OPINION

APS VIEWS
by Brian B. Schwartz
Associate Executive Secretary and APS NEWS Editor

For many years, various educators and researchers have been proposing very reasonable actions on how to alleviate the employment situation for Ph.D. physicists. The suggestions range from providing good information on supply and demand with career seminars, to outright cuts on the production of physics Ph.D. degrees. Other suggestions focus on expanding the scope of physics education to include more applications (even business courses), in order to enlarge the horizon of students in their search for employment in nontraditional areas.

However, very little change has occurred in the system. Perhaps the format of reasoned written discourse is no longer effective in this media age. With that in mind, I presented the following “Top Ten” actions to solve the oversupply of Ph.D. physicists, in the manner of long night talk show host David Letterman, in hopes that with a lighter touch, more attention will be paid to possible solutions to the problem.

Top Ten Actions To Solve the Oversupply of Ph.D. Physicists

10. Disallow use of the term “shortage” until the starting salary of Ph.D. physicists is increasing at a rate of twice the national average.
9. Require at least 50% of graduate students in physics departments to be U.S. citizens or have permanent visas.
8. Develop a course or seminar series, “Physics for Potential Millionaires,” to give students a basic understanding of how the knowledge and application of physics can be used to gain wealth, power and influence (and hopefully a measure of compassion).
7. Require all physics faculty to take every other sabbatical leave in a work area outside the traditional fields of physics. This would enable faculty members to (a) learn the difference, difficulty, and excitement of other career fields; (b) gain valuable information to broaden their teaching and horizons; (c) help develop networks outside traditional physics careers; and (d) consume physics funding which could then be used to support younger physicists. Hopefully some faculty would enjoy working in nontraditional areas and not return, thus freeing up more positions in academia.
6. Publicize highly successful nontraditional careers by Ph.D. physicists, preferably featuring them in expensive cars, clothes, houses, etc. Perhaps Physics Today could have a special “Physics People” section.
5. Require senior faculty over the age of 50 whose children have finished college to renounce taking summer salaries from grants (25 to 3 of the academic year salary). The faculty member would continue to perform research over the summer, but the extra funds would be used to support postdoctoral students and younger physicists.
4. Encourage the NSF to shift grant funding allocations from supporting graduate research assistants to supporting postdoctoral students, which would reduce the number of graduate students and hence the production of Ph.D. physicists.
3. Develop a quality rating system for Ph.D. department programs and close down those departments which average in the bottom 10% over a five-year period.
2. Require physics departments to temporarily suspend faculty tenure whenever the oversupply of Ph.D. physicists reaches the 20% level for three consecutive years, thus opening faculty positions in every U.S. department to the most qualified physicists (even if a recent Ph.D.).

NOTE: The above appeared as an appendix to a recently published article on the job crisis, entitled “Breaking the Mold: Expanding the Horizons for Physics Students,” by Brian Schwartz, included in the proceedings of the AAPT/APPS sponsored topical conference Physics Departments in the 1990s, edited by G.M. Crawley and B.W. Kowary, AAPT (1993). Copies of the full article may be requested from Brian Schwartz, APS NEWS, One Physics Ellipse, College Park, MD 20740-3844, or via e-mail: schwartz@aps.org.

LETTERS

Council Statement Unjustly Penalizes Colorado Members

The announcement in the March 1994 issue of APS NEWS of the APS Council’s response to the passage of Amendment 2 in Colorado presents a frightful example of the few, speaking—without expressed authority on behalf of its entire membership—in a manner which penalizes a few of us for the actions of the many. I am not condemning the Council’s decision to speak out against perceived discrimination in the passage of Amendment 2; rather, I refer to its decision to disenfranchise the Colorado members of the APS from full and equal participation in our Society.

Surely Council recognized that the community in Colorado with the largest APS membership (Boulder), as well as the city of Denver, where APS meetings are likely to be held, had already passed laws pertaining to gay rights. It is surely safe to predict that most APS members in Colorado could care less about the sexual orientation of their colleagues. Does the Council actually believe that those Coloradans who voted for Amendment 2 give a fig about whether the APS holds its meetings elsewhere? Does it think that Colorado’s economy will suffer because of this decision? Be assured, the state’s economy is already doing too well to notice.

Thus, the truly affected individuals are the nearly 700 Colorado members of the APS who are clearly being discriminated against, together with our physics graduate students. The reasoning presented by Stephen Adler regarding the need to prevent “placating those members in the position of having to risk discrimination” is spurious. It is pure conjecture substituting for solid reasoning, which should have led to the conclusion that hundreds of members have become victims of the Council’s blatant discrimination against them. Did the Council discourage the travel of APS members to the Soviet Union when some physicists there were truly suffering from oppression? How about condemning the participation of its members in scientific meetings held in China?

