

## Coffee fortune bails out private university

The most generous private donation ever made to a German university will secure the future of the International University Bremen (IUB). The Swiss-based Jacobs Foundation last week promised to donate €200 million (US\$25 million) to the university, which has faced financial difficulties since it opened in 2001.

Unusually for Germany, the IUB, which offers English-language courses in the sciences and humanities, is privately funded, mostly by private endowments and tuition fees. The windfall from the Jacobs Foundation, a charitable trust founded by the coffee-roaster dynasty Jacobs, will expand the university's research and increase the number of postgraduate researchers and staff from 350 to 600.

But the decision to rename the university 'Jacobs University' has provoked mixed reactions. Some are concerned about scientific independence, but enthusiasts hail the move as the beginning of a more widespread corporate citizenship in Germany's science culture.

## Geneticists delete names on the lunatic fringe

Genes with whimsical names that might cause offence to people carrying mutations in them will be rebranded, the committee that adjudicates on such matters has decided. Names such as *lunatic fringe*, *radical fringe*, *Sonic hedgehog* and *Indian hedgehog* will no longer be used to refer to human genes.

A survey by the Gene Nomenclature Committee of the Human Genome Organisation, based at University College London, came up with ten genes that have

"inappropriate, demeaning and pejorative" names, many of which are linked to eponymous developmental defects. Most genes on the list were initially discovered in fruitflies, for which geneticists have a tradition of coming up with jokey names. The human versions will now be known simply by their abbreviations.

## Multimillion-dollar endowment for cosmology

Big philanthropic donations to science are becoming more common, but Norwegian-born billionaire Fred Kavli is unusual in funding blue-skies research — in neuroscience, nanotechnology and cosmology.

On 1 November, his foundation announced the last of four new Kavli institutes to be established this year. The Kavli Institute for Cosmology at the University of Cambridge, UK, will get an endowment of US\$7.5 million. This will pay for a new building to bring together researchers from different departments and will support four fellows — but what work they do is up to them.

Other Kavli institutes confirmed in 2006 are at Peking University, the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Harvard University. There is now likely to be a lull as the foundation focuses on the \$1-million dollar prizes it will award for the first time in 2008.

## No reward in Japan for alleged bio-spy

Researcher Takashi Okamoto, charged with economic espionage in the United States, was back in court in Japan last week, this time suing the Japanese government for ¥42.9 million (US\$360,000). He lost, but few



Takashi Okamoto leaving detention in 2004.

are likely to feel much sympathy for him.

Okamoto was suing for his 57-day detention during his extradition trial in 2004. He was originally charged with economic espionage in the United States in 2001 for removing reagents from the Cleveland Clinic where he worked before moving back to Japan. He beat an extradition charge in a Japanese court by claiming that extradition cannot be granted when the law broken does not exist in Japan.

At the time, many in Japan felt that Okamoto was in the wrong although the US use of the espionage law was harsh. Okamoto was criticized, however, for not testifying to help his former friend, Hiroaki Serizawa, whose academic research career was destroyed by the episode (see *Nature* 430, 960–961; 2004).

## MIT report chastises warring neuroscience units

A report on collaboration within the neuroscience community at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge seems to be fuelling discord rather than mending it.

The report was commissioned in July to investigate allegations that Nobel prizewinner Susumu Tonegawa, who heads the Picower Institute for Learning and Memory, inappropriately interfered with the hiring of female scientist Alla Karpova (see *Nature* 442, 341; 2006). In the report, an investigating committee concludes that he did — but says that others involved in the recruitment process did not follow correct procedures and that there is competition and lack of communication between MIT's neuroscience units, particularly the Picower and the McGovern Institute for Brain Research, where Karpova would have been working.

Some MIT neuroscientists are pleased with the report, but others say that it contains major inaccuracies and does not sufficiently reprimand Tonegawa. The MIT administration will establish an advisory council on neuroscience to oversee the warring units.

## Acoraceae to Zosteraceae online

A definitive electronic checklist of a large group of flowering plants — the monocotyledons — will be welcome news to green-fingered researchers.

A team from the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, UK, publishes the *World Checklist of Monocotyledons* online this week, with a separate downloadable database for the grasses; the two will be integrated by the end of 2007. Its creators hope it will become the first port of call for plant scientists, who until now have had to search for the accepted names and synonyms of their specimens in obscure literature held by specialist libraries. Users can also build customized lists of species by region or country.

Monocots include staple food crops, such as wheat, rice and maize, and many valuable horticultural plants such as lilies, orchids and daffodils. The database holds 75,000 species, representing a quarter of all flowering plants.

www.rbkew.org.uk/wcsp/monocots; www.kew.org/data/grasses-syn.html

