

Every year since 1997, the US has maxed out on H1-B visas midyear, despite several increases in the cap. That left universities with lengthy delays before their new H1-B workers—research associates, assistant professors, and some postdocs—could get onto the payroll. “The cap was a huge, huge problem,” says Sylvia Ottemoeller, an immigration counselor at UCLA’s office of international students and scholars. Even without the cap, she adds, getting final approval from the Immigration and Naturalization Service can still take five to six months.

Science organizations organize.

Seven of Europe’s largest research organizations have formed EIROFORUM, a formalized collaboration to advise the European Commission, share research resources, and combine outreach activities. The biannual forum meetings will bring together the director generals of CERN, the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, the European Space Agency, the European Southern Observatory, the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility, the Institut Laue–Langevin, and the European Fusion Development Agreement. Started last year, EIROFORUM is initially focusing on the Sixth Framework Programme, Europe’s research guidelines for the next four years. “They wanted to make sure that they had a channel into the European Commission’s deci-

sion making process,” says ESO’s Peter Quinn. Growing common interests among the organizations, such as computational grid development and increased public outreach, also fueled the collaboration, he adds.

French policy post. Ketty Schwartz stepped into France’s top research policy post, director of research in the research ministry, on 2 May. In announcing her appointment, Minister Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg said he tapped Schwartz because she is a top-ranking researcher in the life sciences and because he is committed to bringing more women into top-level jobs. As Schwartzberg is not a scientist, Schwartz is expected to wield considerable influence in forming French research policy. Schwartz moved to the ministry from Paris’s Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital, where she headed a research division in genetics, physiopathology, and therapies for skeletal and cardiac muscle. She succeeds geophysicist Vincent Courtillot, who is returning to research and teaching at the University Denis Diderot and the Institut de Physique du Globe in Paris. ■



SCHWARTZ



Web Watch

<http://www.sodaplay.com/constructor>

Sodaconstructor is a Java-based construction toy that obeys the laws of gravity and Robert Hooke. Players link together virtual masses, springs, and muscles to form automatons that walk, spin, and jerk across the computer screen. Each week, Soda, the London-based Web design studio that built the constructor, examines the automata that players have made and picks one of them to feature on the site.

sodaconstructor

<http://ei.cs.vt.edu/~history>

Helped in part by a grant from the National Science Foundation, Virginia Tech’s computer science department has put together a Web site devoted to **The History of Computing**. Among the site’s offerings is People and Pioneers, an extensive list of noteworthy figures from the world of computing.



http://www.geology.sdsu.edu/how_volcanoes_work

Vic Camp, a geologist at San Diego State University, has written what amounts to a self-contained Web course on all aspects of **How Volcanoes Work**. The site, which features many illustrations, is aimed at university students and high-school geology teachers.



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