

US universities body backs tighter rules on conflict of interests

Washington The Association of American Universities is recommending a tightening of existing federal guidelines on conflicts of interest in research.

In a report released this week, the association says that individual researchers should disclose all relevant financial interests and sources of research funding. It adds that scientists who are engaged in research involving human subjects should avoid having any financial stake in their work.

The report also says that institutional policies need to be strengthened, and that universities and research centres should develop their own policies regarding disclosure of institutional financial interests, including equity holdings, royalty agreements and the financial holdings of senior university officers.

♦ www.aau.edu

No contest over new Max Planck Society head



Peter Gruss: backs stem-cell research.

Munich Developmental biologist Peter Gruss looks set to become the next president of Germany's Max Planck Society. A Max Planck committee will vote on the issue next month, but Gruss is the only candidate on the shortlist.

Gruss, currently a director at the Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry in Göttingen, is best

known for identifying the central role of the *Pax6* gene in the development of the eye and forebrain in mice. His group is now searching for other genes involved in development of the nervous system.

Gruss recently became involved in the highly contentious stem-cell debate when he backed importing human embryonic stem cells from other countries. Isolation of the cells from human embryos is currently forbidden in Germany.

US websites closed in anti-terrorist bid

San Francisco Researchers using certain US government websites and online databases are preparing for a spate of 'Page not found' messages.

Several agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and

the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), have shut down sites they say could contain information useful to terrorists.

The EPA's National Exposure Research Laboratory website, for example, is closed pending a review of its contents. The site, which is used by toxicologists, includes information on the risks posed to people and the environment by spills from chemical plants. Pages pulled from other sites include the National Imagery and Mapping Agency's water-pipeline maps and a CDC report on chemical terrorism.

Several Internet search engines store web pages, however, and much of the information is still available from these sites.

European satellites to spot gorillas in the mist

Paris Sites of key cultural and scientific value will be monitored from space under a new collaboration between the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the European Space Agency.

UNESCO's World Heritage Committee currently lists 690 such sites. One of these, the central and east African forests that are home to threatened gorilla populations, will be used in a pilot study to select the most appropriate monitoring technology. Earth-observation satellites are likely to play a key role. The collaboration was announced at a meeting of the International Astronautical Congress held in Toulouse, France, last week.

♦ www.unesco.org/whc

Volunteers flock to donate computer time

London Two research projects are celebrating milestones in the use of distributed computing, in which volunteers donate their computers' idle time to analyse scientific data.

A drug-screening project run by the University of Oxford and the National Foundation for Cancer Research, based in Bethesda, Maryland, has attracted one million participants since its launch this April. The scheme's screen-saver software has tested 3.5 billion different molecules to determine whether they attach to two proteins implicated in cancer development.

SETI@home, which examines radio-telescope data for signals from extra-terrestrial life, has so many participants that it cannot collect data fast enough. The researchers behind the scheme, at the University of California, Berkeley, are now planning to widen the area of the electromagnetic spectrum from which they gather signals in order to keep up with the demand from volunteers.

♦ members.ud.com/vypc/cancer

♦ setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu

Privacy plan could thwart animal-rights protesters

London Directors of companies who have faced violent protests from animal-rights activists may soon be able to keep their home addresses private, thanks to a proposed change in British law.

The draft regulations, published last week, were prompted by violence and intimidation directed against staff and directors of Huntingdon Life Sciences, a drug-testing firm based in Cambridgeshire. Huntingdon's managing director Brian Cass was attacked outside his home in February by three masked assailants wielding baseball bats.

British company directors are currently required to make their home addresses publicly available. The regulations will allow directors to transfer this information to a private register if they can prove that they, or someone who lives with them, are at risk from violence or intimidation.

Pandas endangered by high blood pressure

Tokyo Battling extinction can be stressful, and China's giant pandas appear to be showing the strain. Some are suffering from high blood pressure, say researchers.

Chen Yucun, director of the Fuzhou Giant Panda Research Centre in China's eastern Fujian province, says that high blood pressure could account for many of the ailments suffered by pandas, and that they should have regular checks.

The centre recently treated a 21-year-old panda with hypertension, and succeeded in bringing the animal's blood pressure down to normal levels by administering double doses of the drugs used to treat high blood pressure in humans.

The centre claims to have achieved several breakthroughs related to the breeding of giant pandas, including the cloning of panda embryos and the world record for the oldest panda to give birth.



Stressed out: raised blood pressure is a headache for China's pandas, say researchers.