

Correspondence

Early-career researchers: choose change, not complicity

Early-career researchers generally are ardent supporters of greater diversity, equity and inclusion, work–life balance and mental well-being in academia. Yet the precariousness of our careers seems to demand a default to an academic system that perpetuates injustices and poor quality of life (K. N. Laland *Nature* **584**, 653–654 (2020); E. N. Satinsky *et al. Sci. Rep.* **11**, 14370; 2021). We must apply the changes we wish to see in academia to our own lives if the system is to work better for everyone.

We need to recognize that many junior researchers cannot safeguard their careers by buying into current academic norms because of their life circumstances (having also to act as carers, for example), or because their identities are marginalized (people of colour, for example). When those who can choose to uphold problematic standards do so, those who cannot are further disadvantaged. Moreover, this complicity punts issues to the next generation. We should leave a better legacy for our pupils and children.

To create a more equitable, collaborative, healthy academia, we must lead by example. Let's start by discussing what academic values we support and how we can practise them now.

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Boost for Africa's research must protect its biodiversity

We write on behalf of 209 scientists (see go.nature.com/3sa16p9) to endorse a new initiative by the African Research Universities Alliance and the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities (see go.nature.com/3b364hj). This calls for greater investment by the African Union and the European Union in Africa's universities, to help them address global challenges such as public health, climate change and good governance. We strongly encourage expansion of the initiative to encompass environmental and biodiversity issues that are crucial to the continent's future.

Safeguarding Africa's extraordinary natural resources and biodiversity – the backbone of much of its economy and livelihood – demands a new generation of African scientists trained in environmental sciences. Experts are needed in conservation science and environmental economics, as well as in the collection, curation and analysis of biological data.

As Julius Nyerere, the former president of Tanzania, put it 60 years ago in a speech now known as the Arusha Manifesto: “The conservation of wildlife and wild places calls for specialist knowledge, trained manpower and money, and we look to other nations to co-operate with us in this important task – the success or failure of which not only affects the continent of Africa but the rest of the world as well.”

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In memory of a game-changing haematologist

Haematology has lost a giant: Paul Sylvain Frenette died in July, aged 56. His research led directly to the development of therapies that changed clinical practice. And he taught us – his former trainees – by example and shaped our careers.

Frenette was the inaugural director of the Ruth L. and David S. Gottesman Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City, where he built one of the strongest interdisciplinary stem-cell programmes in the United States. He developed new paradigms across a range of haematology topics.

For example, he helped to discover the mechanisms mediating vaso-occlusion in sickle-cell disease (A. Turhan *et al. Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* **99**, 3047–3051; 2002); to define how the nervous system regulates haematopoiesis (Y. Katayama *et al. Cell* **124**, 407–421; 2006); and to identify fundamental components and mechanisms through which the bone marrow niche regulates haematopoietic stem cells (see, for example, S. Méndez-Ferrer *et al. Nature* **466**, 829–834; 2010).

As a stellar academic, Frenette trained and influenced many scientists. He encouraged us to identify the key significance of our hypotheses and to do the best experiments to prove them.

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Australian bush fires and fuel loads

David Bowman and colleagues incorrectly cite our work to support their claim that politicians and the media misled the public by blaming Australia's 2019–20 wildfires on inappropriate land management (D. Bowman *et al. Nature* **584**, 188–191; 2020).

In our article (M. A. Adams *et al. Glob. Change Biol.* **26**, 3756–3758; 2020), we emphatically acknowledged that hot, dry weather (and generally drying climates) had created conditions that typically precede large Australian fires. We also offered empirical data showing that loads of litter fuel – which drives fire intensity – had reached critical levels. Although a political issue, litter fuels can be managed to mitigate fire risks (see F. Moreira *et al. Environ. Res. Lett.* **15**, 011001; 2020).

Our empirical data (see M. Neumann *et al. Ecosphere* **12**, e03693; 2021) are backed by an extensive literature on litter decomposition. As climates dry, decomposition slows and litter fuel accumulates faster. Measured fuel loads frequently exceed those predicted by Bowman *et al.* (see, for example, D. M. J. S. Bowman *et al. Plant Cell Environ.* **44**, 347–355; 2021), based on models with arbitrary limits reached within 10–20 years of previous fires.

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