

# *The Perfect Postdoc Package*

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Physics Division

Argonne National Laboratory

<http://www.phy.anl.gov/theory/staff/cdr.html>

# The Structure



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# The Structure

- 3 Postdoc Levels
  - Named Fellows
  - Director's Fellows
  - Divisional Fellows



# The Structure

- 3 Postdoc Levels
  - Named Fellows
  - Director's Fellows
  - Divisional Fellows
- Committee as a whole is involved in review of these applications.
- The bulk of this presentation will focus on the application and review process for these fellowships.



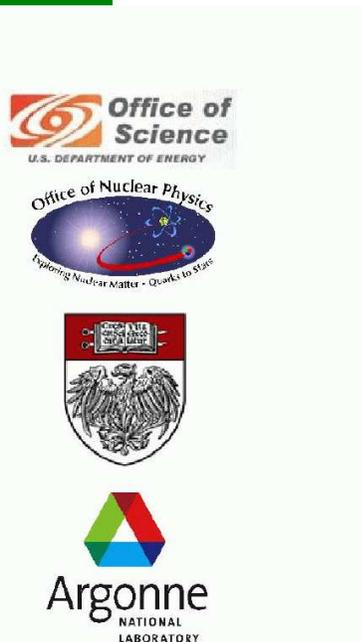
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NB. Argonne is serious: “*We intend that such a position provide an opportunity for post-doctoral training and experience to a person who has recently graduated; namely, graduated within approximately the last three years.*” If a candidate is longer in the tooth, then the nomination letter must make a compelling case for the ALD to override this guideline.



# Named and Director's Postdocs



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Web site – <http://www.dep.anl.gov/postdocs/>



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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Office of Nuclear Physics



Exploring Nuclear Matter - Quarks to Stars



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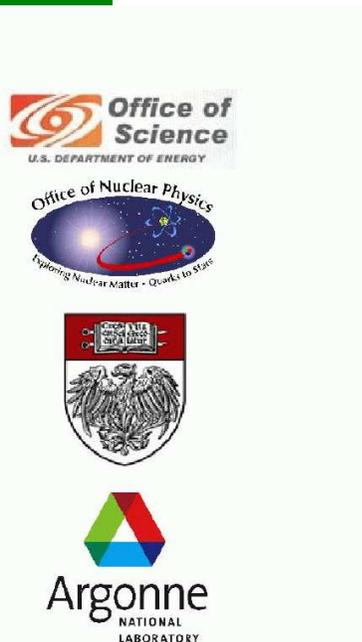
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- They were designed to bring outstanding young people **TO** Argonne. People who might otherwise have gone elsewhere.
- Hence, if a person is already at Argonne, think very hard before nominating that person for one of these Fellowships.
  - You will have to make a clear and strong case for transferring a person from your own budget to the Director's.
    - A statement that the candidate deserves more money is not going to be received well by the Committee nor the Director.
    - A statement that the candidate is going to be hired away by an excellent university is also not a good reason – that is one of the things we aim for with our postdocs; viz., placing them well.



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- These Fellowships cannot be used as a path to support Divisional Postdocs for which funds are simply not available.



