BenchMarks 2007, October 19

The Rockefeller University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.rockefeller.edu/benchmarks_2007
Why visiting scholars?

One of the strategic aims identified in the plan for the university is to foster interactions among scientists at all levels. Over the past few years we have introduced a number of vehicles to encourage greater intellectual exchange. These include the Monday Lecture Series, now entering its third year, the Insight Lecture Series and new investments in our core resource centers.

Another initiative will be launched this month with the arrival of two visiting scholars who will spend several weeks on campus meeting with faculty, giving talks and engaging with students and postdocs. The idea here is to attract interesting visitors who work in a range of areas including those that may not be directly related to Rockefeller’s mission but are nonetheless stimulating. This could include people working in the history and philosophy of science or medicine, or in art or literature related to science. We could invite a science writer or even an artist or poet to visit. Whatever their specialty, these individuals will be chosen because they have distinguished themselves in their careers and are prepared to take on a university-wide role, meeting with scientists from different specialities to discuss research and common interests.

The two individuals we have chosen to launch the program are Philip Campbell and Peter Goodfellow. They are very creative people who are leaders in their fields, and they are both enthusiastic about the opportunity to interact with the Rockefeller community.

We have scheduled several events for Peter and Philip, including separate Insight Lectures, a large-scale panel discussion and smaller, more intimate seminars with students, postdocs and faculty. We have solicited input from the campus about how best to make use of the visiting scholars, and much of their schedules have been driven by suggestions from throughout the community. Because their visits will overlap by one week there is the opportunity not only for us to engage with them individually, but also for the visitors to interact with one another. I’m hopeful that productive exchanges, as well as perhaps new ideas and fresh perspectives, might emerge when we put Peter and Philip together with the scientific members of our community.

At this stage, the Visiting Scholars Program remains very much an experiment. After the visits have concluded, we will review the program and assess it. Eventually, I hope to set it up on a more formal basis in order to take advantage of ideas and opinions from the community with respect to both the selection of visitors and the operation of the program.

Meanwhile, I encourage you to make use of the visitors while they are here. Their contact details are to be found in the Announcements section of this publication. I know that both Peter and Philip will be glad of approaches from any member of the campus community. If you have any feedback or suggestions, please direct them to Jane Randall at rendalj@rockefeller.edu.
Princeton physicist joins Rockefeller as part-time visiting professor

by TALLY HENNING BROWN

There’s more than one way to visit. While Peter Goodfellow and Philip Campbell will each spend a few weeks here as visiting scholars, William Bialek has committed to a longer-term stay as a part-time visiting professor. A theoretical physicist and professor at Princeton University, Bialek joined Rocke-
efeller University this month and will spend approximately one-quarter of his time on campus for a two-year period. The appointment, created to en-
courage further cross-disciplinary collab-
oration of scientists from the physics, biology, and chemistry lines, was discussed among faculty and administration over the summer months and formally announced in August.

Educated at the University of Cali-
ifornia, Berkeley — where he received his Ph.D. in biophysics at the age of 23 — Prof. Bialek did postdocs at the Univer-
sity of Groningen in the Netherlands and the Institute for Theoretical Physics in Santa Barbara, among other institutions. After receiving his Ph.D. in UC Berkeley in 1986, in 1990, he joined the newly established NEC Research Institute, founded by NEC Labs at Princeton, becoming an institute fellow in 1999. He currently serves as John Archdall Wheeler/Battelle Professor in Physics at Princeton.

Prof. Bialek’s research interests cover a wide variety of theoretical problems at the intersection of physics and biol-
ogy, from the dynamics of individual biological molecules to learning and cognition. He is perhaps best known for his work on coding and computation in the brain where, in close collaboration with experimentalists, he has shown how abstract mathematical ideas about signals, noise, and information flow can be brought into direct contact with quantitative data from real neurons. This work has led to the demonstration that at least some aspects of brain func-
tion can be understood as nearly optimal strategies for dealing with the complex, dynamic signals that come to us through our senses, approaching fundamental physical limits to reliability and precision. Along the way to these results, Prof. Bialek and his collaborators discov-
ered how to “read the neural code” in relatively simple nervous systems, such as the visual system of the fly, building a dictionary that translates the sequences of elec-
trical pulses generated by neurons and the sensory stimuli in the outside world. Unexpectedly, these ideas have found their way into current efforts by biomedical engineers to build prosthetic devices driven by neural signals. More recently, Prof. Bialek has been interested in connecting theoretical ideas of noise and information flow to a very different class of technological processes: the regula-
tion of gene expression during the course of embryonic development. Because cross-disciplinary interaction has been so crucial to his own work, Prof. Bialek has made efforts to bring this style of science to a broader audi-
ence, and has established several courses designed to bring scientists together. At Princeton, he developed a radically new, integrated science course entitled “How science can advance our understanding of the teaching of physics, chemistry, and biology.” Collaborative in-
teractions, whether between theoreticians and experimentalists, require an openness and familiarity that allows everyone to admit ignorance and to collaborate not just in the search for answers but in the formulation of the questions,” Prof. Bialek says. “Universities, like Princeton, have been interested in attracting scientists for short-term and/or part-time appoint-
ments for some time, and outlined plans to do so in the university’s strategic plan in 2005. Prof. Bialek, whose research interests support and further the work of theoretical physicists and others already at Rockefeller, is the first one that has received enthusiastic sup-
port from a diverse group of faculty.

He will be at Rockefeller one day a week during the regular academic year and will spend one summer month on campus.” Bills’ time at Rockefeller will expand the university’s knowledge base in more theoretical studies, a goal we have been working toward for some time. Many faculty members have shown unequivocal support for his appointment here and I am certain his association will be a fruitful one,” says Dr. Nurse.

