outcome can actually be achieved. Certainly, this result is hardly counterintuitive. Is it a stunt? We didn't think so, and our peer reviewers didn't think so either.

Sticking one's head in the sand and hoping that unpleasant realities will go away has never been a fruitful approach to science or to public policy. Nevertheless, it is surely true that there should continue to be serious conversations about the relationship between scientific research, publication, and security—in which we plan to participate in a responsible manner.

DONALD KENNEDY

Unfair Characterization of Industry Response

JOCELYN KAISER'S ARTICLE "SOFTWARE glitch threw off mortality estimates" (News of the Week, 14 June, p. 1945) unfairly characterizes industry groups' response to the recent discovery that a software issue had led researchers to overestimate the risks of fine particles—at least that of this industry representative. To portray industry as "crowing" or having "complaints" about this research is unfair.

Manufacturers of motor vehicles, diesel engines, and fuels are partners with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and equal funders and supporters of Health Effects Institute research, including the research in question. In addition, these manufacturers spend billions of research dollars on reducing emissions and improving product efficiency—the results of which have been substantial. According to the EPA, particles from diesel engines make up only 5.56% of all fine particles in the air, and from 1990 to 1998, those levels dropped by 37%. Further improvements will come from the introduction of cleaner diesel engines later this year and in 2007.

Complex computer models and statistics are not widely understood or publicized, but they are the very foundation of virtually every important scientific and public policy decision. Thanks to the curiosity of researchers at Johns Hopkins University, the nuances and limitations of a popular statistical package were uncovered. The impacts of these findings and any restatement relative to particulate studies will ultimately strengthen scientific research.

ALLEN SCHAEFFER
Executive Director, Diesel Technology Forum, 5210 Chairman's Court, Suite 2-B, Frederick, MD 21703, USA. E-mail: aschaeffer@dieselforum.org

Academic Recruitment in Spain and Italy

ACCORDING TO XAVIER BOSCH'S ARTICLE "Reforms spark more jobs—and protests" (News of the Week, 1 Feb., p. 781), the Spanish government's reform of university hiring practices is an effort to circumvent cronyism by abolishing the system of five-member boards (two from the university that has advertised the new position) that select candidates for academic posts. Spanish universities had been criticized for hiring internal or local candidates over 90% of the time. The Italian system of university appointments (concorsi) is similar to the old Spanish one, and the results seem similar too. In fact, nearly 100% of concorsi select internal or local candidates.

Do Italian concorsi select the best applicants on the basis of the quality of their research? According to Italian law, each candidate is required to undergo a formal public examination in which a committee of five university professors, with one from the university advertising the position, choose the two best candidates (three candidates until the year 2000). We recently revisited 13 out of 14 concorsi from 2000 for the selection of full professors in the field of general surgery.

We retrieved the scientific publications of all 93 candidates from MEDLINE. The total number of publications, the number of publications cited in the Journal Citation Report (JCR) 2000, the number of publications in journals not included in the JCR list, and the total impact factor (IF) were computed. None of these indicators were significantly different between the selected candidates (idonei) and those not selected. Two of the four candidates with an IF greater than 100 (106 was the maximum in our sample) were accepted on their first attempt; the other two were not accepted at all, even after three and four attempts, respectively. Of the 31 candidates accepted on their first attempt (out of the total 39 idonei), 10 passed even with a total IF less than 5 (three had an IF of zero). Successful candidates who had coauthored publications with members of the selection committees were also largely represented.

In Italy (as perhaps is the case in Spain), concorsi apparently fail to select candidates according to their scientific impact. The Spanish government reform, aiming at "a more open, competitive and transparent recruitment" of university professors, is based on a preliminary review of the qualification of aspiring applicants. Universities may then choose candidates. If the verification is based on objective indicators, the new Spanish system might work. Many academic researchers in Italy have grounds to feel that their present system is badly in need of reform.

D. GUI,[1] M. RUNFOLA,[1] S. ROSSI,[1] S. PANUNZI,[2] A. DE GAETANO[2]

[1]Department of Surgery, Catholic University, Policlinico Gemelli, L.go A. Gemelli 8, 00168, Rome, Italy. [2]Laboratorio di Biomatematica, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerce IASI, V.le Manzoni 10, Rome, Italy.

Screening Foreign Scholars

WHILE READING JEFF MERVIS'S ARTICLE "Panel would screen foreign scholars" (News of the Week, 17 May, p. 1213), I was reminded of the U.S. government's Committee on Exchanges (COMEX). Born during the Cold War, COMEX was an interagency group of representatives from the State Department, the Department of Defense, and the intelligence community that screened Soviet and Eastern Bloc scientists wanting to visit American institutions. (I attended COMEX meetings while working on international science and technology exchanges for the State Department in the mid-1980s.)

COMEX was concerned with preventing the transfer of sophisticated technologies to communist countries. Now the newly formed Interagency Panel on Advanced Science Security (IPASS) appears to have a broader mandate: to look at all foreign students and scientists—regardless of geographic or political origin—who might be interested in "sensitive topics." That is a large task.

Fortunately, IPASS will have the input of the federal science agencies (the National Science Foundation, NASA, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and so forth), something that COMEX lacked, perhaps to its detriment. A 1982 National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study on scientific communication and national securi-

Letters to the Editor

Letters (~300 words) discuss material published in *Science* in the previous 6 months or issues of general interest. They can be submitted by e-mail (science_letters@aaas.org), the Web (www.letter2science.org), or regular mail (1200 New York Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA). Letters are not acknowledged upon receipt, nor are authors generally consulted before publication. Whether published in full or in part, letters are subject to editing for clarity and space.