

## Season of Change

FALL MAY BE THE “SEASON OF MISTS AND MELLOW FRUITFULNESS,” as English Romantic poet John Keats described it nearly two centuries ago. Yet the soft light of these autumn days contrasts with the intense activity all around us: clouds of birds seek distant nesting grounds; whirring seeds disperse into the air; steelhead fight upstream to spawn in cold natal headwaters. These seasonal rhythms in the natural world find an echo in the patterns of our work.

An entirely new flock of birds alighted at HHMI in September: 40-plus early career scientists, whose research demonstrates considerable promise, joined our community. We're looking forward to hearing from them and to the lively interchange of scientific thinking that occurs throughout the year. This is serious fun—enlivened by news that two HHMI colleagues received 2009 Nobel Prizes. Jack Szostak of Massachusetts General Hospital shared the Nobel in Physiology or Medicine with Elizabeth Blackburn of the University of California, San Francisco, and Carol Greider of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. The trio showed how the ends of chromosomes are synthesized, how they can be copied in a complete way during cell division, and how they are protected against degradation. Two days later, Tom Steitz of Yale University shared the Chemistry Prize with Venkatraman Ramakrishnan of the Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology, and Ada E. Yonath of the Weizmann Institute of Science for discoveries that elucidated the structure and function of the ribosome—the complex cellular machinery that churns out the proteins necessary for life. And on that very same day, Elaine Fuchs of the Rockefeller University was at the White House to receive the National Medal of Science. Wow.

But I'm doing more than listening to great science and popping Champagne. I'm thinking about the future, about ways that HHMI can speed the dispersal of ideas through the academic research community and seed new discoveries. Toward that end, the Institute has joined with Stanford University and others in an initiative to reduce the paperwork that has slowed the exchange of research materials within the nonprofit and academic sectors. As long as certain conditions are met, our scientists will no longer need material transfer agreements to share nonhuman biological materials; if and when a materials transfer agreement is necessary, we hope to simplify the paperwork. This approach should free HHMI investigators to focus on research while enabling the Institute's talented legal staff to address more pressing issues.

I have also asked my scientific and legal colleagues to consider whether HHMI policies that govern the interactions between our scientists and the private sector should be streamlined. Do these policies, which have been subject to thoughtful revision over time, help or hinder the translation of discoveries made in HHMI laboratories into useful therapies for people? Can we encourage appropriate collaboration while maintaining the high ethical standards that define HHMI's scientific culture?

These important questions lack simple answers, but they are worth asking: the medical import of HHMI research is central to our charter and the work of many investigators. Visit the online *Bulletin*



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([www.hhmi.org/bulletin/nov2009](http://www.hhmi.org/bulletin/nov2009)) to hear Charles Sawyers, an HHMI investigator at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, discuss translational research and a promising treatment for prostate cancer. Indeed, the impact of research that calls on the specific strengths of academic and pharmaceutical industry scientists received new attention earlier this fall when Sawyers and HHMI colleague Brian Druker at the Oregon Health Sciences University shared the Lasker-DeBakey Clinical Medical Research Award with Nicholas B. Lydon, formerly of Novartis, for the successful identification of a targeted therapy for leukemia.

HHMI is large and well established, but we are no scientific monolith. Like the cell membrane—the subject of a two-part series that starts in this issue of the *Bulletin*—the boundaries of the Institute are regulated but highly porous; we benefit mightily from a constant flow of people and ideas. Former investigators hold major leadership roles in government, academia, and pharmaceutical research, the most notable being Francis Collins, the new director of the National Institutes of Health. We're happy to see our alumni succeed. And we like to think that they carry an appreciation for their HHMI experience—specifically, the value of giving researchers freedom to pursue challenging biological questions—into their new environments.

HHMI gains from collaboration and interchange, as witnessed by our expanded support for postdoctoral scientists in collaboration with four highly regarded organizations. I look forward to finding other opportunities to develop new programs with partners who demonstrate similar philosophical goals and commitment to excellence, thereby expanding the reach, scale, and sophistication of any endeavor. We have much to learn from others: after all, the poet also labors to explain the world in all its glorious complexity.