

## US universities

# Benefactions abound

*Washington*

UNIVERSITIES in the United States are enjoying a spectacularly profitable spring this year. In April alone, the University of Texas at Austin announced that an \$8 million donation by an anonymous Texan would enable it to endow 32 new chairs in science and engineering, and the University of California said that it had received the biggest single private gift in its history: \$36 million for a new telescope. There may be more to come. According to a new survey, universities and colleges are becoming America's favourite philanthropy: voluntary contributions to higher education reached a staggering \$5,000 million in 1982-83, an increase of 6 per cent over the previous year.

The University of California gift comes in the form of cash, property and art masterpieces bequeathed by Mrs Marion Hoffman, widow of the car dealer, Max Hoffman. The money is to form part of a \$100 million fund with which the university intends to build a 10-metre telescope of novel design at Mauna Kea on Hawaii by the end of the decade. It will consist of 36 six-foot hexagonal mirrors arrayed to form a continuous optical surface. The mirrors will be kept aligned to a precise optical figure by a system of computer-controlled sensors and actuators capable of performing 100 positional readjustments a second.



It will have four times the light-gathering power of the venerable Hale Telescope on Mount Palomar.

A bonanza of similar proportions will befall the University of Texas as a result of the \$8 million donation by a local industrialist. The \$8 million is to be matched by five Texan foundations, and another \$16 million will come from the state-funded Permanent University Fund. Together, the package will enable the university to establish 32 chairs endowed for \$1 million each. The university expects filling the chairs to take several years. It will be recruiting in chemistry, physics, mathematics, molecular biology, computer engineering, microelectronics, computer-assisted design and manufacturing and

materials engineering.

The universities of California and Texas are traditionally among the biggest recipients of private and corporate philanthropy. A survey now published by the Council for Financial Aid to Education reports that, in 1982-83, voluntary donations to the University of Texas exceeded \$107 million, while the University of California received more than \$135 million. In proportion to their size, however, neither matches Harvard and Stanford, which received donations of more than \$126 million and \$91 million respectively.

Where is all this money coming from? Increasingly, it seems, from private business. Corporate philanthropy has at last outstripped donations from foundations and reached more than \$1,000 million in 1982-83, 14 per cent more than in

the previous year. That means that the lion's share of donations comes from four distinct sources: corporations, foundations, alumni and private individuals. Each gives about \$1,000 million in a year, while religious denominations give an estimated \$200 million in total.

Nearly a third (\$1,500 million) of all the money contributed is in the form of unrestricted gifts. Some \$300 million is earmarked for academic salaries and \$750 million for research. But the gifts are distributed extremely unevenly. Major private universities receive an average of \$21 million each, about five times as much as their public counterparts. And ten universities accounted for a full \$690 million of the gifts in 1982-83. Harvard and Stanford lead the pack. Eight other institutions, receiving between \$50 million and \$60 million each, are: Minnesota, Columbia, Cornell, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Yale, Princeton, Southern California and Pennsylvania.

**Peter David**

## Genetic engineering

# Picking up the pieces

*Washington*

PROPOSALS from private companies for the field-testing of recombinant organisms will still be considered by the Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (RAC) of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH), despite the cloud created by a federal district court ruling in favour of anti-genetic-engineering activist Jeremy Rifkin (see *Nature* 24 May, p.296). That ruling has temporarily halted Dr Steven Lindow's experiment on ice-nucleating bacteria and barred RAC from approving any other experiments involving NIH funds that would deliberately release recombinant DNA into the environment.

But the ruling specifically exempted private companies, which are not legally bound by RAC decisions, although they have been complying on a voluntary basis. The reasoning was that if RAC was not allowed to consider proposals from private companies, the companies could simply proceed without RAC's approval.

Although a final decision has not been made by NIH, RAC staff said last week that as far as they knew two deliberate release proposals from private companies were still on the agenda for the next RAC meeting, on 1 June. Advanced Genetic Sciences Inc. (AGS) is seeking approval for a field trial virtually identical to Lindow's, and Cetus Madison is submitting a proposal for the field testing of plants with genetically-engineered disease resistance. RAC will hear all of the Cetus Madison proposal and part of the AGS proposal in closed session, in accordance with the standard procedures for the safeguarding of trade secrets.

In a letter to the executive director of RAC dated 18 May, Rifkin requested a

moratorium on consideration of all deliberate-release proposals and said he was appealing the district court's decision on that point. Rifkin's attorney, however, said they would not appeal until RAC had decided definitely on how to handle the June meeting.

Meanwhile, the University of California has filed an emergency appeal against the temporary injunction against Lindow's experiment. According to Lindow, the experiment must begin by around 25 May or be postponed until autumn. William Anderson, attorney for the university, said that the court failed to examine RAC's deliberations on the Lindow proposal, which, he said, met the legal requirements of a "hard look" at environmental effects. The appeal also argues that Rifkin failed to exhaust available administrative remedies before filing suit, as he failed to file comments or attend either of the RAC meetings at which the Lindow proposal was discussed. Rifkin says he did not know about those meetings and was out of town when they took place; announcements of the meetings and requests for public comment were, however, published in the *Federal Register*.

Rifkin's attorney, Edward Lee Rogers, said that he thought neither argument would stand up; the *Federal Register* announcement was "cryptic", he said, and did not make clear that this was the first deliberate-release proposal; and he said the "equivalency" defence — that RAC in fact carried out the equivalent of a legally-required environmental assessment — is available only to agencies whose principal responsibility — and thus expertise — is with environmental issues.

**Stephen Budiansky**