



# 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

//

*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)

