EDITED BY YUDHIJIT BHATTACHARJEE

Three Q's >>

The new president of the French Academy of Sciences, **Jean Salençon**, is an international expert in soil mechanics and earthquake-resistance construction at the École Polytechnique in Palaiseau. Vice president of the academy since 2007, he succeeds biologist Jules Hoffmann.

Q: What are your priorities as president?

The academy has a key role in fostering interest in science, which is declining in France. People don't listen to scientists anymore. The debate about genetically modified organisms, for instance, is often based more on passion than on scientific arguments. Some of the debates you see on TV are amazing.

Q: How do you plan to change that?

We want to help improve science teaching at all levels, and we want to have a clearer presence in the media.

Q: A controversial new law makes universities autonomous. What's your position?

I think it was unavoidable. But now we need better tools to evaluate how universities are doing, and that's where I want the academy to help. The French complain a lot about the "Shanghai ranking" [a global assessment of universities], which only looks at scientific output, not at teaching and professional training. We may not come up with an alternative ranking, but we'll define the criteria that an evaluation should be based on.

CREDITS (TOP TO BOTTOM): ACADÉMIE DES SCIENCES; OPENANTHROPOLOGY.WORDPRESS.COM; LAMONT-DOHERTY EARTH OBSERVATORY

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DEATHS

WAR ZONE. A 36-year-old anthropologist has become the third social scientist to be killed while working with the U.S. Army's Human Terrain System in Iraq and Afghanistan. Paula Loyd (right) died on 7 January 2009 from burns received in a November 2008 attack in Afghanistan.

Loyd went to Afghanistan in September last year and was embedded with a unit of the 1st Infantry Division. On 5 November, according to news reports, she approached a man carrying a fuel jug in the village of Maiwand in the southern part of the country, where she was conducting interviews. The man ignited the fuel and threw it on Loyd, causing second- and third-degree burns. She was transferred to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, where she later died.

This wasn't Loyd's first tour of Afghanistan: She previously worked there for the United Nations Assistance Mission, to improve working arrangements between humanitarian groups and military forces, and for the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Michael Bhatia, a political scientist in the program, was killed by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan in May 2008. About 2 months later, Nicole Suveges, an economist working for BAE Systems, died when a bomb destroyed a community building in Sadr City, Baghdad.

AWARDS

DECORATED. A Spanish foundation has created $530,000 prizes to honor the lifetime achievement of researchers in eight major fields of study.

The first winner of the Frontier of Knowledge awards by the Madrid-based BBVA Foundation is Columbia University geochemist Wallace Broecker for his work on the mechanism of abrupt climate change. The 77-year-old Broecker, who has funded the work of other climate scientists with money from previous awards such as the Crafoord Prize, says this latest honor will augment the pot. Given his age and frugal lifestyle, he says, he's unlikely to spend the bounty on himself.

Stay tuned for announcements covering achievements in development, biomedicine, the arts, basic science, information and communication technologies, ecology and conservation biology, and economics, finance, and management.

Charles Dinarello of the University of Colorado School of Medicine in Denver, along with **Tadamitsu Kishimoto** and **Toshio Hirano** of Osaka University in Japan, will share the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences' $500,000 Crafoord Prize, being awarded this year in the field of polyarthritis. They are being recognized for exploring the role of signaling proteins known as interleukins in polyarthritis and other autoimmune diseases. The work has led to the development of drugs to treat these conditions.

A Life in Science

INNOVATOR. J. Lamar Worzel enjoyed dropping bombs. In the 1930s, the geophysicist packed explosives into inner tubes, sent them to the floor of the Atlantic Ocean, and deciphered the blasts' reverberations to chart sea-floor sediments. Those findings helped U.S. submarines evade detection during World War II. Among the devices that Worzel and his colleagues invented were deep-sea cameras that discovered marine life in the abyssal ocean. He also figured out how to precisely measure gravity from a rocking ship—to chart Earth's crust—and to drill cores 3.6 kilometers deep. "We never allowed ourselves to think that anything we decided to do was impossible," he wrote in 2001.

In 1949, Worzel cofounded Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, where he worked until leaving for the University of Texas, Austin, in 1972. He died of a heart attack on 26 December 2008 at the age of 89. "He was one of the greats in 20th century geophysics," says Robert Frosch, a retired theoretical physicist who studied ocean acoustics at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and elsewhere.

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