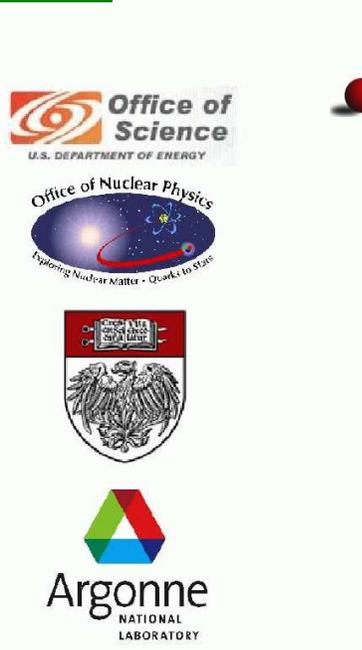
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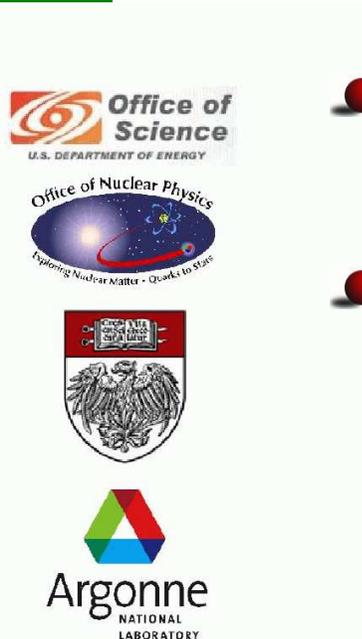
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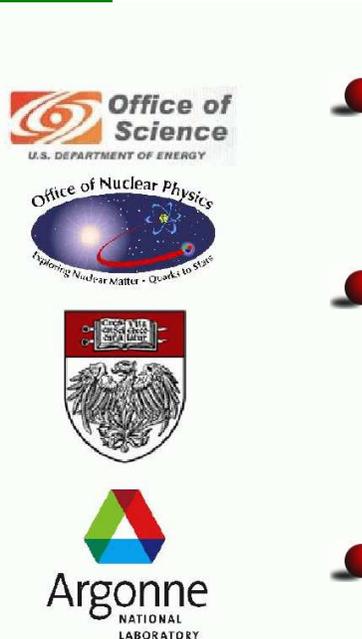
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- We take our work seriously, and work together and with Divisions to do a good job, and develop a workable and effective process.



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- The Lab-wide Committee can distinguish between merely good and plainly outstanding candidates
- We take our work seriously, and work together and with Divisions to do a good job, and develop a workable and effective process.
- But we don't need our time wasted.