Those familiar with Colorado should know that there exists a great number of small, conservative communities, consisting of honest folks who would likely vote the same way if a similar amendment were to reappear on a future ballot. Furthermore, it is likely that the nationally divisive issues surrounding gay rights and the perception of gays as an identified group of minorities are likely to escalate as national health care plans or anti-AIDS programs are debated. In the homosexual community has become an important political consideration for many voters, despite the fact that homosexuality is not a genetic condition and that AIDS is the result of sexual behavior rather than a genetic condition.

In my judgment, the APS Council is mistaken to denigrate itself over the complex arguments surrounding this national debate. Voters in other states, it appears, are likely to consider similar referenda.

Robert C. Amme
University of Denver

Council Statement Imposes Arbitrary Political Agenda

I am appalled that according to the March 1994 issue of APS NEWS, the APS Council approved a ban on holding meetings in Colorado because of a civil law in that state that does not (continued on page 7)

CORRECTION

George Campbell Jr’s letter in the May issue of APS NEWS contained an unfortunate typographical error. The fourth sentence of the second paragraph should have read: Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that the academic performance or intellectual development of high-achieving students is inhibited by placement in heterogeneous groups.
Letters (continued from page 6)

provide a certain protection from something called "discrimination."
Could we have discrimination based on race, gender, nationality, religion, or sexual orientation? Why don't the members of Congress act like physi-
cisists instead of politicians who utter
nouns without knowing what the
nouns mean? What is "race," "religion," "sexual orientation"? What experiment
does one perform to ascertain if a
given person is a member of a listed group?

The nouns "gender" and "nationality"
are fairly easy to measure. To deter-
gender, one could measure the
subject's DNA or pull the subject's
pants down (de-gender the subject
by the eyes of the subject). But what
measure my race, he would discover
that my race is mongrel.

The last two characteristics in the
Council's statement, however, deal with
changeable behavior and not un-
changeable properties. It is here that I am willing to be called a
Council because the Council is imposing its ethos on me, in violation
of the unconstitutional decisions by the
United States Supreme Court. The
courts have foisted their logically
inconsistent "value-free neutrality" on
the populace. The Court has imposed
equality burdens on us while denying
us the freedom to do the same. The
Council has implied that we as human
beings are not equal intellectually be-
cause the scientific evidence does not support such equality, that we are not
equal physically because the scientific
evidence does not support such equa-
I thought that the religious toler-
ance is the tolerance of any religi-
ous belief, then you should investigate
the Atte" and thuggery religions where
human sacrifice was part of many
rituals. Such behavior does not have con-
stitutional protection. What experiment
does one perform to determine a per-
son's sexual orientation? How about
determining the person's physical, so-
cial, political, artistic, pedophilic, or
bestial orientation? Maybe the subject
changed his view this morning at
9:45 A.M. What experiment would you
perform to determine this change?
If you believe that religious tolerance
tolerates the tolerance of any religious
belief, then you should investigate
the Atte" and thuggery religions where
human sacrifice was part of many
rituals. Such behavior does not have con-
stitutional protection. What experiment
does one perform to determine a per-
son's sexual orientation? How about
determining the person's physical, so-
cial, political, artistic, pedophilic, or
bestial orientation? Maybe the subject
changed his view this morning at
9:45 A.M. What experiment would you
perform to determine this change?
In any case, the group "normal"
are not scientifically determined, how
the law hold us accountable to such
disorienting facts?

Please, the Council of The American
Physical Society, do two things for me.
First, act like physicists and ascertain
what the nouns mean before you cau-
ally use them in your condemnation.
Second, do not impose your ethical standards
on me and require me, re-
gardless of my ethics, to accept behav-
ior which is not constitutionally
protected. Let physics speak the scientific knowledge anywhere in the world
without coupling such dissemination to
an arbitrary political agenda.

Anthony J. DiFatta
University of Scranton, Pennsylvania

Council's Threatened Boycott over Homosexuality Must Be Avoided

The March issue reports Council's No-
ember resolution threatening an APS
boycott of Colorado and other localities
over the homosexual issue. Several APS
members resigned immediately upon
learning of this.

Members who don't know should learn that Colorado's new Amendment 2
(possibly suspended while under leg-
legal challenge) is not an extremist meas-
ure. It doesn't deprive homosexuals of their
civil rights or clip them into jail. All it
tells is that no Colorado city can
give people protected-group status un-
der civil-rights laws on the basis of
"homosexual, lesbian, or bisexual ori-
cination." They can only have the same
rights as other people. This means, for
example, a state university landlord can't
give notice to a homosexual, just as she
could to an active bachelor or a smoker
whose style offends her. Is this inhumane or draconian?

Council's resolution is a mistake which
needs to be rectified before it becomes
a major embarrassment to the Society--
i.e., before we have to declare a kinetic
(as opposed to potential) boycott, which
may happen in several ways. (1) After
a year or two, the Supreme Court may
not take things out of our hands. They
may uphold Amendment 2. Then we
must either back down sheepishly, or
carry into action to depud Colorado voters
of their rights through an economic boycott.
(2) Other states and cities may pass
similar legislation. Cincinnati and other
cities have already done so. Are any of
these now under boycott? Measures simi-
lar to Colorado's are pending in many
states. In the next state, perhaps a
liberal lower-court judge will be willing
to throw the will of the voters, even
temporary. Then we'll have to boycott
at once, won't we?

