Monthly S&T Highlights from Japan
NSF Tokyo Office - October 2001

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1. [Equipment to Detect Anthrax on the Spot] Takara Brewery Company will start sale of a set of equipment and reagent by the end of October which can detect anthrax on the spot where the suspicious materials are found. The company already has the right to sell small-sized equipment which has been developed by a U.S. company to identify the species of bacteria. Takara will combine the equipment with the reagent which Takara has developed to react to anthrax. If the equipment is connected with a cell phone, the detected result will be known in 40 minutes. The cost per equipment is Yen 5 million (ca. $42,000), and their projection is to sell 100 sets. (Summary translation of an article on Nihon Keizai Shinbun - 10/23/01)

2. [The Goal of 30 Nobel Laureate Lacks Common Sense] Dr. Ryoji Noyori, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry in 2001, Professor at Nagoya University, criticized the national goal set by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEXT) of 30 Nobel Laureate from Japan in the next 50 years, by saying that scientists do their best in what they are interested in; the prize should not be the goal of research just like it is not possible to compare Mozart and Beethoven. Also, he commented on industry-university collaboration by saying that the role of university is education and research; whereas there are discussions that universities should totally make contributions to industries, it is wrong. The reason why the industries are currently in a critical situation is because of the lack of the ability of the researchers in industries. He further mentioned that it is because of the big gap in the levels of graduate education between western countries and Japan. He emphasized the importance of leveling up graduate schools in Japan. (Summary translation of an article on Asahi Newspaper - 10/14/01)

3. [Industry-related Research Results Prioritized] The Nobel Prizes to Dr. Ryoji Noyori, Nagoya University, in 2001 and Dr. Hideki Shirakawa, Tsukuba University, in 2000 epitomize that the prize recipients are not limited to basic science but include those in applied fields. This is good news for Japan which has many researchers strong in industrial technologies. It is said that the prize for this year could have been given to these three researchers years ago and the reason for delay has been attributed to the limited number of three awardees in one field. In fact, in addition to the three researchers who received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry this year, there is one more French researcher who could have been included in the recipients of the Prize. His research is in the same field with the three Prize recipients this year. The only difference was that his research was purely in basic science and theory. On the other hand, the research results of the

three prize recipients were applied to medicine and other industrial products. Also, Dr. Shirakwa's research results were also applied in industries. Based on such trends in the way the Prize recipients are selected, the number of researchers who are concerned with the selection of the Prize would increase in the future in Japan, including Dr. Sumio Iijima of NEC who has discovered carbon nano tube and Dr. Shuji Nakamura of UC-Santa Barbara who has developed blue light emitting diode. (Summary translation of an article on Nihon Keizai Shinbun - 10/14/01)

4. [Supplementary Budgets by Two Stages] It is almost certain that the Japanese government's supplementary budgets will be issued by two stages. The first supplementary budget will focus on the countermeasures for unemployment and the second one will focus on the countermeasures for terrorists' attack and measures for increasing public demand. By issuing the second one the Japanese government would have to issue more than Yen 30 trillion of national bond, although it was the amount the Prime Minister has been insisting not to exceed. (Summary translation of an article on Nihon Keizai Shinbun - 10/17/01)

5. [University-wide Collaboration with Industry] University of Tokyo has decided to establish an organization of experts which will be the bridge between the University and industries. Such an effort will help enhance the movement to link national/public universities and the private sector. According to the interim report by the Working Group for promoting industry-university collaboration established at the University of Tokyo, to be newly established will be an "Office for Promoting Collaboration between Industry and University." The effort will cover not only science fields, but also human literature fields within the university. Such an office will be established within this year at the earliest. Its major activities will include hiring of attorneys and technology-transfer coordinator who will be "OBs" (old boys) of companies, with whom the professors and companies will consult. The Office will also manage IPRs and proprietary information as well as establish a database for research by the faculty members and patent-related information. (Summary translation of an article on Asahi Newspaper - 10/19/01)

6. [Hitotsubashi University to Adopt GPA System] Hitotsubashi University (state university) has decided to adopt a GPA (grade point average) system from the year 2003 in its four departments. The system evaluates students' performance by five levels from A through F each of which has score of 4 through 0. At the end of each semester each student will add up the scores and have the average score (GPA). The President said that it will make it possible to make the students' evaluation by global standard, which will therefore make it easy for the students to study abroad, e.g., in the U.S. According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEXT), the number of four-year colleges which have adopted GPA system has been increasing from the viewpoint of establishing a university where it is not easy to graduate. More than 60 private colleges have adopted this system. (Summary translation of an article on Asahi Newspaper - 10/23/01)

7. [Genetic Spy Case] To the question of what Japan should do to secure freedom of research, Dr. Kenichi Arai, Professor, University of Tokyo, who knows both Drs. Okamoto and Serizawa who were indicted in the U.S. for the charge of carrying genetic materials from a U.S. institute to an institute in Japan and using the materials there, which was viewed against economic espionage, says that some rules need to be established on the property of the research materials and information. Such rules have existed in the U.S. since 1980's. The rule in scientific circles is different from that in industrial circles. IPRs including patents cannot be discussed at the same level with researchers' ideas and materials. In the days when new medicines are developed based on genomic information, establishment of new rules that promotes collaboration between universities and industries is required. (Summary translation of an article on Nihon Kdizai Shimbun - 10/29/01)

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