

Engaging the Public

Across society, as issues such as evolution, nanotechnology, climate change, and stem-cell research increasingly intersect with values, scientists will be challenged to engage the public and others in respectful, productive dialogue. In response, the AAAS Center for Public Engagement with Science and Technology has launched Association-wide efforts to boost public awareness on key issues, and to increase public input into policy agendas by providing opportunities for interaction among policy-makers, the general public, teachers, and the scientific community.

Abelson Seminar Series Debuts

As a natural followup to the cutting-edge scientific lectures that he helped to support, AAAS in 2005 launched the Philip Hauge Abelson Advancing Science Seminar series. Honoring long-time AAAS science adviser and *Science* editor Abelson, who died 1 August 2004 at the age of 91, the first-ever legacy seminar focused on the global rise of chronic disease, from heart disease and stroke, to cancer and diabetes. Speakers included Robert Beaglehole, the World Health Organization's director of Chronic Diseases and Health Promotion, who said the toll of premature death from chronic disease is increasing worldwide, principally because of unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, tobacco use, and population aging. But, he added: "A very dangerous misunderstanding is that chronic disease is the result of unhealthy lifestyles under the control of individuals. The reality is that poor people and children have very limited choices, and it is unfair to blame them for the environmental conditions in which they suffer." See www.aaas.org/programs/centers/pe/abelson/index.shtml.

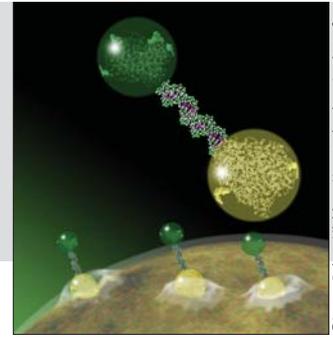
2005 AAAS Annual Meeting

Efforts to restore devastated marshlands in southern Iraq, reported in a *Science* paper and also at a related press briefing; the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's description of avian flu as a "very ominous" threat to human health; and robots capable of walking like humans but without using much energy all made headlines during the 2005 AAAS Annual Meeting. Shirley Ann Jackson, president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, also commanded attention during her AAAS Presidential Lecture, where she reported that American science and engineering have reached a critical juncture, confronted by a mistrustful public and diminishing policy support, despite the promise of life-enhancing discoveries. Among the nearly 9,500 attendees of the 2005 Meeting were a record number of 1,184 press registrants, as well as some 3,000 parents, teachers, and children who took part in free Family Science Days, where they made "fossils," met a dog trained in forensic research, and played Kinetic City, the popular AAAS online learning game. Go to www.aaasmeeting.org.





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Reporters and Editors Tell All

To effectively communicate science, public information officers must know the media outlets they approach, as well as reporters' individual preferences, a panel of top reporters told a packed ballroom at the National Press Club. The group was convened by EurekaAlert!, the science-news Web site launched by AAAS, and Spectrum Science Communications. Rick Weiss of *The Washington Post*, John Timpane of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Randy Schmid of the Associated Press, and others shared their pet peeves and favorite story topics. Op-ed Editor Timpane, for instance, identified three basic approaches to writing an op-ed thesis statement: (1) It is or is not good, true or worthy; (2) here's what happened and why; or (3) look what happened. In addition to avian flu, evolutionary biology and ethical issues related to nanotechnology are of interest to Timpane. For Weiss, news means "something has to happen — not just someone speaking," he noted. And, Jim Lebens of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's "Quirks & Quarks" show said he looks for scientists capable of telling a good story that can "charm, excite, and amuse" listeners. Log onto www.eurekaalert.org/seminar.

EurekaAlert! Online Events

Want to know more about the promise of manufactured molecules designed for specific medical uses, from cancer treatments to vision restoration? Or, perhaps you might want to ask questions of leading evolution experts? Log onto the next EurekaAlert! moderated online discussion to get fast answers to timely questions. Two online chats in 2005 tackled the nanotech revolution in medicine and strategies for responding to the "intelligent design" movement. Future chats may feature experts on climate change and other topics. See www.eurekaalert.org/expertchat. The talks have been sponsored by *The New York Times* Company Foundation.

"When the American Association for the Advancement of Science devoted a session to this idea of separation [of science and religion] at its annual meeting this year, scores of scientists crowded into a room to hear it."

—Cornelia Dean, *New York Times*,
23 August 2005

"They say never work with children or animals, but no one reminded the American Association for the Advancement of Science when it threw a family science day at its annual conference last year and invited three cloned mules ... The association's annual meeting is perhaps the only event in the world where you'll find cutting-edge science under the same roof as children making ice-cream from liquid nitrogen ... 'It's the Olympics of science conferences.'"

—Stephen Phillips, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 18 March 2005