It annoys traditional Christian and ob-
servant Jewish members when Council
takes a position encouraging homo-
sexuality. It worries everyone not only
actually boycotts states which don't share
that attitude of encouragement.
We haven't boycotted cities which
decourage drinking or smoking, although
these are legal activities.

To save space, I'll devote the rest of
this in large part to a list of questions which
members can mug over before commu-
nicating with members of Council
and/or the Panel on Public Affairs. Why
was this done in a star-chamber man-
ner? Why was there no notice in APS
NEWS or Physics Today? Why, were
opinions not sought from members?
Why was the Forum on Physics and Society
bypassed, just as in Council's earlier fruitless boycott in support of the Equal Rights Amendment? Didn't we learn anything? Why was there no discussion session at an APS meeting?

Why take positions and start boycotts
on such issues? We are divided on
these things. Isn't it sufficient that we
conduct our own activities without dis-
 crimination? Physics is what unites us.

Council's very broad resolution pro-
tects not only homosexuals, but "gen-
er" and "sexual orientation," and it declares that we'll boycott any "locality
that discriminates." Shouldn't we boy-
cott the entire USA? The U.S. military continues discrimination against
homosexuals and to the extent against
women. Should we avoid meeting in
any school district which refuses to hire
homosexuals as elementary-school
teachers? Or in any city which will
assign women to hazardous police
duty? Or in the many states which still
have laws against homosexual acts?

What if pedophiles and bestialities
come to us and demand a similar boycott?
Pedophiles already have an advocacy
group (NAMBLA). Can we avoid them under the terms of Council's resolution?

Many cities extend no explicit civil rights to homosexuals, and apparently that's OK with Council. Would it
then be fair to punish Denver, Boulder,
and Aspen, which tried to do so but were
shut down by the state's voters? What
message would this send to other cities
in conservative states?

Will congressional and state legisla-
tors from Colorado or other states con-
tinue to support science in public
universities and labs once they learn
that a "professional society" believes
we're too good to meet in their states?
Aren't we meddling in religion (as well
as politics) if we take a position which
contradicts traditional Christian and Jew-
ish morality? What can Christian and
Jewish physicists do? Resign? How many
members will be lost as a result of that?
Doesn't the APS owe more to physicists
than to homosexuals? Should we punish
innocent colleagues in states which will
no longer be able to host meetings? Isn't this idea of a boycott contrary to the
universality of science?

I hope that Council will be wise
to pull back from this over-
ended and extremist resolution before
we find ourselves embarrassed, e.g., if
the Supreme Court declines to pull out
of the fray. At the moment at least
this is hardly more than lunch-table
talk, but it has already provoked a few
resignations. An actual boycott would
be a grave matter. I urge members to
make their opinions known to the President and/or Council.

James E. Fetlen
Greenbelt, Maryland

Colorado Boycott Further Politicizes APS

As an APS member, I wish to express a strong protest against the APS Coun-
cil's resolution which calls for a boycott of Colorado. It is an outrage that such a
grave decision was made without input from the majority of APS members. The
rickety March issue of APS's News seems to suggest that the Council's decision was
based on mendacious testimony of a member of the Panel on Public Affairs, in another attempt to impose "politically correct" behavior as defined by the left wing of the ac-
demic intelligentsia.

Some professional "rights" activists complain that homosexuals do not have a
privilege of special protection in Colorado. Just because the people of Colorado
love to hate, they don't want to lose the status of protected minority on a par-
ticular group of people does not in itself constitute an act of discrimination against
individuals.

What are we to expect next in the spectacle of politicization of the profes-
sional societies? Perhaps the Council will want to boycott the entire territory
of the United States in another show of
contempt for the mores of the general public.

Serjey Rodin
Union Beach, New Jersey

Patent System Is Part of Job Problem

Leon Lederman is quoted in the most recent APS News (April 1994, p12) to the
effect that the nation's long term economic and societal needs will sim-
ply not be met without funded science. If this is true, blaming the lack of proper
response on Congressional ignorance cannot be all of the problem.

I submit that the culprit may be the failure of the current patent system to
match its goals of promoting science for the benefit of society. If the
payback to society from investment in science is large, why is it not supported as a good
investment? Patents encourage gadgets but do not reward those who contrib-
ute to developments which involve a
long chain but do not yield the final
commercial product. The payoff from
research may be large, but because of
the chain, the small reward from most
investment in research is not regarded as profitable.

Publication which contributes to a de-
velopement should be rewarded, if
we are to attract the best talent to work
we may be able to come up with
appropriate recommendations. We
cannot depend on lawyers and politi-
cal interest for us. Of course it would
still be a struggle to get our ideas
adopted, but surely this is relevant to
our employment problem.

Eimer Eiser
Houston, Texas

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