

institutions in the US and at Cambridge and Oxford universities in the UK. The postdocs will earn \$65 000–\$70 000 a year.

“Because postdocs are a very important first step in one’s career, and a number of such positions have been eliminated at universities due to financial concerns, we moved to plug a gap,” says Jim Simons, a mathematician-turned-investment-manager who 15 years ago created the foundation, now worth more than \$1 billion. “If we continue this program, it won’t be with a group of anointed universities as it is now, but rather as direct grants to individuals. We did this quickly. Otherwise we could never have had this in place for this fall.”

In the physical sciences and mathematics, the foundation has funded isolated projects, including the Simons Center for Geometry and Physics at Stony Brook University and a bailout of Brookhaven National Laboratory’s Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider (see *PHYSICS TODAY*, March 2006, page 26). But unlike the foundation’s life sciences focus on quantitative biology and the study of autism, “we are just beginning to solicit advice on the most effective ways to support math and the physical sciences,” says David Eisenbud, a mathematician at University of California, Berkeley, who recently joined the foundation. TF

Thirty Meter Telescope. The National Astronomical Observatories of the Chinese Academy of Sciences joined the Thirty Meter Telescope project last fall. Jun Yan, director of the observatories, said, “We believe that the Thirty Meter Telescope will provide an otherwise unattainable opportunity for the Chinese astronomical community to make significant discoveries, perform cutting-edge science, and advance technological development.”

Last July the collaboration announced its selection of Mauna Kea, Hawaii, for the TMT, despite some opposition to further construction at the site from environmentalists and Native Hawaiians (see *PHYSICS TODAY*, January 2004, page 22). “The TMT has done a lot of work to understand and address the issues,” says project press officer Charles Blue, who noted that a final environmental impact statement and a conservation use permit are still pending.

Work is under way on the actuators, adaptive optics, and mirror segments that will make up the TMT’s primary mirror. Groundbreaking is slated for 2011, with first light planned for 2018.



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Construction of the telescope will total an estimated \$1 billion, of which about a third has been raised so far, mostly from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Caltech, the University of California, and the Association of Canadian Universities for Research in Astronomy jointly launched the TMT. The partnership shares of China and Japan, which joined earlier, are still to be determined. TF

Focus on statistics. The number of physics faculty and the number of degrees awarded in astronomy are both holding steady in the US, according to two recent studies by the American Institute of Physics.

In 2008 some 763 physics-degree-granting departments employed a total of 9100 faculty members. PhD-granting

departments have more than twice the number of faculty members as departments where the highest physics degree available is the master’s; those in turn have more than twice as many as departments where the highest degree is a bachelor’s. In 2004 about one in five positions were temporary or nontenure track; in 2008 that had decreased to one in seven.

Following a 38% increase around the turn of the millennium in the number of bachelor’s degrees awarded in astronomy, the number has leveled, with about 340 awarded each year in the US in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Over the past 10 years, the number of entering graduate students in astronomy has grown by a third, from 150 to 200; US citizens make up the bulk of that growth, and the number of women is growing faster than men. In 1978 women earned 5 out of 93 astronomy PhDs; in 2007 they earned 35 out of 125.

These and other data are presented in *Number of Physics Faculty* (available at <http://www.aip.org/statistics/trends/facultytrends.html>) and *Astronomy Enrollments and Degrees* (<http://www.aip.org/statistics/trends/undergradtrends.html>), the first reports to appear in the new, mainly online “focus on” format. TF ■

web watch

To suggest topics or sites for Web Watch, please visit <http://www.physicstoday.org/suggestwebwatch.html>. Compiled and edited by Charles Day

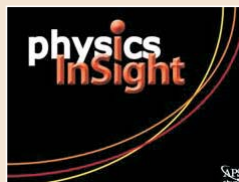


<http://www.suntrek.org>

Sun|trek is a rich and extensive website devoted to teaching schoolchildren about the Sun and its effect on Earth’s environment. In addition to projects, lesson plans, and teachers’ resources, the site provides engaging biographies of the 40 “solar guides” who volunteer their time to create and maintain the site.

<http://blogs.america.gov>

The US Department of State’s Bureau of International Information Programs hosts several blogs, including **New Enterprise**, which is devoted to intellectual property, and **Adaptation!** which describes the ways people, communities, and countries are facing climate change.



<http://www.aps.org/careers/insight>

The American Physical Society has put together a series of slide shows called **Physics InSight**. The shows are designed to interest undergraduates in physics careers and include profiles of physicists, descriptions of internships, and accessible summaries of recent research.