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University News

Obama names Washington University biologist to his science advisory council:

President Obama has appointed Barbara A. Schaal, Ph.D., the Mary-Dell Chilton Distinguished Professor of Biology in Arts & Sciences and vice president of the National Academy of Sciences, to the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST). PCAST is an advisory group of 20 of the nation's leading scientists and engineers who will advise the president and vice president and formulate policy in the many areas where understanding of science, technology, and innovation is key to strengthening the nation's economy and forming policy that works for the American people.



Schaal

New College Savings Initiative aims to advance college success for all families:

The New America Foundation and the Center for Social Development (CSD) at Washington University announced a new College Savings Initiative to examine and improve "529" college savings plans so more people have the opportunity to attend and complete college. "Saving money is not easy, but research shows many people can save when they have incentives and a way to do so. More low-income families may save with well-designed 529s and incentives," says Margaret Clancy, policy director at CSD. "We will study 529 innovations to see which ones are effective. This will inform 529 policy so that it can benefit families of all income levels."

Medical students to benefit from two new simulation centers:

Students at Washington University School of Medicine have two new state-of-the-art simulation centers in which they can get hands-on clinical training. The Saigh Foundation Pediatric Simulation Center opened April 14 at St. Louis Children's Hospital, and the Howard and Joyce Wood Simulation Center at the Farrell Learning and Teaching Center opened last fall. Both centers allow medical students, interns, and residents training at the School to fine-tune diagnostic and treatment skills in a realistic situation.

Research

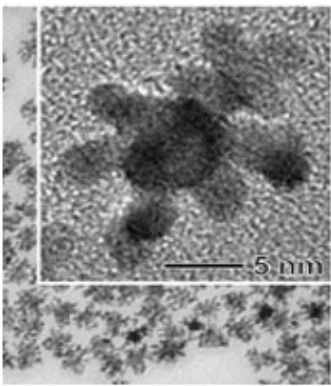
New catalyst could boost cleaner fuel use:

Material scientists at Washington University have developed a technique for a bimetallic fuel cell catalyst that is efficient, robust, and two-to-five times more effective than commercial catalysts. The novel technique eventually will enable a cost effective fuel cell technology, which has been waiting in the wings for decades and should give a boost for cleaner use of fuels worldwide.

Researchers discover why eczema often leads to asthma:

Many young children who get a severe skin rash develop asthma months or years later. Doctors call the progression from eczema, or atopic dermatitis, to breathing problems the atopic march. Now scientists at Washington University School of Medicine have uncovered what might be the key to atopic march. They've shown that a substance secreted by damaged skin circulates through the body and triggers asthmatic symptoms in allergen-exposed laboratory mice.

Researchers evaluate iPod-sized device for hard-to-treat high blood pressure:



Younan Xia

A new catalyst based on dendritic platinum arms grown on palladium nanocrystals has been developed by Washington University's Younan Xia and his collaborators. Tests have shown that the "bimetallic" catalyst outperforms commercial catalysts, which could enable a cost effective fuel cell technology and ultimately provide cleaner fuels worldwide.

Some 15 million Americans have high blood pressure that can't be controlled with medication, leaving them at high risk for early death, stroke, heart disease, or kidney failure. Researchers at Washington University School of Medicine are evaluating whether an investigational device can help these patients keep their blood pressure in check. Similar to a pacemaker, the iPod-sized device is implanted under the skin near the collarbone, with wires that carry electrical signals to nerve receptors along the carotid arteries in the neck. The signals activate the body's own system for regulating blood pressure.

Features

Ring-nesia:

A flurry of recent research has documented that talking on a cell phone poses a dangerous distraction for drivers and others whose attention should be focused elsewhere. Now, a new study in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* finds that just the ring of a cell phone may be equally distracting, especially when it comes in a classroom setting or includes a familiar song as a ringtone. "In any setting where people are trying to acquire knowledge and trying to retain that information in some way, a distraction that may just seem like a common annoyance to people may have a really disruptive effect on their later retention of that information," says the study's lead author, Jill Shelton, a postdoctoral psychology fellow in Arts & Sciences.



Students exposed to a briefly ringing cell phone scored 25 percent worse on a test of material presented before the distraction.

Plant biodiversity enhanced thanks to spillover from landscape corridors:

Researchers at Washington University, along with collaborators at three other universities, have discovered that the biodiversity in a patch of habitat can extend outside the borders of a protected area. This effect is magnified when corridors — skinny strips of land — connect the habitats. Their findings, reported in the online issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, provide a strategy for managing nature preserves to maximize biodiversity in the small spaces that are already formally protected.

Living building challenge:

An opening ceremony for what could be one of North America's greenest buildings — a flagship building on the cutting edge of sustainable design and energy efficiency — took place May 29 at Washington University's new Living Learning Center at the University's Tyson Research Center. The Living Learning Center is a 2,900-square-foot facility built to meet the Living Building Challenge — designed to be the most stringent green building rating system in the world — of the Cascadia Region Green Building Council. No building has met its standard yet, but the Living Learning Center is in the running to be the first in North America.

Kudos

Yixin Chen, assistant professor in the School of Engineering & Applied Science, has been named to the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research*. He will also serve as a keynote

Heard on Campus

"There is something about the fresh perspective, the naiveté, the limitless energy that comes along with youth and inexperience that enables recent graduates to solve problems that many more experienced people have given up on."

—Wendy Kopp, founder and chief executive officer of Teach For America, a national corps of outstanding college graduates who commit to teach in some of the country's neediest schools for at least two years, in her Commencement address to the Class of 2009

speaker for the 2009 International Conference on Computational Intelligence and Natural Computing.

Roger Follmer, head men's tennis coach, has been named the 2009 Wilson/Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) NCAA Division III National Coach of the Year. He previously won the award following the 2006 season.

Tzyh Jong Tarn, professor of systems science & mathematics in the School of Engineering & Applied Science, received the 2009 George Saridis Leadership Award in Robotics and Automation from the IEEE Robotics and Automation Society.

About @Washington University in St. Louis

This newsletter is prepared by Special Development Communications Projects staff in Alumni and Development Programs. It is intended to provide a brief summary of what is happening at the University. Alumni, parents, and friends of the University for whom we have valid e-mail addresses automatically receive @Washington University in St. Louis.

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One Brookings Drive, St. Louis, MO 63130
(314) 935-5000