# Named and Director's Postdocs

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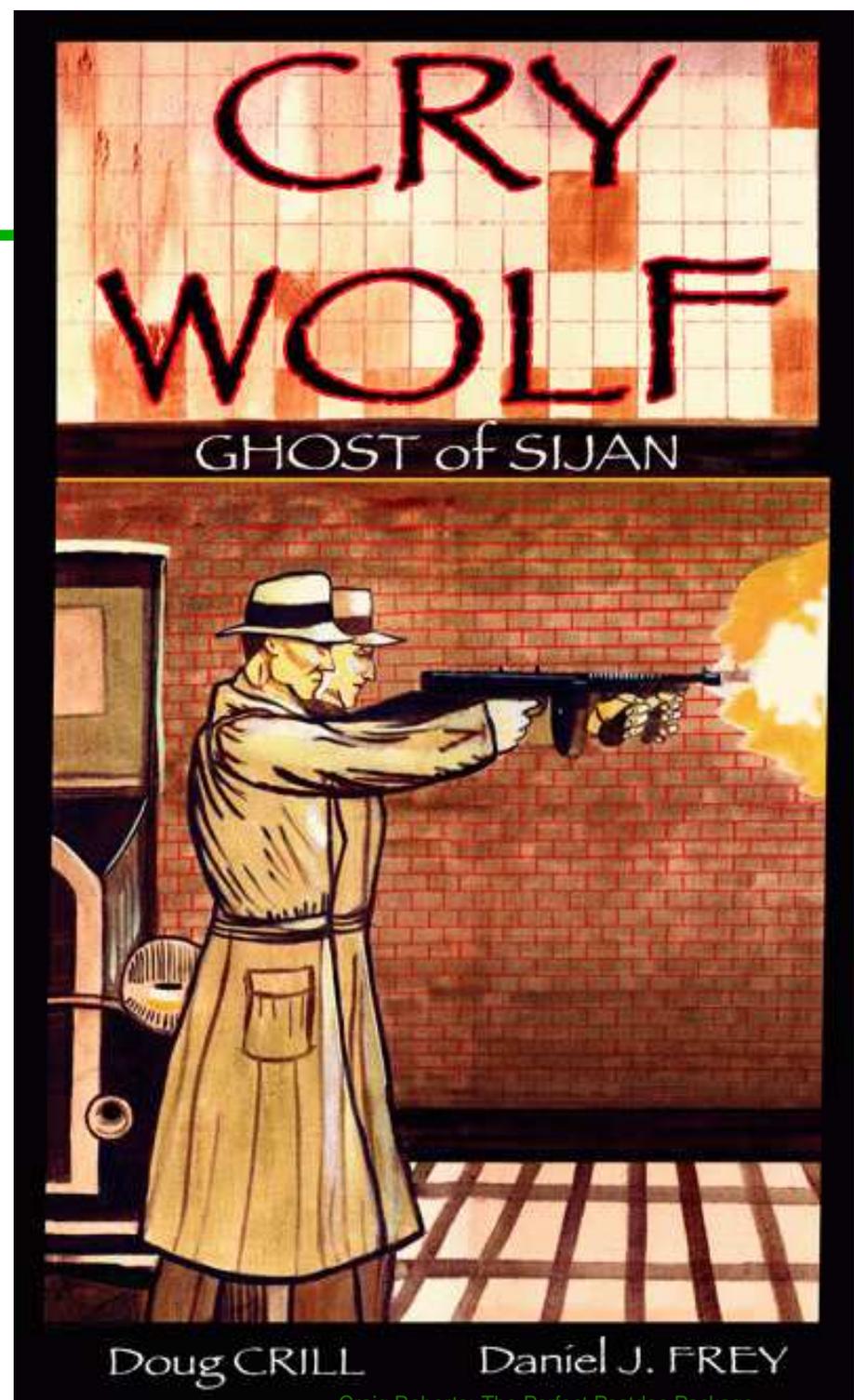
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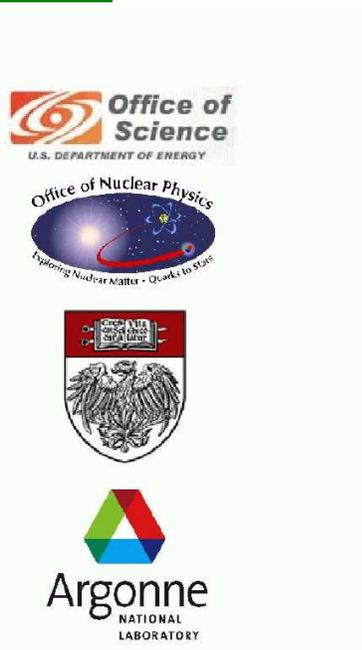
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- One representative from each Division
  - 16 people, from diverse backgrounds
  - ~ half serve for two years, the others for three.
- Know your representative: *John Kopasz*
- Seek their advice on package preparation.



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- Packages are read and graded by each committee member. Scores are collected, tallied and recirculated to the Committee. Open process – scores of each Committee member are seen by all others.



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- After this meeting, there's a 24 hour cooling-off period for the Committee, after which they provide a ranking of the “interviewed” candidates.



# Lab-wide Committee

- Rankings are presented to the Laboratory Director by a panel:
  - ALD;
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  - Giselle Sandi - Coordinator of Programme;
  - and the Chair and Co-Chair of the Postdoc Committee.



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  - and the Chair and Co-Chair of the Postdoc Committee.
- *NB. The final decision on awards is the Director's alone.*



# The Package



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- Complete CV – **DON'T CRAM**  
Arrange logically and make it easy to read and understand
  - Include a supplement with undergraduate and graduate transcripts
- Research Plan – 2 PAGES ONLY, including references. **DON'T CRAM**
- Nomination Letter from Argonne-affiliated sponsor
- Three letters of reference from people unrelated to Argonne.
  - Less than three is unacceptable.
  - Four is not necessarily helpful.



