

## GRADUATE JOURNAL

## Choosing a boss

Professor X is never in the office, doesn't respond to e-mails, meets you once every six months and is guaranteed not to hassle. Dr Y, meanwhile, requires daily updates and detailed progress reports, is always close at hand and knows your thesis research better than you do.

Choosing the right supervisor is crucial, yet many students underestimate the importance of their decision. Finding the right person can make or break a PhD.

The right kind of boss is someone whose style matches the way you like to be managed. You may prefer to be left alone to do your own thing, whereas your boss wants to guide you every step of the way. That doesn't make them bad, just the wrong style for you.

Research is rarely done in a vacuum, and students usually interact with a wide spectrum of people. My PhD has taught me as much about myself and other people as it has about physics. If you have the right people to work with, half the battle is won.

When your relationship with your boss is flexible enough to suit both of you, you can get the most out of your research. A good supervisor is like a best friend who helps you to ride the PhD roller-coaster safely. So take time to find the right combination for you; it'll be worth it in the end. ■

**Amber Jenkins is a graduate student in particle physics at Imperial College, London, doing thesis research at Fermilab in Batavia, Illinois.**

## An introduction to biotechnology

Being a graduate student or postdoctoral fellow — even if you're fortunate enough to work in a good lab and on a fun project — can be an isolating experience. You live and breathe academic science, and as a result you can develop a limited perspective on the world and on your career.

To broaden my horizons, I joined Yale's Biotechnology Student Interest Group, which aims to provide a big picture of the biotech industry, beyond just the science. The group's mission is to bring together graduate students and postdocs in the biomedical sciences, business, medicine, public health and law, for educational and career-related opportunities relating to the biotech and drug industries. This somewhat dry-sounding

vision doesn't quite capture the exciting and dynamic character of the organization. It has about 750 members, including postdocs, graduate students, professional students in law and business as well as many members of the small but dynamic biotechnology community centred around New Haven, Connecticut.

Its speaker series helps to broaden members' perspective of the life-sciences industry by including academics engaged in biotech, patent attorneys, industry chief executives, venture capitalists and investment bankers. For example, at the annual 'biotechnology reception' last October, Steven Holtzman, chief executive of drug-discovery firm Infinity Pharmaceuticals, dropped his self-described "standard PowerPoint presentation". Instead, he drew on his Rhodes scholar training in philosophy, and his

experience as a former member of the National Bioethics Advisory Commission, to present an analysis of the ethical and philosophical implications of stem-cell and cloning technologies.

But the organization does more than listen to speakers. It also provides free consulting services to local biotech companies. And it has an equity-analysis group that evaluates firms for investment from financial, legal and scientific perspectives.

Being involved with the organization has not only widened my scientific perspective — it has helped me to make a career change. Once I have finished my postdoc this summer, I plan to enrol as an MBA student at Yale, and train to manage a biotech company. ■

**Eric Anderson is a postdoc at Yale University and a co-president of the university's Biotechnology Student Interest Group.**

♦ [www.yale.edu/biotech](http://www.yale.edu/biotech)

## MOVERS

Kim Nasmyth, Whitley chair of biochemistry, University of Oxford, UK



In 1988, Kim Nasmyth moved from Cambridge, UK, to the recently established Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP) in Vienna, Austria. He knew almost no German, and had few connections in the close-knit Austrian research network. But his enthusiasm for mountaineering and skiing — and the fortuitous proximity of an old climbing partner — helped him to adapt.

During the 1990s, Vienna moved from the scientific periphery to the heart of a flourishing central European life-sciences community. And Nasmyth quickly rose through the ranks to be one of its leaders, becoming director of the IMP in 1997.

Climbing and skiing in the Austrian Alps has been a satisfying counterweight to Nasmyth's triple role as scientist, institute director and research manager. But Nasmyth now feels ready for a change. In early 2006, he will take over the Whitley chair of biochemistry at the University of Oxford, UK.

The move will mark a return to a completely academic environment for Nasmyth. Although the IMP is a basic-research institution, it is funded by German drug firm Boehringer Ingelheim. Nasmyth hasn't regretted his marriage to an industrial partner. The dowry was generous — professionalism, clearly defined hierarchies and minimal bureaucracy for raising cash. "There have been many advantages," says Nasmyth. "But research outside universities tends to be extremely focused, which is not always the best thing."

Nasmyth will take over the Whitley chair from Edwin Southern. He knows he

has big boots to fill — but he feels well prepared. The IMP served as a springboard for a number of successful scientific careers, and he hopes to repeat this success in Oxford.

At the IMP, Nasmyth helped to nurture scientific talent. "The trick is to hire them in a steady trickle, and not too many people too quickly," he says. At Oxford, he will take the same approach, and will generate an environment where peer pressure, not funding pressure, is the driving force towards excellence. "Expectations must always be high," he says. "But I'm keen that young researchers are still capable of taking pleasure in other people's success."

Neither the IMP nor Austria will be easy to leave, says Nasmyth. "I'll definitely miss the mountains," he says. But he has already prepared for his absence — he has bought a farmhouse in southern Austria as a holiday base for future climbs. ■

**CV** **1997–:** Director, Research Institute of Molecular Pathology, Vienna, Austria  
**1988–97:** Senior scientist, Research Institute of Molecular Pathology, Vienna, Austria  
**1982–87:** Staff member, Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge, UK