



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...
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at Ohio State University in Columbus. "It has the potential to fundamentally change and improve the way that basic systematic research is conducted."

A major limiting factor is the availability of data in formats that computers can manipulate. To develop AntWeb further, Agosti aims to convert 4,000 papers into machine-readable online descriptions. Another problem is the reluctance of many labs and agencies to share data.

But this is changing. A spokesman for the Global Health Atlas from the World Health Organization (WHO), for example, a huge infectious-disease database, says there are plans

to make access easier. The Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) has linked up more than 80 million records in nearly 600 databases in 31 countries. And last month saw the launch of the International Neuroinformatics Coordinating Facility.

But such initiatives are hampered by restrictive data-access agreements. The museums and labs that provide the GBIF with data, for example, often require outside researchers to sign online agreements to download individual data sets, making real-time computing of data from multiple sources almost impossible.

Nature has created its own mashup, which integrates data on avian-flu outbreaks from the WHO and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization into Google Earth (www.nature.com/nature/googleearth/avianflu1.kml). The result is a useful snapshot, but illustrates the problem. As the data are not in public databases that can be directly accessed by software, we had to request them from the relevant agencies, construct a database and compute them into Google Earth. If the data were available in a machine-readable format, the mashup could search the databases automatically and update the maps as outbreaks occur. Other researchers could also mix the data with their own data sets.

Page and Agosti hope that researchers will soon become more enthusiastic about sharing. "Once scientists see the value of freeing-up data, mashups will explode," says Page. ■

Declan Butler

Croatian scientists call for openness over funding

More than 250 scientists inside and outside Croatia have signed a petition calling for more transparency in the country's funding of science and technology.

In particular, the petition calls for an investigation into a technology-development grant issued two years ago to Dragan Primorac, now the country's science minister.

The scientists allege "irregularities" and possible conflicts of interest in the operation and funding of the €1-million (US\$1.2-million) project to establish a forensic and molecular-genetics laboratory — accusations Primorac denies. Primorac won the grant in December 2003, when he was director of a clinic at the Holy Spirit Hospital in Zagreb. He was appointed minister four days later.

The petition was prompted by some scientists' unhappiness that, over a few months, the lab's grant money was transferred between several different institutes in Zagreb. They also want to know how Primorac resolved potential conflicts of interest relating to the grant — for example, he was a member of the technology council that evaluated and approved his own grant.

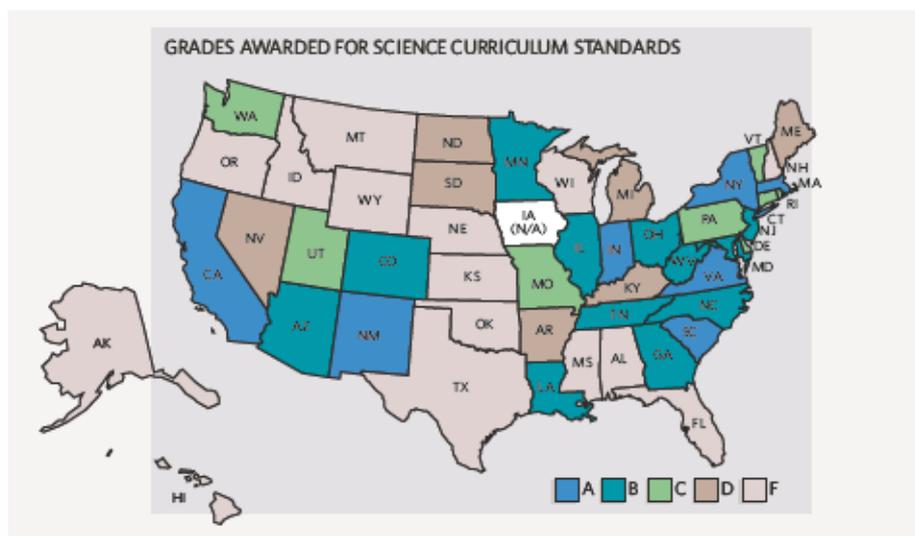
Vlatko Silobrcic, former director of the Institute of Immunology in Zagreb and a member of the Croatian Academy of Sciences, was one of the petition's 15 original signatories. He says that the episode is symptomatic of a general lack of openness in the way science money is allocated in the country. "The action was started to get answers to issues that we think are important for the science system in Croatia," he says. "It is legitimate to ask questions about possible conflicts of interest."

Krešimir Pavelić, director of molecular medicine at the Rudjer Bošković Institute, Croatia's largest research institute, is currently in sole charge of the project. An institute spokesman says that the moves were largely an attempt to find enough lab space.

Meanwhile, Primorac told *Nature* that he has always been open about the moves, and that concerns about conflicts of interest are unfounded. "I have nothing to hide," he says, adding that the criticisms are part of a "relentless campaign" against him. ■

Alison Abbott

THOMAS B. FORD/HAMINST.



never resolve social issues, and it won't here," says Matzke. "But it will give us a little breathing space. Intelligent design as a strategy is probably toast."

Naturally, proponents of the theory disagree. Casey Luskin, a lawyer at the

Discovery Institute, an intelligent-design think-tank in Seattle, Washington, says the Dover decision will have a "negligible effect". "You cannot change the facts of biology through a judicial ruling," he argues. ■

Emma Marris