

# MOVERS

**Hendrik Weerts, director, high-energy physics division, Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, Illinois**



**2004–05:** Sabbatical at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, Illinois

**1998–2002:** Visiting scientist, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, Illinois

**1983–2005:** Professor, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan

As a high-school student, Harry Weerts finished reading his physics textbook, but was left with more questions than answers. His quest to find those answers led him from his native Netherlands to the forefront of particle physics in the United States.

From the start, Weerts had no doubt that he would study physics at university. But it was a riveting class about neutrino scattering at the RWTH Aachen University in Germany that compelled him to do both his masters and his PhD at the same university, working on neutrino experiments at CERN, the European particle-physics lab near Geneva, Switzerland.

His biggest career decision, he says, was to move to the United States and work at the Tevatron — the world's highest-energy particle accelerator — as a postdoc at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory (FermiLab) in Batavia, Illinois.

From there he took a faculty position at Michigan State University in 1983, where he was able to spend the next 20 years working on one of the two large-collider experiments designed at the Tevatron. He oversaw the programme — which continues to collect data today — since it began running in the 1990s.

A self-described “lucky guy”, Weerts was part of the team working at the Tevatron that in 1995 discovered the largest elemental subatomic particle: the elusive top quark.

Always on the lookout for the next big collaborative project, Weerts recently took a year's sabbatical at FermiLab to champion the International Linear Collider — the proposed particle accelerator that would be able to create high-energy collisions between electrons and positrons.

Most recently, he decided to put off retirement and give up his tenure at Michigan State to serve as director of high-energy physics at Argonne National Lab in Argonne, Illinois. This decision was driven by his belief that the younger cohort should conduct the experiments and that it is the duty of the more senior scientists to lead their field in new directions.

“I feel I owe it to my research field to help define the next big project in particle physics,” Weerts says. Being a director at Argonne enables him to make this contribution at an administrative level, he adds. And with so much left to discover, he wasn't quite ready for retirement just yet.

“Only 4% of the Universe is made out of the stuff we've studied for the past 2,000 years,” he says. ■

**Virginia Gewin**

## SCIENTISTS & SOCIETY

### Dabbling in science journalism

Somewhere between working on my research project, panicking about deadlines and teaching undergraduate students, I took a graduate course in science communication at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden. The rationale behind it is that scientists must accept responsibility for communicating their results to a wide audience.

The course — held one evening a week this past autumn and taught by journalists, government administrators and scientists — covered many aspects of science journalism, ranging from ethics, graphics, broadcast and magazine reporting to the overall portrayal of science in the media.

As part of the course, I did a two-week internship at the *Nature* office in Washington DC with *Naturejobs* editor Paul Smaglik. He showed me how he runs his sections and let me help with some of the editing tasks. I discovered the difficulties in shortening and altering other people's work. I talked to some other *Nature* staff, and asked the manuscript editors about the editing and peer-review process.

I also found time for reflection. I learned to appreciate how significant communicating about science and medicine is to the education of the general public. Journalists are key

players in this process, acting as interpreters between scientists and the public. During this interpretation, though, messages can become distorted and that can strongly influence public opinion. Perhaps we scientists are partly to blame: we spend years learning new laboratory techniques but spend far less time thinking about how best to deliver our newly found knowledge to the public.

More importantly, in a democratic society, controversial issues in research should be open and accessible to the public, which has a natural interest in knowing how taxpayers' money is spent. Scientists should play a key role in shining a light on these issues, and one way to do that is to engage with the media. It is also in the individual researcher's own interest to do this, to generate interest, gain recognition and explain the need for funding.

This course taught me that the public perception of science has become almost more important than the science itself. I hereby promise that in my career, I will keep a straight and honest relationship with medical journalists. If that turns out to be too difficult, well, then I might just have to become one myself. ■

**Lina Nordquist is a PhD student at Uppsala University in Sweden.**

#### GRADUATE JOURNAL

### PhD TV

They'll never make a TV comedy about graduate students. I know this because I just spent three days watching all of the second season of *Scrubs* — the goofy American comedy about would-be doctors doing their residency. *Scrubs* has three things that a show about graduate students wouldn't.

One, people actually die on *Scrubs*. “Professor Frank, I just don't think this *E. coli* is going to pull through” is unlikely to drive ratings.

Two, they have patients. The best we can offer are ideas and blips on a graph. Blowsy operations are more fun to watch than percolating ideas.

Three, people have been to see doctors. They might reasonably wonder what it's like to be one. By contrast, tell someone at a party you're in science and the next question tends to be “So, how's the punch?” As grouchy Dr Cox would summarize on *Scrubs*: “Viewers just don't care about graduate students, Bambi.”

This really is a shame. Consider me: I'm in my last year of a PhD, looking for a postdoc in a field that's fundable, not super-competitive, yet super-hot for 15 more years. I keep daydreaming about careers that society respects more, like plumbing. My mom keeps calling to tell me about my friends who have bought houses. I spend more time talking to yeast than to people. My doctor tells me I stress too much. Oh, and I need to graduate. Soon. How will all this unfold? Stay tuned. If TV executives happen to be reading this, call any time. I'll be in lab. ■

**Milan de Vries is a molecular-biology graduate student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts.**