

PRESS CONFERENCE

>> Magnus Nordborg becomes new director of the GMI <<

The Austrian Academy of Sciences recruits the internationally renowned plant geneticist and molecular biologist as director of the Gregor Mendel Institute of Molecular Plant Biology (GMI).

Thursday, December 11, 2008, 10:00 a.m.

Austrian Academy of Sciences, Clubraum
Dr. Ignaz Seipel-Platz 2
A-1010 Vienna

Participants:

Peter Schuster
President of the Austrian Academy of Sciences

Georg Stingl
Secretary of the Section for Mathematics and the Natural Sciences of the Austrian Academy of sciences

Barry Dickson
Scientific Director of the Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP),
Chair of the Search Committee for the Scientific Director of the GMI

Magnus Nordborg
Designated Scientific Director of the Gregor Mendel Institute of Molecular Plant Biology (GMI)

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The Austrian Academy of Sciences recruits the internationally renowned plant geneticist and molecular biologist as director of the Gregor Mendel Institute of Molecular Plant Biology (GMI).

On January 1, 2009, Magnus Nordborg assumes the position of the scientific director of the Gregor Mendel Institute of Molecular Plant Biology (GMI) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Born (1965) and trained in Sweden, he now serves as Professor of Molecular and Computational Biology at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. The Academy is happy and proud of having recruited this top researcher in the area of molecular plant biology.

Dr. Nordborg covers a broad scope of research ranging from the molecular basis of plant genetics to models of population genetics. By doing so, he uses the genetic variation in defined populations to explore and, ultimately, understand the basic mechanisms governing development, physiology and evolution of species. The elucidation of the genetic basis of evolutionary adaptation is a challenging goal that can now be met by means of modern sequence technology tools.

The Gregor Mendel Institute of Molecular Plant Biology (GMI) was founded by the Austrian Academy of Sciences in 2000 to promote research excellence within the field of plant molecular biology.

Research at the GMI currently focuses on the genetic and epigenetic plasticity of the plant genome in the contexts of gene regulation, chromosome biology and development. GMI scientists also study the nature and crosstalk of plant signal transduction pathways in response to intrinsic and environmental stimuli at both the genetic and epigenetic levels. *Arabidopsis thaliana* is used as the primary model organism.

The GMI is located at the Vienna Biocenter Campus within the Austrian Academy of Sciences Life Sciences Center Vienna. The Vienna Biocenter Campus, which encompasses university- and non-university-based basic research institutes as well as biotechnology companies, provides an ideal environment for the GMI. The Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP), the Institute of Molecular Biotechnology (IMBA), as well as the Max F. Perutz Laboratories of the University of Vienna and of the Medical University of Vienna are located in its direct proximity.

Statement

Peter Schuster

Präsident der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften

The Austrian Academy of Sciences is pleased to announce today that it has recruited a leading scientist from the USA as new Director for the Gregor Mendel Institute. Professor Magnus Nordborg is currently working at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, and will take charge of the Institute for Molecular Plant Biology in Vienna as of January 1, 2009. He combines evolution research on populations with molecular plant genetics, and not only will his special fields be a decisive enrichment for the academic spectrum of the GMI, he will also provide a new direction of research at the Vienna Biocentre, the successful biology cluster in Dr. Bohrgasse.

The Austrian Academy of Sciences pursues an uncompromising strategy of increasing the scientific performance of its research institutes. The best opportunities for making the changes necessary for the future in the research portfolio of a research organisation are the foundation of new institutions and the appointment of new directors. In the last decade, new institutions have been created that have already acquired a leading position in the global research scene. Leading international figures have been selected and recruited as scientific directors. Examples of new or restructured academic institutes include the Institute of Molecular Biotechnology under the direction of Josef Penninger, the Institute for Quantum Optics and Quantum Information under director Rainer Blatt, -- the Vienna section is under the direction of Anton Zeilinger, the Johann Radon Institute for Computational and Applied Mathematics under Heinz Engl, the Research Centre for Molecular Medicine under Giulio Superti-Furga on the site of the General Hospital in Vienna and the Institute for Demography with director Wolfgang Lutz, forming a bridge to the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Laxenburg. In order to be able to recruit leading scientists, the Academy needs tailor-made and flexible research opportunities with an excellent infrastructure as well as an attractive environment with other inspiring leading scientists. The Vienna Biocentre and quantum physics in Innsbruck and Vienna can serve here as best practice examples.

