Tapping into Cool Science

HHMI GRANTEES HAVE DEVELOPED TERRIFIC EDUCATION TOOLS. NOW THEY'RE AVAILABLE AT ONE WEBSITE.

WHO SENT A LOVE NOTE, SIGNED WITH A KISS, TO THE CAPTAIN of the basketball team? A girls' club in Atlanta used chemistry and biology to solve this fictional mystery, and they made the front page of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on February 9th.

It was an early Valentine's Day gift for Patricia Marsteller, HHMI's program director at Emory University, whose student had designed the love-note lesson. Marsteller was thrilled to see it being used as intended. The "Signed with a Kiss" investigative case is one of the varied tools developed over 20 years by hundreds of HHMI grantees.

"Our grantees' work has utility and worth that goes beyond the individual projects that they were funded to do," says Peter Bruns, HHMI's vice president for grants and special programs. HHMI is selecting the most useful resources and making them freely available in one place: its new *Cool Science* Web portal.

Cool Science, which went live in the fall of 2008, pulls together many of HHMI's existing online resources, including the virtual labs and other materials created for the popular Holiday Lectures series. The Web portal gives teachers access to a vast array of resources, gives students the opportunity to pose vexing questions to scientists who post the answers online, and allows anyone to learn how to breed sleepy fruit flies or make bacteria glow green under ultraviolet light.

"*Cool Science* is a way of sharing the best practices. It's a How To: this is how we do it at this particular place," says David Asai, director of HHMI's precollege and undergraduate science education program. "I might know what I want to do but not know how to do it. I'll see what others have done and borrow from them."

The section labeled *For Educators* contains resources like Swarthmore College's guide to designing scientific posters. Swarthmore professor Colin Purrington originally designed the website to help his students get more enjoyment from poster sessions. "Posters demonstrate the fun, cooperative aspect of scientific life," Purrington says. His website has poster templates and wide-ranging, often funny, advice such as "resist the inevitable directives from your mentor to use the white space to cram in more background information."

Each resource on *For Educators* comes with an abstract describing how it has been used, the program director's background and contact information, and links to similar resources. Visitors can search for resources by keyword, grade level, topic, and type. They are encouraged to leave comments and to rate the resources on a scale of one to five flasks. The poster-making website, for instance, has a five-flask rating and the comment "Awesome!"

HHMI staff will be paying attention to those evaluations. "We'll be counting flasks," Bruns says. "We want to know if some resources are used and rated while others just seem to sit there."

Bruns is also very interested in seeing *Cool Science* spark new conversations. "A person who finds one resource interesting will get a sense of the whole program that created it and then might contact its developers," he says. "Connecting people and the resulting networking can be so important." ■ –OLGA KUCHMENT

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Visit *Cool Science* at www.hhmi.org/coolscience.

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