CHAPTER 12

SCIENTISTS OUTSIDE THE LABORATORY

Emergence from the Ivory Tower: The Advocate Role in Science-Related Social Issues; The Expert Witness as an Effective Participant in Legal Events; The Accommodations of Science to the Political Process; The Interpretation of Scientific Information for Public Use

INTRODUCTION

We are at the point where all the lines of inquiry developed thus far in this book should begin to converge, where we should begin to see a larger landscape in which those who have found success in the technical aspects of science go on to additional achievements within their fields, or begin to explore broader science-related activities. Examining the careers of successful professionals in the numerous categories described in Chapter 6 on “Destinations,” a major dichotomy can be seen, between those who continue to invest in interests directly related to science, and those who move beyond and
outside, to advisory or leadership roles in the larger human community.

Those who choose the broader course—on the periphery of science—deserve some attention in these closing pages. Thumbing through the masses of lightly processed data which form the fragile foundation of this book, it is possible to discern points where excellent scientists have moved far beyond the laboratory and lecture hall—into areas of social concerns, political interactions, and public interests. They have done this in part because of a perceived need to establish the relevance of their work, and that of colleagues, to a society searching for a factual base for decisions about issues of the moment. Those who persist do so because they find that they can perform effectively in these new roles.

The critical observation here is that many excellent professionals seek out and participate vigorously in science-based socio-political activities; they derive pleasure and satisfaction from this added dimension of careers in which they have already achieved credibility and success. Examples of larger social roles for scientists, that are based on scientific competence and credibility, but extend beyond disciplines, include (but are certainly not limited to)

- The Advocate—interpreting scientific data relevant to social issues
- The Expert Witness—providing scientific information, advice, and opinions to formal bodies (courts, legislative or agency committees)
- The Political Liaison—relating science affairs to political processes
- The Public Scientist—translating, simplifying, and interpreting scientific information for the public

Participation in these and similar "outreach" activities demands excellence, but it can reveal unexpected horizons to