

# At Your Service

Last year, you told us what worked and what didn't.  
Here's what we did about it

One of the beauties of our annual "Careers in Science" special report—from the editors' point of view—is that we get a chance to enter into a dialogue with our readers about how to serve them better. This year's sequel on careers in science, as you will see, has been dramatically affected by what readers said last year—both the positive comments and, especially, the recommendations for improvement.

Last year's dialogue consisted of more than 150 responses, either in the form of filled out questionnaires or in letters about the special section. Close to half of the respondents were biologists; half were university-based scientists; 44% were under 40; 38% made less than \$40,000; and more than 70% had doctoral degrees. About one-third of those who responded were women.

Most of the feedback was positive. "I loved this and read it from cover to cover" was one response we liked. Another reader felt we had tapped into the "reality of 1991—how do we do it all and stay sane, not cheat, but do imaginative research."

Most popular among the individual articles were our overview of the major societal trends affecting academic science in 1991 and our description of "Real Life" for young biologists in university settings.

This isn't to say that we received no complaints. The most frequent of these concerned the minuscule typeface chosen by a flashy young designer. This year we've employed our normal typeface in a special layout, hoping to achieve eyesight-saving elegance instead of flash.

More substantively, a number of readers felt we came across as Pollyanna-ish in our characterization of life in science. Enough on the stars, said several—we want to hear about the life of the silent majority, and about those overcoming problems. Stories that "stress rosy success and omit most of the downside over-stimulate career plans and expectations and keep unstable cycles going," wrote one reader. "I am depressed, not motivated, by all the 'wonderful people' stories. Get real..." said another.

Readers also wanted to hear about researchers who don't hold Ph.D.s; or about those who don't follow the usual prescribed route up the career ladder. As one wrote: "Not all models of success point to tenured full professor." A fair number felt that industry science had gotten short shrift. And a handful of readers shunned the effort altogether: One called it a foray "into the shallow hype of pop culture."

The editors' verdict on our readers' critiques: right on (almost) every count! Which is why we have sought to present a broader spectrum of researchers in terms of classical notions of career success (see especially our article on alternate lifestyles in science). We also have a discussion of non-Ph.D. researchers, and both this year's overview piece and one of our "Real Life" sequels are all about scientists in industry. And that's not all: We've tried to combat Pollyanna-ism both in individual pieces and with a look at the feelings of some unhappy postdocs.

Altogether new this year are a report on the results of an opinion poll conducted by AAAS about career satisfaction and a fresh look at funding sources.

One suggestion we did *not* address in this issue was the desire of some readers to see more about women and minorities. These issues are being covered separately in annual reports (one on women appeared in the 13 March issue; a special section on minorities is scheduled for November.)

Finally, some readers suggested that we broaden the number of fields we cover: among those cited, environmental sciences (see story on p. 1730) and social and behavioral sciences. On this last (our apologies) we'll try to cover that next year along with other new areas that we hope will be opened up by your responses to this year's edition. Don't miss your chance on p. 1769 to give *Science's* news editors extra work!

—Constance Holden

