



Thomas R. Cech

GRFP Recipient: 1970

Undergraduate Institution:
B.A. 1970, Grinnell College

Graduate Institution:
Ph.D. 1975, University of
California, Berkeley

Graduate Field of Study:
Chemistry and Biochemistry

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Current Position:
Distinguished Professor of
Chemistry and Biochemistry
and of Molecular, Cellular,
and Developmental Biology,
University of Colorado
Boulder // Director, Univer-
sity of Colorado BioFrontiers
Institute Investigator, Howard
Hughes Medical Institute

RESEARCH INTERESTS //

Thomas R. Cech earned the 1989 Nobel Prize in chemistry for his discovery of the catalytic properties of ribonucleic acid (RNA), previously thought to merely carry genetic information. This research supports the theory that life could have started as RNA. Cech also studies telomerase reverse transcriptase, which is responsible for the maintenance of chromosome ends and is associated with cancer. Dr. Cech has a keen interest in science education and often teaches introductory chemistry at the University of Colorado Boulder.

A FOND MEMORY FROM MY EXPERIENCE AS A FELLOW //

Bringing my own funding into John Hearst's laboratory at UC Berkeley gave me a sense of independence and control over my graduate career. It made me feel more like a colleague to others in the department, rather than a "student in training." Somehow, the sense that one could pick up and move to another research group was empowering – even though I loved my laboratory and never had the slightest interest in moving!

AWARDS/ HONORS //

- Member, National Academy of Sciences (1987)
- Nobel Prize in chemistry (1989)
- National Medal of Science, administered by the National Science Foundation (1995)

POSITION PROFILE //

Director, University of Colorado Biofrontiers Institute

Distinguished Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry,
University of Colorado Boulder (1982)

Distinguished Professor of Molecular, Cellular, and
Developmental Biology, University Colorado
Boulder (2012)

President, Howard Hughes Medical Institute (2000-2009)

