

Biochemistry

© Copyright 2003 by the American Chemical Society

Volume 42, Number 1

January 14, 2003

EDITORIAL

This is my final editorial in *Biochemistry*, as a new editor will take charge in 2004. A search committee has been constituted by the American Chemical Society (ACS), and a new editor should be selected by late spring. I have enjoyed my twelve years as editor, but look forward to new challenges. This has been an exciting period in scientific publishing in general and for *Biochemistry* in particular. The Web edition of the journal was created and eventually will supplant print as the primary publishing vehicle. The processing of manuscripts has gone from a complex trail of paper to a computer-based system: more than 80% of our manuscripts are now submitted electronically via the Internet. Preliminary data suggest that Web submission reduces the processing time by more than one week. During my tenure as editor, page charges have been eliminated, and the use of color has increased dramatically, at no cost to authors. Two new types of articles have been initiated, Current Topics and New Concepts. The system that we have developed for processing and reviewing manuscripts is both fair and critical so that we continue to publish high-quality manuscripts. Of course, no system is perfect, but the editors have tried to make the playing field as level as possible. *Biochemistry* has remained focused on structure/function/mechanism aspects of the field, although what this means is in a continual state of evolution.

Although I believe that *Biochemistry* has made great strides and is among the best journals in the field, a number of serious challenges are apparent. Many competitive new journals have appeared in recent years, and they clearly have taken some quality manuscripts away from *Biochemistry*. This explosion in the scientific literature creates serious problems for the researcher, some of which have been alleviated by the many abstract services available on-line. Moreover, this has resulted in increased costs for institutional libraries, and educational institutions are at, or over, the limit on what they can spend on journals. Many libraries have made significant cuts in journal budgets. This, of course, translates into a loss of revenue for journals. It is doubtful that all of the current journals will survive. Much of the future is in our own hands. I believe that we should concentrate our support on society journals, rather than commercial journals. Society journals have a low profit margin and are designed for the benefit of practicing scientists. This is reflected in the low cost per page of society journals relative to most commercial journals. A related matter of great concern to me is the current emphasis on "high-profile" journals, many of which feature relatively short articles, with little supporting data. The review process for these journals is generally viewed

as somewhat capricious and highly dependent on the editors. Many of my younger colleagues believe that their careers depend on publication in these journals, and unfortunately many university administrators have jumped on this bandwagon. This overemphasis on such journals was not always the case, and I hope this trend can be reversed. Reversal will require that top scientists publish their best papers, along with a complete description of the research, in other journals.

Finally, I would like to mention my concern with regard to the availability of past literature in an electronic format. Science should be an open window, and the archives of all publications should be freely accessible. Of course, it is necessary to carry out this goal with an eye to keeping the financial base of journals intact. Many high-quality journals now make their electronic archives available at no charge, with a suitable time interval between publication and availability of archives. This is particularly true of journals concerned with biological research. This has not harmed the financial status of these journals. The ACS has elected to charge an annual subscription fee for access to the archives, albeit a relatively small fee. The practical effect of this policy is unlikely to inhibit the dissemination of ACS journals, but in my view it is wrong in principle and also places *Biochemistry* at a competitive disadvantage. The number of manuscripts submitted to *Biochemistry* during the last part of 2002 declined ~10%, shortly after the ACS archive policy was announced. I hope that this decline is only temporary, but a change in the current ACS policy would certainly be beneficial. If you think this is an important issue, please let the ACS Board of Directors know about your concerns.

I have been fortunate to have a wonderful group of people serve as Associate Editors, and I want to thank them for the great job they have done. Editors are rarely thanked for the literally thousands of manuscripts that go through the system with no problems, but they often hear about the relatively small number of manuscripts that encounter difficulties. The Editorial Advisory Board also has been outstanding in adjudicating differences in opinion between reviewers, and they have my profound thanks. Finally, I would like to thank the thousands of authors and reviewers who are ultimately responsible for the success of *Biochemistry*. I hope that you will continue to submit your very best research to *Biochemistry* and will help maintain the high quality of the journal.

Gordon G. Hammes

Editor-in-chief

BI030001E