

Biochemistry

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EDITORIAL

This past year has gone well for *Biochemistry*. The number of manuscripts submitted has declined slightly, a few percent at the time of this writing. However, the quality of the manuscripts is high, and we have maintained the rigor of the review process. Approximately 10% of the manuscripts submitted are rejected without a complete review, after careful consideration by at least two members of our editorial group (Associate Editors and Editorial Advisory Board). After this initial scrutiny, at least two reviews are obtained for all manuscripts. We are one of the few journals still requiring two independent reviews, a procedure that we believe is necessary to provide a fair review process. This requires more than 5000 reviews each year, and we are greatly indebted to our many fine reviewers. We have worked hard to reduce the time of the review process. The average time from receipt to acceptance is 14 weeks for regular papers and 7 weeks for accelerated manuscripts. This includes the time for revision by authors. Most of the returns of the reviews and correspondence with the authors occur via the Internet or fax, and our software systems are being updated to enhance this capability. During the next year, we expect to have the capability of receiving manuscripts and sending them out for review electronically. I must confess that I am not confident this will reduce the time of the review process, as the slow step will understandably remain the actual review process.

You will note on our masthead that Joe Villafranca has decided to step down as an Associate Editor. Joe has done a terrific job, and I am sorry to see him leave, but we are fortunate that Clare Woodward has agreed to serve as an Associate Editor.

The use of the electronic version of the Journal continues to increase rapidly and linearly with time. Electronic journals probably will eventually replace the paper versions, but we are not close to this time yet. In response to concerns of the editors, readers, and authors, the American Chemical Society (ACS) is putting a great deal of effort into improving the quality of the graphics, particularly color. We will make the use of color free to authors as of January 1, 2000, but approval by the editors of each use of color is required. Color is quite expensive—the color budget of the ACS is more than \$1 million per year, and most of that color is found in *Biochemistry*. Nevertheless, it is clear that color is an essential part of the effective presentation of biochemistry research.

As you probably know, a proposal by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to create a publication and preprint server has

been circulated for some time. The project has been dubbed PubMed Central in its most recent incarnation. I have been very concerned about this proposal for several reasons. The current proposal for peer reviewed material requests that existing journals permit their publications to become part of a NIH public database. This would be an obvious problem for journals that meet their budget through subscriptions, as it would almost certainly lead to a reduction in the number of subscriptions. The wisdom of NIH entering the publication arena is dubious, at best, in my opinion. The professional societies seem to be doing a very good and cost-effective job in dealing with publication. I do not believe that availability of published material is a serious problem in the dissemination of science. With regard to material that has not been peer reviewed, it is not at all clear that posting such material is in the best interests of science. This project will require significant NIH funds—is this the best use of their money? With the departure of Dr. Varmus from NIH, it is not known what will happen to this project. If you have strong views about this project, as I do, I urge you to write to the new Director of NIH. I should note that the ACS is considering establishing a preprint server: this has been under discussion for several years. The concerns again lie primarily with the posting of material that has not been peer reviewed. Please let me have your thoughts on this important subject.

Concurrent with the start of a new millennium, we have decided to replace *Perspectives* with *Current Topics*, as this is a more appropriate description of what is intended. I would like to ask for your help in enhancing our two special features, *New Concepts* and *Current Topics*. We would like to publish more of these as the editors believe that they enhance the usefulness and reputation of the Journal. Most *Current Topics* are solicited, but we would be pleased to consider unsolicited *Current Topics* and/or suggestions of appropriate topics. We are particularly interested in emerging areas of biochemistry that can be understood in molecular terms. During the new millennium, I hope that *Biochemistry* will continue to flourish and publish outstanding research in biochemistry.

Gordon G. Hammes
Editor

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