# Blue Riband Advice



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# Blue Riband Advice

- Get to know your nominee
  - If they're good enough for one of ANL's most prestigious fellowships, then they're good enough to invite for a seminar.
- Work with them on preparing the package
  - Doesn't mean writing it for them *but* advising on preparing the best case.
- Invest in the candidate, if you really want to see them successful. It will make a difference if the Committee sees that you've put your money where your mouth is.





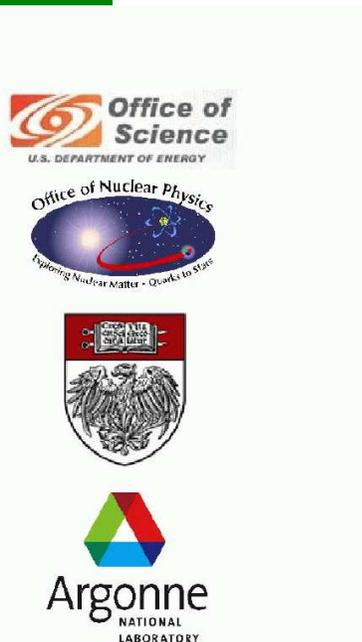
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- Biographic information
  - Education
  - Work experience
  - Honours – list and explain their significance; e.g., “ . . . scholarship awarded to top 5% of applicants from across the Nation.”
  - $\frac{1}{2}$ -page statement of research interests
  - Any other relevant exceptional qualities; e.g., community involvement – serving on committees, planning meetings, chairing sessions at meetings, etc.  
Whatever it is, *explain its significance*.



- Publications
  - Separate lists: refereed, submitted for review and un-refereed. Within these lists:
    - first-author publications or those of which the candidate takes ownership
    - publications by a team in which the candidate's role was not primary
  - If there's something special in the list, separate it, and highlight and explain it.
- Patents – list and explain candidate's role and patent's significance



## ● Presentations

### ● Separate lists:

#### ● Invited

- International meetings
- National meetings
- Local meetings

#### ● Colloquia

#### ● Seminars, whether for a previous job interview or from a group with a shared research interest.

#### ● Contributed papers

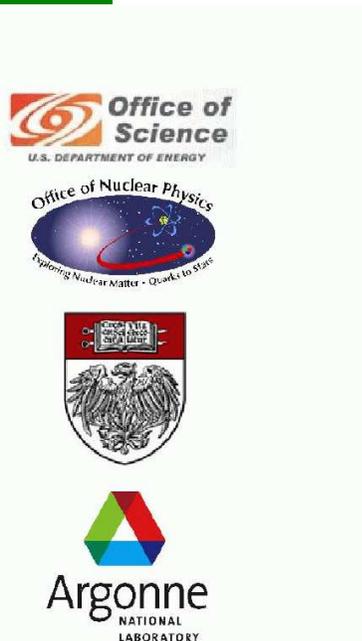
#### ● Contributed posters



# CV – A winner's credentials

Person less than one year from PhD

- CV and publications laid out very clearly
  - No padding.
  - Information presented plainly - it makes its own case
    - Coauthor of an invited review article
    - 9 first-author papers
      - More than 40 papers in total
    - 15 invited talks at international meetings
      - APS meetings, Erice, Gordon Conferences
      - 25 talks at meetings in total
    - Concise, informative statement of research interests



# Research Proposal

2 pages



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- Key questions
  - Why does the candidate want to come to Argonne?
  - How does Argonne benefit their career?
  - How does Argonne benefit from their presence?
  - Why is the proposed research novel?



- Layout is extremely important
  - Objective
  - Background
  - Research goals
  - Proposed work
  - Anticipated results

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- At the very least, show the proposal to colleagues informed about your work but with a different specialisation.



