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Synthetic Biology Importance in the 21st Century

Five free iPods to those who test their knowledge at www.synbioproject.org

Washington, DC – Among the 75 people *Esquire* magazine recently chose as the most influential in the 21st century are three researchers in an emerging discipline that combines science and engineering in order to design and build novel biological functions and systems – otherwise known as synthetic biology.

The promise of this burgeoning scientific field lies in the potential to apply engineering principles to the fundamental components of biology. This includes the design and construction of new biological parts, devices, and systems (e.g., tumor-seeking microbes for cancer treatment), as well as the re-design of existing, natural biological systems for useful purposes (e.g., plants making energy). To test your knowledge of synthetic biology and potentially win a free iPod, visit www.synbioproject.org/quiz.

In response to this emerging field, the Synthetic Biology Project is being launched to identify gaps in our knowledge of the potential risks of the field, explore public perceptions towards it, and examine governance options that will both ensure public safety and facilitate innovation.

“Humans have been altering the genetic code of plants and animals for millennia, by selectively breeding individuals with desirable features. But more recent advances have enabled scientists to make new sequences of DNA from scratch. By combining these advances with the principles of modern engineering, scientists can now use computers and laboratory chemicals to design organisms that do new things -- like produce biofuels or excrete the precursors of medical drugs,” says David Rejeski, the director of the Project.

But just how much about this field is covered in the media? And while these scientists featured in *Esquire* – Drew Endy, Jay Keasling and Craig Venter – may hold the keys to improved medical treatments and cleaner fuels, are there adequate controls and security measures to limit potential risks? The development of www.synbioproject.org marks an effort to answer those questions.

To provide a snapshot of the work to come, the Synthetic Biology Project announces the release of the landmark paper *Trends in American and European Press Coverage of Synthetic Biology*, which examines coverage of the field in recent years, as well as a quiz that tests your knowledge of synthetic biology.

About Synthetic Biology

Synthetic biology is a maturing scientific discipline that combines science and engineering in order to design and build novel biological functions and systems. This includes the design and construction of new biological parts, devices, and systems, as well as the re-design of existing, natural biological systems for useful purposes.

The **Synthetic Biology Project** is an initiative launched in 2008 by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars with the support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The Synthetic Biology Project provides independent, rigorous analysis that can inform critical decisions affecting the research, commercialization and use of synthetic biology. Its objective is to help ensure that, as synthetic biology moves forward, possible risks are minimized and benefits maximized.

In collaboration with researchers, governments, industries, non-governmental organizations, policymakers and others, the Project will work to identify gaps in our knowledge of the potential risks of synthetic biology, explore public perceptions towards the field, and examine governance options that will both ensure public safety and facilitate innovation.

To learn more about the Project, log on to www.synbioproject.org.

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