



Aaron Novick

It was during his time at Los Alamos that Novick met with now University Pres. Paul Olum. Competing against military police teams in flag-football league games, Novick and Olum played for the civilian team.

"I have this one photo where I'm throwing a pass and Paul is blocking a defensive player," Novick said.

During the time of the project, Novick was talking with Leo Szilard, the man who initiated the Manhattan Project and wrote the letter that Albert Einstein later sent to Pres. Roosevelt. It was Szilard who asked if he would like to join him in an adventure in biology. The idea appealed to Novick.

Novick then quit his job, and the two of them started a biology research project in Chicago. This turned out to be the beginning of study in the field of molecular biology.

"In a sense it was easy to get started," Novick said. "There

wasn't much information on the subject. We were, really, pioneers."

After working with Szilard for about ten years, Novick tired of living in Chicago.

"It's a great place for work and cultural interests," he said. "But there's nowhere to go on the weekends. It's a thousand miles to the nearest mountain or ocean. And, it's easy to get mugged."

It was at this time that the opportunity to initiate a program of molecular biology at the University of Oregon came to Novick.

"At first, I said no," Novick said. "It seemed too remote, too isolated." After a slight delay, he accepted the position and came to the University at Christmas of 1958.

As a panel member with the National Science Foundation, Novick learned of a program that would make funds available for scientific inquiry on a competitive basis.

Novick and his colleagues successfully applied, making the University one of the first three schools in the nation to receive such funds. The University acquired \$7 million, which was used to build the top two floors of Science II and all of Science III. The money was also used to fund the computers on campus and two more faculty positions, filled by University Profs. Franklin Stahl and George Streisinger, who died this summer.

One active field of study at the institute, as well as nationally, is genetic regulation, the question of how cells differentiate and how they regulate their activity.

"It's like a piano with a million different keys, and it's a matter of what tune you're playing," Novick said.

Many practical benefits have come from this course of study. The study of genetic regulation has led to genetic engineering, the manipulation of information within a cell. Pharmaceutical companies now use genetically altered bacteria to manufacture human insulin. Another benefit from this field of study has been gains in cancer research.

"The tentative conclusion is that cancer comes about in the switching back on of a gene that is supposed to be shut off," he explained. "This can happen in a number of ways, including mutations and viruses."

Considering himself the "ultimate amateur," Novick has interest in almost all disciplines of science. Spending much time discussing new developments in various fields with other researchers, Novick feels that scientists have a great deal of responsibility to the general public.

"I think it's our duty to explain the results of scientific inquiry to the public," Novick said. "Many of the findings can be menacing to humans if exploited badly."

During his time of research at Los Alamos, Novick became concerned about the issue of a nuclear arms race as a result of the project. At one point he was chairman of a committee that lobbied in Congress on the issue of atomic energy. In the last few years, he also has spoken publicly on the issue of arms control.

Novick agrees with his friend and scientist Carl Sagan that the Earth's atmosphere is the most vulnerable element of our environment and that it cannot absorb the impact of a thermonuclear war.

"I feel that the public ought to say to the government that they should be up night and day working on this problem of getting arms control. It's too God damn serious," Novick said.



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