

SPOTTED

# Science solidarity; ENCODE expansion; strength in diversity

BY KATIE MOISSE

3 FEBRUARY 2017

WEEK OF JANUARY 30<sup>TH</sup>

## Science solidarity

The executive order President Donald Trump signed last week blocks people from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States. The ban is **weighing heavily on scientists**, many of whom have spent years being vetted for visas or rely on the talent of foreign students to fuel their research.

**BannedScientists.org** shares the personal stories of scientists blocked from jobs and conferences, as well as those who are “wary to live in, leave, or visit the U.S.,” according to the site. But the ban is also bringing scientists together. EMBO, Europe’s molecular biology organization, has released a ‘science solidarity list’ — a rundown of researchers who are willing to **share lab space or living space** with U.S.-based scientists stranded by the ban.

Trump’s travel restrictions also threaten to strain international collaborations. **Geraldine Dawson**, president of the International Society for Autism Research (INSAR), says they will have a “direct, detrimental impact on our scientific community.”

“We believe that this will slow progress in understanding autism and related disorders and in finding more effective treatments to lessen disabilities for those affected.” Dawson wrote in a **letter to INSAR members** on Tuesday.

Dawson notes that about 30 percent of the society’s members are from countries other than the U.S., and the next annual meeting is scheduled for May in San Francisco.

A *Spectrum* article this week revealed that many autism researchers are more **politically engaged** than ever before and are concerned about the new administration’s policies. Some are particularly **worried about Betsy DeVos**, Trump’s pick for education secretary. We will continue to cover the impact, and invite you to contact us at **[news@spectrumnews.org](mailto:news@spectrumnews.org)** with your

perspective.

**SOURCES:**

**Banned scientists /**

Banned scientists

<https://bannedscientists.org/>**EMBO** /

The science solidarity list

<http://www.embo.org/science-solidarity>

---

## ENCODE expansion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) plans to **spend \$31.5 million** this year expanding its encyclopedia of the genome's regulatory regions, called **ENCODE** (The Encyclopedia of DNA Elements).

Since ENCODE launched in 2003, more than 1,600 studies have used the tool, according to an NIH statement. The new funds will be doled out in grants to researchers contributing to ENCODE.

"These awards provide the opportunity to strengthen this foundation by expanding the breadth and depth of the resource," **Elise Feingold**, program director at the National Human Genome Research Institute, said in the statement.

**SOURCES:**

**National Institutes of Health /** 02 Feb 2017

NIH to expand critical catalog for genomics research

<https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/nih-expand-critical-catalog-genomics-research>

---

## Strength in diversity

What would U.S. science look like without immigrants? Well, a lot less prize-worthy. Immigrants have won 47 of the country's 123 **Nobel Prizes in chemistry, medicine and physics**, *Buzzfeed* reports. That's 38 percent.

The scientific workforce in the U.S. is **growing even more diverse**, according to a chart in *Nature*. Roughly 42 percent of scientists in 2014 were from minority groups, and 52 percent were born outside the U.S.

**SOURCES:**

<https://www.spectrumnews.org>

---

**Buzzfeed** / 31 Jan 2017

These Nobel Prize winners show why immigration is so important for American science

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/peteraldhous/immigration-and-science>

**Nature** / 03 Feb 2017

The new face of U.S. science  
<http://www.nature.com/news/the-new-face-of-us-science-1.21229>

---

## Overblown data

A new class at the University of Washington in Seattle is **getting a lot of attention** for its hilarious name: “**Calling Bullshit in the Age of Big Data.**”

**Carl Bergstrom**, professor of biology, and **Jevin West**, assistant professor of information, want students to develop an eye for results that don’t add up or are falsely interpreted.

“As we read various scientific papers, or media descriptions of the latest discoveries or the latest claims some startup is making — let alone seeing the kind of stuff you get sent on Twitter — we were like, wow,” Bergstrom told *The Seattle Times*. “There’s so much bullshit.”

A more traditional name for the course would be “Critical Reasoning and Statistical Inference,” *The Seattle Times* reported, sarcastically asking, “But who would sign up for that?”

**SOURCES:**

**The Seattle Times** / 28 Jan 2017

UW class on how to spot fake data goes viral within hours

<http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/education/uw-class-on-how-to-spot-fake-data-goes-viral-within-hours/>

---

## Marching forward

The March for Science has a date: 22 April.

A private Facebook group dedicated to the march in Washington, D.C., has more than 814,000 members. Groups are planning satellite marches in other cities, too.

One goal of the march is to protest Trump’s ‘alternative facts’ about climate change, vaccine safety and other areas of science in which the new president seems to take a non-scientific stance. But not all scientists think a protest is the right approach.

“A march by scientists, while well intentioned, will serve only to **trivialize and politicize** the science

we care so much about, turn scientists into another group caught up in the culture wars and further drive the wedge between scientists and a certain segment of the American electorate,” **Robert Young**, professor of coastal geography at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina, wrote in an op-ed for *The New York Times* on Tuesday.

Rather than marching on D.C., Young recommends that scientists “march into local civic groups, churches, schools, county fairs and, privately, into the offices of elected officials,” to make contact with Americans who don’t know any scientists. “Put a face on the debate. Help them understand what we do, and how we do it.”

**SOURCES:**

**The New York Times** / 31 Jan 2017

A scientist’s march on Washington is a bad idea

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/31/opinion/a-scientists-march-on-washington-is-a-bad-idea.html>

---

## Job news

**Chris Gunter**, formerly associate director of research at the Marcus Autism Center in Atlanta, Georgia, is now director of communications operations at the center.

Making a career move? Send your news to [jobmoves@spectrumnews.org](mailto:jobmoves@spectrumnews.org).

---