

MOVERS

Eric Barron, director, National Center for Atmospheric Research, Boulder, Colorado



2006-08: Dean, Jackson School of Geosciences, University of Texas at Austin

2002-06: Dean, College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

1989-2006: Professor of geosciences, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

Eric Barron has had a controversial start as the new director of the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in Boulder, Colorado. He had looked forward to leading the place that had been the source of a fellowship and multiple collaborations over the years. And yet, soon after taking up his new post in July, Barron closed NCAR's Center for Capacity Building and laid off its director, Mickey Glantz, a climatologist who helps developing countries deal with climate change (see *Nature* 454, 808-809; 2008). Barron blames stagnant budgets, which have forced NCAR to lay off 12% of its core staff over the past five years.

It is a sharp contrast with his previous job. For two years, Barron ran the Jackson School of Geosciences at the University of Texas, founded in 2002 with a \$237-million gift from John and Katherine Jackson — at the time, the largest ever to a US public university. The Jackson money allowed the university to expand rapidly; Barron hired several people, including seven new faculty members in climate science.

But Barron had an affinity for NCAR. After studying geology as an undergraduate and oceanography as a PhD student in Florida, he received a Cray supercomputing graduate fellowship from NCAR in 1976 and turned his attention to climate modelling. Soon he was serving as editor at various geosciences journals and as panellist on numerous advisory committees.

Through nearly two decades of working at Pennsylvania State University, Barron maintained strong links with NCAR, collaborating with researchers and serving on the board of trustees for the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, which manages NCAR. That history is what led him back to Boulder, he says — in particular, the notion of serving society at large through NCAR's work.

"It's an extraordinary group of people doing something of considerable importance for society," he says. And even as finances drive him to lay off some of those people, he is planning to find budget-friendly ways to bolster the centre's impact — for instance, by developing partnerships with outside institutions to share NCAR expertise.

John Dutton, the now-retired former dean of the college of Earth and mineral sciences at Pennsylvania State University, lauds his one-time hire for engaging students and helping them achieve their academic aims. "He has a very positive spirit and gets things done," says Dutton, adding that Barron has the management style to cope with NCAR's budget woes. ■

Alexandra Witze

NETWORKS & SUPPORT

Fellowships at the FDA

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) hopes that a newly established annual fellowship programme will help reel in a diverse mix of top-notch PhDs, PharmDs, DVMs and MDs. "We're trying to recruit a broad mix of the brightest researchers and clinicians, with the fellowship as a way to recruit future FDA employees," says Frank Torti, the agency's new chief scientist who fast-tracked the programme's creation (see *Nature* 453, 560; 2008). So far, interest in the programme, a two-year stint combining coursework and research, has been strong. By its 30 August deadline, the agency had received more than 600 applications for its 40 positions.

In addition to MDs and clinicians, Torti wants to recruit pharmaceutical professionals, epidemiologists, statisticians and psychologists to tackle new scientific areas at the agency. Whether they have FDA, industry or academic aspirations, Torti says the FDA fellows will be hot commodities — especially in pioneering research areas such as regenerative medicine. Torti expects six to ten will specialize in biomedical engineering. "With so many novel devices coming through, it is a booming area of regulation," he says.

As the FDA regulates 25% of the manufactured goods that make up

the US gross domestic product, it connects fellows with a wide array of industries seeking candidates who understand the inner workings of the FDA. Academia may seem an odd beneficiary, but Torti says people who understand FDA regulatory processes will be more effective in designing trials to meet FDA requirements.

Fellows will be chosen by a 'mutual selection' process. Eligible applicants will choose from 100-120 preceptors working in the various FDA centres, which specialize in the evaluation of drugs, biologics, devices, food safety, nutrition and veterinary medicine. The preceptors will then rank those fellows. Sanjai Kumar, a preceptor and chief of the malaria research programme at the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, says he will look for applicants who express a clear desire to forge a career in the regulatory sciences. Most fellows will be housed at the White Oak facility in Silver Spring, Maryland, but some will take courses electronically at the National Center for Toxicologic Research near Little Rock, Arkansas.

First-year courses will cover FDA law, policy, management, trial design, epidemiology and statistics. Over 70% of time will be devoted to a hypothesis-driven research project. ■
Virginia Gewin

POSTDOC JOURNAL

Job transplant

I'm uprooting myself, and uprooting requires digging. This month I've made academic discoveries not worthy of publication, such as the pile of important papers I put aside to read at the start of my postdoc, or the helpfully underlined answers in a page of neat algebra (if only I still had the questions). These will not be accompanying me to my new position at University College Dublin.

It's undesirable but unavoidable. Uprooting causes root damage. Once more I'm removing myself from a network of friends and familiar surroundings. I'm going to be replacing tangible, face-to-face collaborations with remote working relationships and all the problems they bring. The advice of trusted colleagues will no longer be down the corridor, and my ex-student cannot stroll down the hall to consult me. I am making myself peripheral to my current work circles.

Uprooting is followed, of course, by replanting in a carefully chosen, fertile location. I'm taking a new post in a hitherto undeveloped area for my new department. It's exciting and challenging. I'll need to develop joint projects and nurture connections with other research groups. And all this in the luxury of my native tongue, making communication a little bit easier and my partner's job prospects more promising. With a bit more careful digging, her roots will be ready to join mine. I think the prognosis for this transplant is good. ■

Jon Yearsley is a senior postdoc in evolutionary genetics at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland.