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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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