



The University of Hong Kong
School of Biological Sciences



AMERICAN
ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF
SCIENCE

SCIENCE

11 FEBRUARY 1994 \$6.00
VOL. 263 • PAGES 725-888

Public Lecture

The Continuing Need for Useless Knowledge

Prof. Martin Chalfie
(2008 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry)

RHT, 10:30-11:30 am, 12 August 2024



ABSTRACT

In 1939, the first director of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study, Abraham Flexner, wrote an article in Harper's Magazine entitled "The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge." In this article, he questioned "whether our conception of what is useful may not have become too narrow to be adequate to the roaming and capricious possibilities of the human spirit," and he argued that real discoveries are made when scientists are allowed to explore the world without recourse to usefulness. Several Nobel prizes have been given for discoveries tangential to what was initially studied. I will argue that "useless knowledge" is needed as much today as in the past to improve human well-being and health. I will also suggest ways that we can encourage the finding of the unexpected, the discoveries that will enable future scientific revolutions.

SPEAKER



**Professor
Martin Chalfie**

University Professor,
Columbia University

Time: August 12, 2024 (Monday) 10:30-11:30 am
Venue: Rayson Huang Theatre (Run Run Shaw Building)
Moderator: Prof. Chaogu Zheng (School of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Sciences, The University of Hong Kong)
Enquiry: cgzheng@hku.hk

Registration: <https://forms.office.com/r/hzxJBUJStx>

Online Registration



He shared the 2008 Nobel Prize in Chemistry "for the discovery and development of the green fluorescent protein, GFP", which revolutionized biological and biomedical research. He also pioneered studies into the genetic basis of neuronal differentiation and mechanosensation using the model organism *C. elegans*. He is an elected member of the National Academy of Sciences, a foreign member of the Royal Society, and a recipient of the E.B. Wilson medal and the Lomonosov Gold Medal, among other distinctions.