

On Campus

ARM'S LENGTH. The pope's presence is supposed to bring peace and harmony. But when the University of Rome "La Sapienza" invited Pope Benedict XVI to mark the institution's 705th academic year last week, faculty members and students kicked up such a fuss that the Vatican called off the visit.

The protests were led by 63 physicists who objected to the pope's views on Galileo. They point to a 1990 speech in which the pope—then Cardinal Ratzinger—quoted philosopher Paul Feyerabend as saying that the church's 17th century persecution of Galileo was "reasonable and just" and that the church had been "far more faithful to reason

than had been the astronomer. Stating that these words "offend and humiliate us," the physicists asked the university's rector, Renato Guarini, to cancel the "incongruous" event. Two days before the inauguration, the Vatican announced that it had decided to cancel the visit "given the events of the last few days."

Italian politicians from both the left and the right have condemned the academics, causing them to clarify their position. "The pope is free to come and visit the university at some other time, but not at the opening of the academic year of the university, which is a secular institution," says Carlo Cosmelli, one of the letter-writers.

DEATHS

OPTIMISM PERSONIFIED. Judah Folkman, whose once-controversial idea that blocking blood-vessel growth can choke tumors is now widely accepted, died last week, apparently of



a heart attack, after collapsing at Denver International Airport. He was 74.

Folkman, a fixture at Children's Hospital Boston since the late 1960s and a professor at Harvard Medical School, met with skepticism from many scientists when he first proposed his concept of angiogenesis. But his persistence was legendary. In an interview with *Science* 3 years ago, he emphasized that "if something's really important, you keep after it, regardless of what other people think." His work on angiogenesis opened up a new research field in cancer and other diseases with blood-vessel abnormalities, such as macular degeneration, and led to many new drugs.

Folkman had an unquenchable curiosity and passion for discovery. "He stayed a little kid his entire life," says Donald Ingber, who has worked with Folkman since joining his lab as a postdoctoral fellow in 1984. "The idea that

something actually stopped him kind of takes our breath away."

MOVERS

DESERT ROSE. Choon Fong Shih built his academic reputation on understanding how metal cracks under stress. Now the Singapore-born, U.S.-trained materials scientist will be addressing the fault lines in global higher education as the founding president of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, a new graduate university in Saudi Arabia with a \$10 billion endowment.

As vice-chancellor of the National University of Singapore, Shih has transformed a well-regarded undergraduate institute into an Asian research powerhouse. Ali Ibrahim Al-Naimi, the Saudi minister of petroleum and mineral resources and chair of the new university's board of trustees, hopes that Shih will repeat that performance by being "a builder of bridges across peoples, disciplines, institutions, and cultures."

To attract faculty, Shih intends to offer generous, guaranteed funding—"much bigger than the usual start-up package." He also plans to organize the university around multidisciplinary research topics rather than individual departments.

Shih, 62, begins his new job in December, and the university—being built 80 km north of Jeddah—will open its doors in September 2009.



Two Cultures >>

DOCUMENTING DOCUMENTING. Linguists David Harrison and Gregory Anderson of the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages in Salem, Oregon, have trekked to many remote corners of the world to document dying languages. On three recent expeditions, they let a film crew tag along in hopes of furthering efforts to save endangered tongues.

The result is a 70-minute documentary that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival last week. Produced by Ironbound Films and partly funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation, *The Linguists* follows Harrison and Anderson as they travel to Siberia, India, and Bolivia to locate and record the last living speakers of three endangered languages. It captures both the drama and the grunt work involved in the project—from eureka moments with village elders to stomach problems and negotiations with reluctant governments. In one scene, for example, Anderson (left), tutored by native speakers, finally comprehends the "obscenely complex" counting system of the Sora language in the Indian state of Orissa.

Working with a film crew was "a little odd at first," Anderson says, "but eventually, we sort of forgot they were there." Harrison says the filmmakers helped open some doors, arranging a formal presentation to the Bolivian government to make the case for saving the Kallaway language. "We wouldn't have had that level of access without them," he says. A portion of the proceeds from the film will go toward initiatives to record and revitalize endangered languages.

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