# Nomination Letter



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## ***Nomination Letter***

- Key observation

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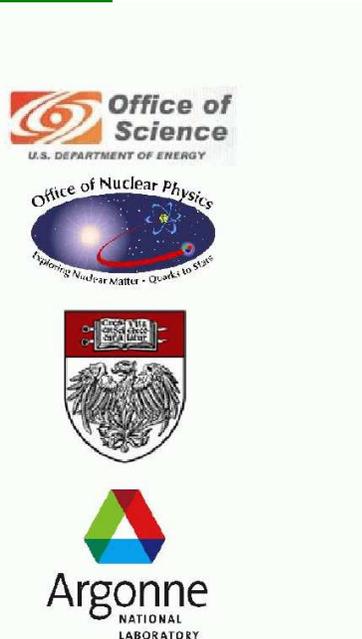
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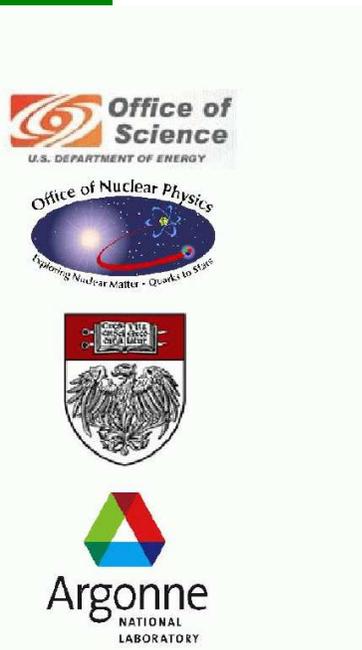
- It should explain:

- how well you know the candidate;
- why you think they're worthy of one of Argonne's most prestigious fellowships – reporting all the great things you know about them;
- why Argonne and the candidate are a perfect match in terms of the benefit to each;
- how well you know the people who wrote the candidate's reference letters; their credentials and standing in the field; and why we, the Committee, should trust them.



# Nomination Letter

- Key questions for yourself, the nominator
  - Is this person in the top 5%, or better, of their field?
  - Is this person going to be banging hard on the door of well-respected institutions for a faculty or staff position?



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Because there **WILL** be sponsors who can answer an emphatic **YES** – and mean it!



# 3 Letters of Reference



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# 3 Letters of Reference

- All from people without Argonne affiliation
- The authors must be made aware of the nature of the position – this is not just another postdoc. The letters must demonstrate awareness of this.



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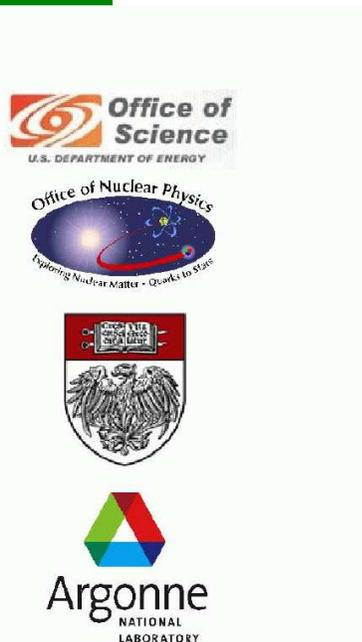
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    - “... *the most outstanding graduate student I’ve ever had.*” (With parenthetical comparison to earlier students and their positions.)
    - “*Though [the candidate] has only just completed the PhD, [the candidate] has a reputation that would be the envy of many who are 10-15 years into their careers.*” Along with a paragraph highlighting the candidate’s accomplishments.



