



Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Center for International Studies



Press Release

June 10, 2013

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**MIT and Wilson Center Receive NSF Grant to Develop Synthetic Biology Research Agenda
*Project Aims to Address Ecological Effects before Problems Materialize***

WASHINGTON – The MIT Center for International Studies and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars are collaborating on a \$233,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to help realize potential benefits and to address potential ecological effects of synthetic biology.

The grant is supported jointly by three units within NSF, the Division of Cellular and Molecular Biology, the Division of Environmental Biology, and the Engineering Directorate. The grant will fund development of an interdisciplinary research agenda to improve understanding of potential ecological effects of commercial uses of synthetic biology. The research agenda will be developed through consultations among synthetic biologists, evolutionary biologists, ecologists, and environmental scientists. It will be based on workshops that focus on near- and medium-term applications of synthetic biology, with scenarios based on the intentional and unintentional release of engineered organisms.

This project will be conducted jointly by the Program on Emerging Technologies of the MIT Center for International Studies and the Synthetic Biology Project at the Wilson Center. It will build on four previous workshops that brought together a wide range of scientists, regulators, NGOs, companies, and other stakeholders to discuss possible ecological risks associated with synthetic biology products and to identify sources of uncertainty over risks. These workshops were funded jointly by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the NSF Synthetic Biology Engineering Research Center. The project is expected to be completed in one year. A small board of advisors has been created to guide the design and execution of the workshops.

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About the MIT Center for International Studies and the Program on Emerging Technologies

The Center for International Studies (CIS) aims to support and promote international research and education at MIT. The CIS Program on Emerging Technologies (PoET) seeks to improve responses to implications of emerging technologies. PoET was created with support of an NSF IGERT. Research has included retrospective studies on past emerging technologies led by Merritt Roe Smith, Larry McCray, and Daniel Hastings; and prospective studies on next generation internet (led by David D. Clark) and synthetic biology (led by Kenneth A. Oye).

For more information, visit: <http://web.mit.edu/cis/>

About the Synthetic Biology Project

The Synthetic Biology Project is an initiative of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars supported by a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The Project aims to foster informed public and policy discourse concerning the advancement of synthetic biology.

For more information, visit: <http://www.synbioproject.org>

About The Wilson Center

The Wilson Center provides a strictly nonpartisan space for the worlds of policymaking and scholarship to interact. By conducting relevant and timely research and promoting dialogue from all perspectives, it works to address the critical current and emerging challenges confronting the United States and the world.

For more information, visit: <http://www.wilsoncenter.org>