

MOVERS

Sam Aronson, director, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York



2006: Interim director, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York

2005-06: Associate laboratory director for high-energy and nuclear physics, Brookhaven National Laboratory

2001-05: Chair, physics department, Brookhaven National Laboratory

Sam Aronson attributes his success in administration, in part, to a piece of fatherly advice. Even though Aronson was interested in science and engineering, his father suggested that a liberal arts undergraduate education would serve him well later in life. He took that advice, and went to Columbia College in Chicago, gaining a wide perspective of science's role in society, as well as a major in physics.

He then pursued a PhD in particle physics at Princeton University, detailing the properties of elementary particles called kaons. As a postdoc at the University of Chicago's Enrico Fermi Institute, he continued his kaon work, related to the observed imbalance between matter and antimatter.

Next, he accepted an assistant professorship at the University of Wisconsin, but opportunities for tenure in the physics department were limited. Aronson turned down offers from other universities to go to Brookhaven National Laboratory — his most pivotal career move.

He was lured there in the late 1970s by the prospect of building ISABELLE, a proton collider. After several years, the project was cancelled in favour of the superconducting supercollider, but this was also ultimately cancelled. Meanwhile, Aronson was helping build new experiments to measure the elastic scattering of neutrinos at Brookhaven, while also assisting with the Tevatron accelerator at Fermilab, which discovered the 'top' quark.

While deputy chair of the physics department at Brookhaven, Aronson helped design the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider (RHIC), which uses heavy-ion collisions to study quarks and gluons at high temperatures. Aronson then moved to manage one of RHIC's detector construction projects, named PHENIX. "With RHIC, Brookhaven bounced back in a creative and spectacular way," he says.

After 30 years at Brookhaven, Aronson has taken the helm as director. "We were looking for the perfect combination of researcher and administrator," says Shirley Strum Kenny, Stony Brook University president and board chair of Brookhaven Science Associates, which operates the lab for the US Department of Energy.

Aronson will have to reposition Brookhaven's scientific agenda once RHIC faces competition from the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland. "We face financial, political and sociological challenges to realize our vision of conducting basic-energy and nuclear physics," he says. "What I do now is not about hard science, but about managing science in a cultural and societal context." ■
Virginia Gewin

SCIENTISTS & SOCIETIES

Stand up and be quoted

An unconventional guide launched this month aims to help young researchers get involved in media coverage of science.

The guide, *Standing up for Science*, has been produced by a group of UK graduates in the Voice of Young Science (VoYS) network. We asked our fellow researchers what they thought about talking to the media. The answers were disappointing: no time, no opportunity, not enough experience, said many. Although a few respondents were more positive, most were sceptical. The public isn't interested in science, they said, and journalists only want to misquote us.

But at earlier VoYS workshops, science journalists from *The Times*, *The Guardian*, BBC Radio 4, and others voiced rebuttals to this. Yes, journalists need to sell newspapers, so they have to make science stories exciting. But by and large they want to report accurately. Their task is complicated by deadline pressures, and little or no control over headlines.

Scientist-media interaction would benefit from enthusiastic early-career researchers eager to make science exciting and relevant to the public. Anna Fazackerley, who has written for *The Guardian* and the *Financial Times*, suggested that young people could bring a fresh perspective articulated

in informal, engaging language.

In *Standing up for Science*, we tried to help researchers understand the media's agenda and objectives, even if they feel they're not cut out to be communicators themselves. We conducted interviews with newspaper and radio journalists, press officers and scientists who had talked to the media. We put the most interesting conversations into an informal guide to address our peers' concerns.

Some worried that journalists would 'sex up' their stories. "I was horrified when they asked, 'Can we say you've discovered anti-gravity?'" said Emma King, a cosmologist at the University of Nottingham. Scientists must be prepared to deal with hype and take control in an interview, advised scientists and press officers.

On the other hand, countered Mark Henderson of *The Times*, "If we overplay something it is usually because somebody has overplayed it to us."

Scientists should become media-savvy, asking journalists about their deadline, their audience and the angle of the story. The more such scientists there are, the more accurate and interesting science coverage will be. ■

Richard Van Noorden is a member of the VoYS network and a former intern at Nature.

GRADUATE JOURNAL

D-day

After barricading myself in my office every day and night for the past couple of months, I've finally completed a first draft of my dissertation. A dissertation defence date has been set, and friends and family have made arrangements to travel to Hawaii to support me as I attempt to survive the final battle of my graduate career. The sun and surf of Hawaii are probably the real reasons many of them are visiting. I doubt if they want hear about the biogeochemical consequences of rising CO₂ and 'ocean acidification' in carbonate ecosystems. But my parents would have made it regardless — whether I lived on the North Pole or Hawaii, whether I was presenting the first evidence of life on Mars or just reading out loud from a phonebook.

As my defence day rapidly approaches, I still have one big problem: how do I fit five years of research into a 45-minute talk? What should I include and what should I exclude? My self-inflated science ego tells me to include as much as I possibly can. After all, I've devoted considerable effort to my dissertation and this is my chance to demonstrate what I've accomplished. Furthermore, it hurts tremendously every time I cut something out of my presentation. I'm hopeful that I'll overcome this problem and present a memorable story rather than an incoherent cluster of results. ■

Andreas Andersson is a final-year PhD student in oceanography at the University of Hawaii.