Statement by Georg Stingl

Secretary of the Section for Mathematics and the Natural Sciences of the Austrian Academy of Sciences

More than twenty years ago, a group of people with vision and foresight had the dream of putting Vienna back on the map as a center of biomedical research and biotechnology in general. One proud result of this endeavor is the Vienna Biocenter - Campus Dr. Bohrgasse: a successful mixture of university- and non-university-based research institutes funded by public or industry sources together with a handful of spin-off companies whose number and size is steadily increasing. The success of such a biotech research cluster requires a firm financial basis and, linked to it but not always a consequence of it, a critical mass of dedicated people who provide a fertile soil for the pursuit of highly competitive, cutting-edge research. By the appointment of Magnus Nordborg as the new director of the GMI, the Austrian Academy of Sciences is contributing decisively to this critical mass, making the Bohrgasse campus an even more attractive center in the life sciences.

Statement by Barry J. Dickson

Scientific Director of the Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP)
Chair of the Search Committee for the Scientific Director of the GMI

With the emergence of molecular biology in the latter half of the last century, biological research has been increasingly focused on a very select group of model organisms and the sheltered lives they lead in the controlled laboratory environment. While this approach has yielded many important discoveries in the molecular and cell biology of these organisms, it remains largely uncoupled from any understanding of the factors that shape the variability and evolution of these organisms in their natural environment. With the rise of whole-genome sequencing, these two divergent paths of biological investigation are now coming together in a powerful new synthesis. Studying variation in natural populations is providing new insights into the underlying molecular and cellular mechanisms, while also placing the mechanistic findings from the laboratory into the broader context of the organism in its natural setting. This approach is also not confined to a few model organisms in the laboratory. Indeed, the genome-wide association studies that are a hallmark of this approach are now beginning to reveal the molecular basis for phenotypic variation in humans. What makes each of us different, and why are some of us more prone to certain diseases than others?

With his pioneering studies, mainly in plants, Magnus Nordborg has emerged as one of the leaders in this exciting new field. The search committee, and the many international experts we spoke to, were unanimous in their view that Nordborg would be an ideal director for GMI. We are confident that he will provide the strong and visionary leadership that will take GMI into exciting new directions, whilst also further developing the existing strengths in plant molecular genetics that have been built up under the directorship of Dieter Schweizer and Ortrun Mittelsten Scheid. We are delighted to welcome Magnus Nordborg to Austria, and to the Vienna Biocenter Campus in particular, and offer him our full support in this exciting new endeavour.

Statement by Magnus Nordborg

Designated Scientific Director of the Gregor Mendel Institute of Molecular Plant Biology (GMI)

Making sense of natural variation remains one of the greatest challenges in biology. Understanding how genetic variation translates into phenotypic variation, and how this translation depends on the environment, is fundamental to our understanding of evolution, and has enormous practical implications for human health as well as for plant and animal breeding. While a purely statistical description of the relationship between genotype and phenotype may be sufficient for disease prediction and breeding purposes, it is not sufficient for developing cures, nor for understanding evolution. For these purposes, we need to open the black box of genetics, and start dissecting the mechanisms whereby genetic variation leads to phenotypic variation. Plants are ideal for this purpose, and an institution like GMI, with its existing strengths in plant molecular genetics (especially epigenetics), and access to top-notch infrastructure, is an ideal place in which to build a world-leading program that focuses on understanding the genotype-phenotype map (an objective Gregor Mendel would surely have approved of).

Picture of Magnus Nordborg:

http://www.oeaw.ac.at/shared/news/2008/img/nordborg_gmi.jpg

Gregor Mendel Institute of Molecular Plant Biology (GMI)

Research at the GMI is curiosity driven and currently focuses on the genetic and epigenetic plasticity of the plant genome in the contexts of gene regulation, chromosome biology and development. GMI scientists also study the nature and crosstalk of plant signal transduction pathways in response to intrinsic and environmental stimuli at both the genetic and epigenetic levels. *Arabidopsis thaliana* is used as the primary model organism. All discoveries made are screened for patentability before publication, and patent applications have already been successfully submitted. Research groups are evaluated annually by an international scientific advisory board. A rich seminar series, the GMI's participation in the Vienna Biocenter International PhD programme as well as numerous international collaborations ensure that the GMI is at the forefront of research in the field of plant biology.

For further information:

<http://www.gmi.oeaw.ac.at/en/home/>