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Bioinformatics awarded

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Two bioinformatics scientists have been awarded the Max Planck Research Prize for International Cooperation, each of which carries a cash award of €750,000 (USD \$915,900) to be spent over a period of 5 years.

[Martin Vingron](#), 42, director at the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Genetics in Berlin, and [Eugene W. Myers](#), 50, professor of computer science and molecular biology at the University of California, Berkeley, were honored Thursday (June 24) at a ceremony in Stuttgart.

In past years, the annual prize was awarded to as many as 12 researchers with cash payments of €150,000 (USD \$183,200), but was modified this year to make the prize more internationally attractive. The prize, awarded by the [Alexander von Humboldt Foundation](#) and the [Max Planck Society](#) with additional funding support from the Germany Ministry of Education and Research, now will go to only two researchers, one based inside Germany and one outside of Germany.

The goal of the prize is to promote collaboration on cutting-edge research between scientists from Germany and elsewhere.

Myers was described by the Max Planck Research Prize committee as one of the pioneers of computational molecular biology, which now is commonly called bioinformatics. As head of the bioinformatics department at Celera Genomics, he developed methods for stringing together the small segments of DNA that are generated during the sequencing process.

Vingron's main research interests center around the regulation of gene activity and gene expression. In an interview with us, he said that the awarding of such a prestigious prize to bioinformatics scientists is a signal that the field has come of age.

"I have been doing it almost 20 years," Vingron said. "For me, it came of age almost 20 years ago. But in society, [this year's prize] does mean that bioinformatics has now found widespread acceptance."

Vingron said he would use his award to help turn Berlin into what a "center of intellectual creativity" in bioinformatics, with a focus on regulatory genomics and network analysis. Seminars for up to 6 weeks in summer would be held at the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Genetics, with overseas researchers taking part. He also will use award money to help finance trips abroad for German-based bioinformatics scientists.

Vingron lamented that the German scientific community is diffused throughout the country, lacking the vibrant intellectual centers that can be found in countries like the United States and United Kingdom. "Heidelberg could be the one place in Germany that would be comparable to the centers you find elsewhere," he said.

References

1. Martin Vingron, [<http://www.molgen.mpg.de/~vingron/>]
2. Eugene W. Myers, [<http://www.eecs.berkeley.edu/~gene/>]
3. Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, [<http://www.avh.de/en/index.htm>]
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