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**THE CAREERS  
MAGAZINE FOR  
SCIENTISTS**

**A** recent story in satirical newspaper *The Onion* summed up the problems faced by women today. The piece, headlined "National Organization for Women Turns 39 Again", sought to tweak stereotypes about women. But in the end, it embraced them — and served to illustrate the prevalence of retrograde attitudes. The topic is as live in science as in any other sphere, following the departure in July of Larry Summers as president of Harvard University in the wake of comments he made about innate differences between men and women.

These comments were addressed head on in a recent Commentary by Ben Barres (*Nature* **442**, 133-136; 2006) — an article that generated a lot of comment, some of which underlined uncomfortable truths about the representation of women in science. One correspondent, for example, was prompted to review the awards given out by the UK Biochemical Society and discovered that only 3.2% of the society's prizes have been given to women (A. C. Dolphin *Nature* **442**, 868; 2006).

Elsewhere, a report by the InterAcademy Council revealed that women typically make up less than 5% of the membership of national science academies. And a close look at more than 4,000 life scientists over 30 years has shown that women secure patents at a much slower rate than their male colleagues (see page 973).

Despite such dismal statistics, there are signs that things are changing. One scheme at the US National Institutes of Health yielded no grants to women in its first year, but after a revamp it awarded 43% to women the following year (M. Carnes *Nature* **442**, 868; 2006). The list of scientific prizes aimed specifically at women is also growing, including one from L'Oréal and a new award for South African women. But schemes to give money to women should be eyed with caution: true progress can only be claimed when women are proportionately represented in terms of conventional grants and awards. Otherwise, the irony of a quote from the fictitious president of *The Onion's* women's group will continue to hit too close to home: "There's no reason why we can't continue to make amazing achievements in our 39th year and in all our other subsequent 39th years."

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