# 3 Letters of Reference

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  - Author from Ivy-league university, with exemplary record of training exceptional graduate students:
    - *“To summarize, [the candidate] is the prime mover for new initiatives at [. . .]. [The candidate] excels at so many aspects of research from conceiving new physics questions and the methods to address them, experiments, data analysis and, perhaps most importantly, the physics interpretation. [The candidate] writes papers like a professional twenty years past their PhD. [The candidate] is the mentor to the more junior people at the lab. Unique among [early career researchers the candidate] is a part of every lab discussion of new directions and projects.”*



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- Excerpts from letters of winners:
  - Named Chair at well-respected university, with exemplary record of training exceptional graduate students:
    - *“[The candidate] is the best student I have had in more than a decade; he ranks with the best I have had, all of which now hold senior positions in major universities and national laboratories. He has demonstrated what I find to be an amazing level of initiative in getting things done. At the same time he is flexible and can change course if needed. He is clearly extremely bright as well as hard working; as important, he has plenty of ideas.”*



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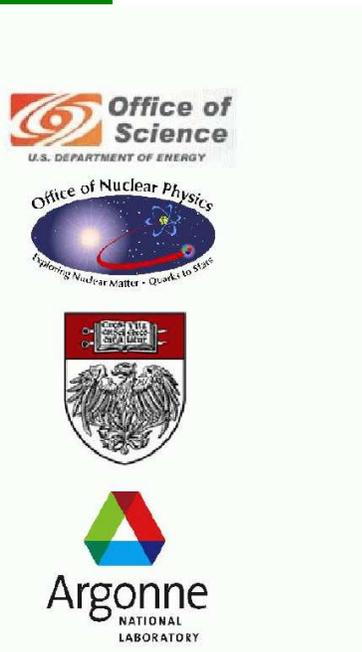
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  - Has the potential to take a leadership role in science.
- If the authors don't specify it themselves, it's the nominators role, as mentioned earlier, to explain to the Committee why the letter writers should be believed and their opinions weighed heavily.



# Sponsor Presentation



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- Sponsors should contact their Divisional representative on the Committee in order to be briefed on the nature of the presentation. The Committee sees a lot of presentations. The members know what works and what does not.



# Sponsor Presentation

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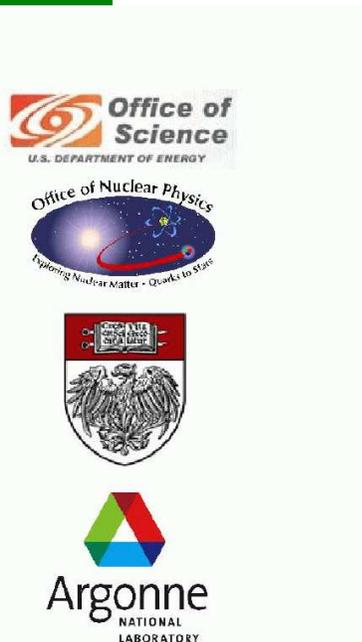
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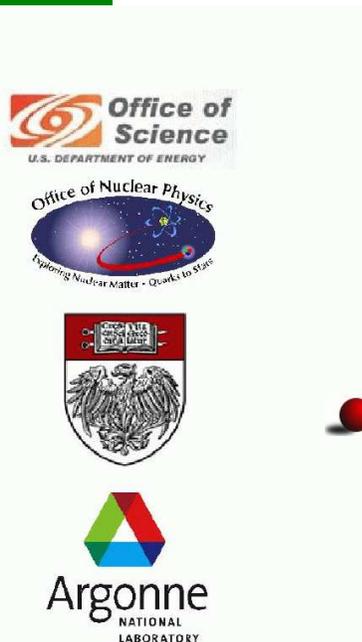
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  - If anything new has happened, communicate it.
  - If candidate has offers of excellent positions elsewhere, communicate that.
- If a candidate is from Chicago area and will continue to work with same group of people, be ready with a very good explanation as to why that is in the candidate's best interest.



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  - really thinks the nominee will move on to bigger and better things, at ANL or elsewhere.



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- After the sponsor presentations, each Committee member reconsiders all available material and after a 24 hr. cooling-off period submits a rank-ordered list to DEP.
- The scores are averaged and a meeting with the Director arranged for their presentation and discussion.