“The difference between momentary interactions and lasting collaborations is the difference, if you will, between being a tourist and having a second home,” says Prof. Bialek. “My goals as visiting professor are to expand my own intellectual horizons and to contribute to the growth of a like-minded scientific community. Rockefeller seems an ideal place to try this.”

CAMPUSS NEWS

PRMOTIONS, AWARDS AND PERSONNEL NEWS

Awards

Sean Brady, a 2007 Beckman Young Investi-
gator Award, for his work in the discovery of and nature of a class of small non-
molecules and their therapeutic potential. The
award, which comes with $7,500, will be presented
this month, the Institute of Cellular Pathology
which comes with $7,500, will be presented
an annual prize recognizing outstanding publications in
the 2007 Pardee Distinguished
90th birthday
Chris-
in Leuven, Belgium — where Dr. de Duve con-
ducted some of his Nobel Prize-winning re-
zation of the cell — has been renamed the Chris-

MILESTONES

Awarded:

Ilaria Ceplig, from postdoctoral associate to
research associate, Greengard Lab.
David Chang, from postdoctoral fellow to
docent fellow, Dhdoplar Lab.
John Chuan, from postdoctoral fellow to
research fellow, Heintz Lab.
Maxwell Heiman, from postdoctoral fellow to
research associate, Shalam Lab.
Hong Wang, from postdoctoral fellow to re-
search associate, Greengard Lab.

Hired:

Brigitte Arubini, postdoctoral associate, Be-
viancol Lab.
Christopher Bare, research support specialist,
Flow Cytometry Resource Center.
Christine Broica, animal technician, Gre-
engard Lab.
Robert Bronstein, research assistant, Strick-
lund Lab.
Gila Budensu, director of sponsored research
and program development, Sponsored Pro-
grams Administration.
Alexander J. Cardella, development assistant I,
Development.
Matthew Chan, research assistant, Tarakhovsky
Lab.
Tijana Cop, postdoctoral fellow, Gaul Lab.
Damiem Coudreuse, postdoctoral associate, Nus-
neau Lab.
Guillaume Darrasse-Jeze, postdoctoral associ-
ate, Nussenzweig Lab.
Marily De Jesus Hernandez, animal techni-
cian, Heintz Lab.
Michael L. DeVito, research assistant, Heintz
Lab.
Scott Dowell, research support specialist, Ge-
nomics Resource Center.
Jessica Doemer, research assistant, Robert
Moore Lab.
Ellen Eritary, postdoctoral associate, Fuchs Lab.
Jenifer Felger, postdoctoral fellow, McEwen
Lab.
Maya Frank-Levine, copy editor, JCR, The
Rockefeller University Press.
Rori M. Hanson, office assistant, LARC.
Victoria Iitakura, research assistant, Heintz
Lab.
Lucy Kemp, research associate, Gross
Lab.
Tatsuya Kihi, postdoctoral fellow, de Lange
Lab.
Simeon Knight, malridom, clerk, Mail Room.
Sharon Kuca, animal technician, Greengard
Lab.
Seppe Kuehn, research associate, Leibler
Lab.
Ruth Kulikov, research assistant, Greengard
Lab.
Pradeep Kumar, fellow, Center for Theoretical
Science.
Laurent Laor, manager of health information
management, Hospital HIS.
Shelia Lola MacRae, research assistant, de
Lange Lab.
Ivana Mirkovic, postdoctoral associate, Hud-
spreth Lab.
Takahiro Nakayama, postdoctoral associate,
Roeder Lab.
Justin O’Connor, administrative assistant, K12
program, Hospital A & administrative

Jacob Yount, research assistant, Heintz
Lab.

Visiting scholars (continued)

year and now divides his time among the
kitchen, the garden and advising biotech-
nology firms.” Society-funded biocomputer
research because we have promised to
translate new knowledge into new treat-
ments for disease. Rockefeller, as a leading
academica institution, can influence how
academia and industry deliver on that promise,”
he says.

Dr. Campbell earned a bachelor’s degree in aeronautical engineering, a master’s in astrophysics and a Ph.D. in
upper atmospheric physics. Among the
career options afforded him by 10 years of advanced training in the physical sciences,
Dr. Campbell quickly chose academic. He became an assistant editor at a multidisciplinary
science journal. He spent 11 years at
Nature Publishing Group, where he was
an editor for nine — before leaving in 1998 to
launch Physics World, an international
magazine of the Institute of Physics widely
regarded for its authority and accessibility.
Dr. Campbell returned to take the helm of Nature in 1995. During his tenure as editor-in-chief, circulation has increased
nearly 20 percent; the journal remains the highest cited multidisciplinary journal; and the Nature Publishing Group, of which Dr. Campbell is a board director, has created several Nature research journals in fields including neuroscience, cell biology, immu-

nology, materials science, methods and
chemical biology, as well as review journals in many areas and innovative online publi-
cations from his position front-and-center to
the conversation among scientists, the
public and policy makers, Dr. Campbell regularly writes articles for Nature and other
publications, on subjects spanning biology, physics, chemistry, national and international security, and the
public, bioterrorism and research ethics.

“The Visiting Scholarship will give me the chance to draw to together some thinking on controversial societal issues stimulated by
discoveries in the natural sciences, examin-

ing how both natural and social sciences can
take to the policy process,” Dr. Campbell says. Dr. Campbell.” And I’ll enjoy explor-
ing how whether New York has, as we Londen-

ers have, been taken in its mass cultural
cultural wealth and diversity by our home town.”

(continued)

This publication lists new hires, retirements, awards and promotions. Staff promotions are listed yearly; faculty promotions and appointments are listed monthly.