid some of the earlier problems, FCRC organizers will exclude trade exhibits from the meeting, which is to be held in May 1993. If the collaboration works out well, the superconference could become a biannual affair.