# Director's View



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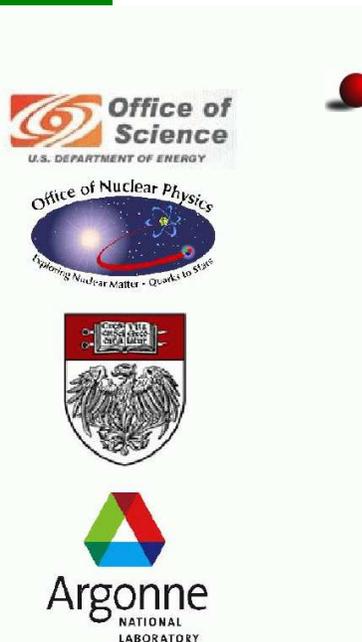
## Director's View

- The process is open because a person from each Division plays a role in every stage of the process. However, the Committee members are requested to keep the scores confidential.



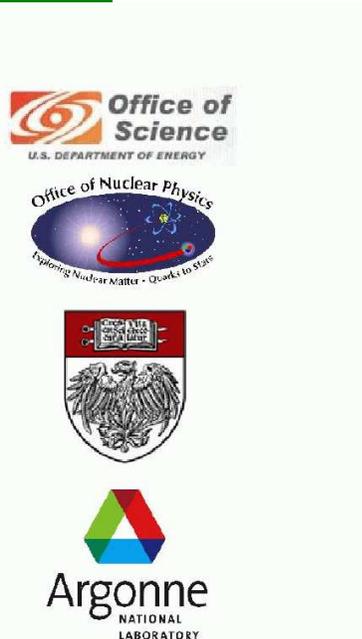
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- The process is open because a person from each Division plays a role in every stage of the process. However, the Committee members are requested to keep the scores confidential.
- The Director *reviews* the packages of the candidates that are top-ranked after the sponsor presentations.
- It is his prerogative to recommend changes to the ordering. He might do so based on any one of many reasons. He discusses the reasons at the time with all those present at the meeting: the ALD, DD-DEP, Postdoc-coordinator, and Chair and/or Chair-Elect of the Committee. The *final* decision is the Director's.



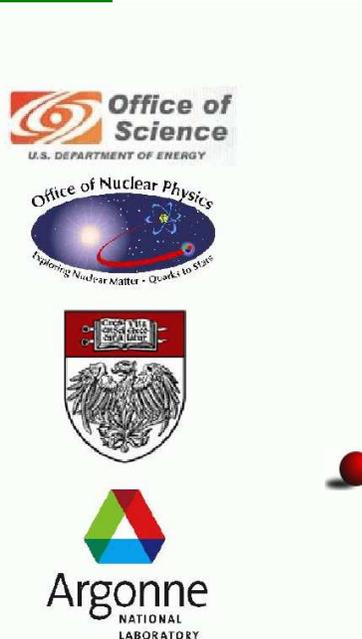
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  - stepping stones: to strengthen Argonne immediately, and to strengthen the Nation's science programmes thereby and thereafter.



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- Argonne's Fellowship Programme is to grow into a model for the Nation.



# Named & Two Rounds



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# Named & Two Rounds

- Named:

[http://www.anl.gov/Media\\_Center/News/2007/DEP070202.htm](http://www.anl.gov/Media_Center/News/2007/DEP070202.htm)

- **Jana Zaumseil**, Cavendish Laboratory – Ugo Fano Postdoctoral Fellow, [Center for Nanoscale Materials](#);
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- Director's:

- Sanghyun Park, MCS; C. David Martin, XSD; Jay Hubisz HEP.
- Elizabeth McCutchan, PHY; Phay Ho, CHM; Serguei Antipov, HEP.



# Future



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- 2008 Named Fellowship
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  - Review begins soon, must be complete by 21/Nov.



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- Now is a good time to begin work on identifying and attracting an outstanding candidate.

