

Contacts

Publisher: Ben Crowe
Editor: Paul Smaglik
Marketing Manager: David Bowen

European Head Office, London

The Macmillan Building
4 Crinan Street
London N1 9XW, UK
Tel +44 (0) 20 7843 4961
Fax +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

Senior European Sales Manager:
Nevin Bayoumi (4978)

UK/ RoW/ Ireland:

Matt Powell (4953)
Andy Douglas (4975)
Frank Phelan (4944)

Netherlands/ Italy/ Iberia/ Belgium:

Evelina Rubio Hakansson (4973)
Scandinavia: Sille Opstrup (4994)

France/ Switzerland:
Amelie Pequignot (4974)

Production Manager:

Billie Franklin
To send materials use London
address above.
Tel +44 (0) 20 7843 4814
Fax +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

International

Advertising Coordinator:
Hind Berrada (4935)

Naturejobs web development:
Tom Hancock

Naturejobs online production:
Ben Lund

European Satellite Office

Germany/ Austria:

Patrick Phelan, Odo Wulffen
Tel + 49 89 54 90 57 11/-2
Fax + 49 89 54 90 57 20
e-mail: p.phelan@nature.com
o.wulffen@nature.com

US Head Office, New York

345 Park Avenue South,
10th Floor, New York, NY 10010-1707
Tel +1 800 989 7718
Fax +1 800 989 7103
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

US Sales Manager: Peter Bless

US Advertising Coordinator:

Linda Adam

Japan Head Office, Tokyo

MG Ichigaya Building (5F),
19-1 Harakatomachi,
Shinjuku-ku,
Tokyo 162-0841
Tel +81 3 3267 8751
Fax +81 3 3267 8746

Asia-Pacific Sales Director:

Hideki Watanabe
e-mail: h.watanabe@naturejpn.com

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Seeking out the elite

Scientists seeking a job at an institution that boasts a strong impact factor could research their prospects by following citation trails back to their source. Perhaps not surprisingly, such trails lead to prominent institutions in well-established scientific regions, according to the company ISI in Philadelphia, which tracks citations.

Earlier this year, ISI's publication *Science Watch* performed an evaluation to see which institutions dominated citation statistics in molecular biology and genetics for the period 1992-2002. The analysis generated two lists: efficiency and power. The former was based on the percentage of all papers published that received a high number of citations; the power list looked at the raw number of cited papers per institution. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York won the efficiency contest, whereas Harvard University powered through to head the second category.

ISI's efficiency rankings show where the hot molecular-biology regions are in the world. Twelve of the top 15 are clustered on the east or west coast of the United States. Only two non-US institutes made the top 15 — the European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Heidelberg, Germany, and the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (now called Cancer Research UK) in London. The 'power' list fills in the gaps, with a few more institutions that are located near those with the high efficiency ratings. It also adds other institutions to the mix, such as Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, the Pasteur Institute in Paris and Kyoto University in Japan, that have historically been strong in molecular biology but which aren't part of the major US coastal hubs.

Of course, individuals, not institutions, earn citations. Although places that have scored high on either list would be justifiably proud in trumpeting their rankings, young scientists would be wise to check their prospective mentors' citation records.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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