



Panelists discuss future of state biotech industry

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was pertinent to the Bay Area because of the high number of biotech jobs here—about 900 companies, enough to make the area the largest biotech hub in the world—and the relative lack of training available.

While the opening of the Newark campus this spring will eventually bring the total number of yearly Ohlone biotechnology students up to around 500, said Dean of Science, Technology and Academic Affairs Ron Quinta, many other schools do not have the funds for such an expansion.

But while there may be a shortage of biotech training programs in California, there is no shortage of demand for the workers they produce. Not only is the average yearly starting salary for a trained biotech worker \$70,000, said president of local non-profit BayBio Matt Gardner, but this year there is a demand of about \$100 billion that “needs to be spent” on the manufactur-

ing of biotech products. Because of the shortage of workers and manufacturing facilities, California companies will probably cash in on less than half of this \$100 billion, said Gardner.

If California continues to fail to capitalize on manufacturing opportunities such as these, the state will lose more and more biotech dollars to other states and nations, said Gardner. Already, many states have expressed interest in becoming big players on the biotechnology field, particularly North Carolina, that in September cut the ribbon for the world’s largest biotech training center at North Carolina State University.

The Bay Area’s location has been both a huge advantage and an impediment to the growth of the area’s biotech industry. It has been a benefit, said East Bay Economic Development Alliance Technology and Trade Director Robert Sakai, because of what he called “technolog-

ogy fusion:” the blending of two separate disciplines—in this case, technology and biology, two Silicon Valley industry mainstays—into an entirely new field.

However, the very industry that made Silicon Valley successful has made the local housing prices so prohibitive that biotech workers often have trouble finding affordable homes in the vicinities of their workplaces.

Despite general lack of funding, however, schools and agencies have worked to roll out different types of biotech training programs in recent years. At Ohlone, Quinta said the college is moving forward on a variety of different programs. One, called the Learning Alliance for Bioscience (LAB) program, which aims to train interested high school students in biotechnology, already has six area high schools participating, with 240 high school students and 60 eighth grade students in the program. Another program trains

displaced workers for biotech careers, and a third trains students currently in biotech jobs more thoroughly so they can advance in their company.

An added bonus of this last program, said Quinta, is that the positions that are vacated when the employee moves higher provide jobs that can be filled by Ohlone biotech graduates.

Other associations had plans of their own for training the next wave of scientists and technicians. Many of these emphasized a hands-on approach to learning, with a mix of classroom learning and internships at area biotech firms.

Many of these programs are funded by grants distributed by the California State University Program for Education and Research in Biotechnology (CSUPERB), which distributed over \$1 million in grants over the past three years. CSUPERB is asking for an additional \$3 million from the state to

fund its program.

Once trained, more substantial money exists for beginning biotech students. For example, in the first half of this year venture capitalists invested \$340 million in life sciences companies, which, totaled with the funds made available by the Energy Biosciences Institute and the Joint BioEnergy Institute, resulted in \$1.26 billion that will flow into life sciences companies over the next several years.

When asked whether she was pushing any pro-biotech legislation, 10th District Sen. Ellen Corbett said that while she tries to encourage biotech funding when possible and makes an effort to allocate more money for biotech in the yearly budget, she personally is not leading any legislation calling for more funding.

She said she was hopeful that the success of biotechnology would soon eliminate the need for state funding.

Mental health expert to speak

By **BRIAN CHU**
Staff writer

The Psychology Club will bring Dr. John Contrufo to Ohlone this Friday to hold an open forum on psychiatric/psychological disorders. The event will be held in Room 8205 between 2:30 and 3:30 p.m.

Contrufo said he wishes to educate the society at large on mental illnesses because he said “a lot of the stigmas (regarding mental health) are based on ignorance.”

Contrufo believes there is a lot of damaging of self esteem in our society. It has become an epidemic. “It’s really about the wounding of our children. So much of what we see in adult life starts very early and

the confusion then comes through into the adult life.”

When asked what he would tell students at Ohlone that have to make difficult decisions, Contrufo replied with, “The process of decision making is the same at any age. There is no guarantee the important thing is taking the responsibility for the choice. With mental health, the worst choice is death.”

During medical school, when Contrufo was going through a lot of personal problems, he had both an academic and clinical interest in psychiatry. Contrufo finished residency in 1975 and has spent his entire career in Alameda county. He enjoys working with disenfranchised people. “It’s part being a

doctor, part being an advocate,” said Contrufo.

After the forum, the Psychology Club and other attendees will meet at Mission Pizza for refreshments and to discuss the event.

The Psychology Club’s future events include bringing Furry Friends, a group whose mission statement “is to consistently facilitate delivery of the love and affection of our volunteers and their pets. We enhance the lives and touch the hearts of people with special needs.” They will be at Ohlone on Nov. 30. The Psychology Club also plans to visit the sleep clinic at Stanford next semester.

Focus of talk: fun

Math Instructor Jeff O’Connell is very clear when it comes to describing the purpose the Brown Bag science seminar he will lead this Friday: It will not be to inform, or to instruct, or to teach anything about science. The goal of the talk is purely entertainment.

In fact, O’Connell won’t even be doing all of the talking. The seminar, entitled “Math in the Movies and on TV,” which will take place from 1 to 2 p.m. in Room 3201, will be mainly composed of a collection of humorous math-related film clips from such sources as Abbott and Costello and the Simpsons.

The clips range from division humor to differential equations and linear algebra hilarity. O’Connell said he would explain only enough math to make the more advanced wit accessible to all.

Anyone interested in learning more about the talk may go to www.ohlone.edu/people/joconnell/mathclips/.

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