

Press Release

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February 8, 2012

The Governance of Synthetic Biology
Are We Making Progress?

WASHINGTON – The Synthetic Biology Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center is launching a new web-based [Synthetic Biology Scorecard](#), designed to track federal and non-federal efforts to improve the governance of synthetic biology research and development so risks are minimized and broad social and economic benefits can be realized.

The Scorecard, unveiled today, monitors the progress made toward implementing the recommendations in [New Directions: The Ethics of Synthetic Biology and Emerging Technologies](#), a December 2010 report from the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues. The report contains 18 recommendations covering a range of topics from risk assessment to ethics education and public engagement.

More than a year has passed since the release of the Commission’s report. What progress has been made? The Scorecard seeks to answer that question: In addition to tracking the progress of various federal and non-federal initiatives, the website encourages broad participation in achieving the goals set forth by the Commission and invites public comment on the recommendations and implementation efforts.

“The Commission’s report was a landmark document and lays out a framework with broad applicability to many emerging technologies, but, like many reports of this type, no mechanisms were put in place to track progress,” David Rejeski, director of the Synthetic Biology Project, said. “Our goal is ensure that this report -- and others like it – can drive change.”

Valerie Bonham, executive director of the Commission, said, “Throughout the Commission's deliberations and in the report, the members emphasized the need for transparency, dialogue, and accountability around synthetic biology.”

President Obama requested the Commission’s report almost two years ago in response to important advancements in the field of synthetic biology. On May 20, 2010, scientists at the J.C. Venter Institute unveiled a bacterial cell controlled by a synthetic genome. That same day, the president asked the Commission to undertake “a study of the implications of this scientific milestone . . . [and] consider the potential medical, environmental, security, and other benefits of this field of research, as well as any potential health, security, or other risks.”

Following the launch of the Scorecard, the Synthetic Biology Project will update the website to reflect new initiatives and publish a bi-annual summary of federal and non-federal activities that fulfill the recommendations. Additions to the Scorecard are welcome and encouraged.

The Synthetic Biology Scorecard can be found here:

<http://www.synbioproject.org/scorecard/>

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