

of US faculty; by 2009, they were close to half the total. So, over this period, full-time faculty growth was 39% and part-time was 237%. Such positions are typically filled by scholars who are poorly paid, have little say in departmental and university affairs, and no possibility of tenure. These itinerant faculty members, once found mainly in two-year community colleges, are now prevalent throughout the academy — public and private, undergraduate colleges and research universities. Whereas women made up 28% of full professors at US degree-granting institutions in 2009, they were a majority (52%) among non-tenure-track faculty.

Both authors address this growth in expendable faculty, but differ as to its cause. Schrecker sees the problem as part of a general attack on faculty prerogatives and academic freedom. Riley sees it as a logical move to

**“The growth in part-time faculty is bad for students.”**

bring universities much-needed flexibility. A unique point of agreement between them, with which I agree,

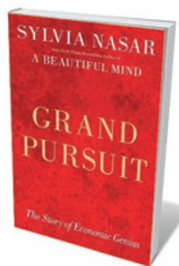
is that the growth in part-time faculty is bad for students. With limited office hours and termly contracts that exclude a role in curriculum development, part-timers are faculty in name only, without the time, resources, or support to truly educate their students.

Alternatives are possible. At Quest University Canada, a four-year-old independent institution in British Columbia that has 350 students and 25 faculty members (expected to double in five years), we have no faculty ranks, no tenure and no departments. The review and renewal of multi-year contracts for research and teaching staff are conducted by an elected committee of peers. Teaching is central to the institution's mission, and all staff share equally in this task. The mix of scholarship, curriculum development and other institutional service that, along with teaching performance, forms the basis for the review committee's judgement, is individually tailored and can vary over the course of one's career. This collegial approach fosters academic freedom, minimizes bureaucracy and places the university's focus on teaching and scholarship. Regrettably, it is unlikely to spread, owing in my view to the inherent conservatism of most academics and an unholy pact among the majority of students, faculty and administrators, all of whom benefit from the status quo.

Both books raise important questions while peddling their respective strong lines. Let's hope that the debate we sorely need in academia proceeds in a more nuanced way. ■

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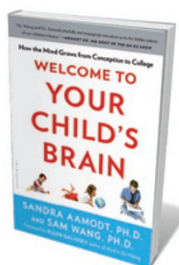
## Books in brief



### Grand Pursuit: The Story of Economic Genius

Sylvia Nasar SIMON & SCHUSTER 554 pp. \$35 (2011)

Sylvia Nasar, economist and author of *A Beautiful Mind* (1998), examines genius through the shaping of economics. Her tour of modern economic history takes us from Charles Dickens and journalist Henry Mayhew, who together woke the world to the scale of London poverty, through Karl Marx and the pioneering social reformers Beatrice and Sidney Webb, to great innovators such as John Maynard Keynes and Nobel prizewinner Amartya Sen. The field emerges as the 'apparatus of the mind' that Keynes saw was needed for understanding and optimizing the workings of society.



### Welcome to Your Child's Brain: How the Mind Grows from Conception to College

Sandra Aamodt and Sam Wang BLOOMSBURY 336 pp. \$26 (2011)

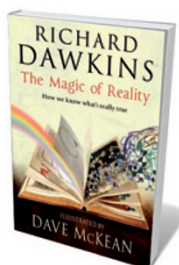
Neuroscientist Sam Wang and Sandra Aamodt, former editor-in-chief of *Nature Neuroscience*, pack into this compendium cutting-edge research on the growing brain, from birth to the age of 21. They lay out seven scientific principles behind neural development, including the interaction of genes and the environment; education; sensory experience and play; and issues such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and growing up in poverty. With its clear graphics, this is a useful companion guide for educators and families.



### American Anthrax: Fear, Crime, and the Investigation of the Nation's Deadliest Bioterror Attack

Jeanne Guillemin TIMES 336 pp. \$27 (2011)

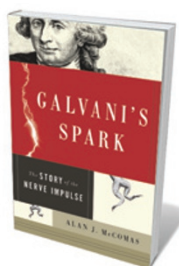
Bioterrorism is a threat that governments prepare for with huge variability. Medical anthropologist Jeanne Guillemin chronicles the deadliest such attack in the United States, when five letters carrying anthrax arrived at the Senate and at media organizations in 2001, killing five people and sparking a seven-year investigation. The event was used to justify the Iraq invasion and billions were spent on biomedical defences, yet Guillemin reminds us that the pathogen in the letters originated somewhere within the US military system.



### The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Really True

Richard Dawkins and Dave McKean BANTAM 272 pp. £20 (2011)

Faced with the strange, the sudden and the beautiful in nature, each generation of children asks the same big questions — from how the Universe began to what thunder is. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins takes on the answers, with acclaimed illustrator Dave McKean, in graphic-novel style. By detailing the hard science behind natural phenomena such as species diversity, and detaching accreted myths, Dawkins strives to reveal 'magic' as an aspect of the real. Although pitched at both children and adults, this is a heavy-handed treatment that fits into neither category.



### Galvani's Spark: The Story of the Nerve Impulse

Alan J. McComas OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 391 pp. £40 (2011)

Serendipity met science when eighteenth-century anatomist Luigi Galvani discovered the nerve impulse — the 'spark' that drives actions, thoughts and sensations — in the twitch of a frog's leg. Neurophysiologist Alan McComas traces the shaping of neuroscience from this point by greats such as Alessandro Volta and David Hubel. From Santiago Ramón y Cajal's meticulous renderings of neural cells to Alan Hodgkin and Andrew Huxley's work on the squid giant axon, McComas chronicles the triumphs and obstacles of the field.