The Journal of Biological Chemistry: 2016 Onward

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Scientific publishing has undergone massive change in the past two decades, and the landscape is shifting. The Journal of Biological Chemistry (JBC) must respond to this changing landscape, weighing what to preserve, what to emphasize, and how to be the best journal for a broad authorship/readership from across the globe. Simultaneously, we are witnessing truly stunning scientific advances and discoveries related to the fundamental molecular mechanisms of life processes. Given its scientific coverage, the JBC has unprecedented opportunities to play a central role in life sciences publishing. It is this exciting combination of challenges and opportunities that led me to join the JBC team as Editor-in-Chief.

Throughout my career from undergraduate days onward, my scientific focus has been the intersection of biology, chemistry, and physics, and how this intersection reveals the underpinnings of biology. The JBC embraces this intersection. Moreover, I appreciate that JBC papers are judged based on the biological significance of the questions posed as well as the rigor and data-driven nature of the conclusions drawn. Indeed, JBC adheres to the importance of providing the full detail of a scientific study: the design of experiments, the data supporting the conclusions, and the critical interpretation. These practices have stood the test of time: the JBC is a long-standing and highly respected journal that has launched many successful careers and reported many critical new insights to the scientific community. And it continues to capture and celebrate scientific results that both satisfy our thirst for knowledge and fuel advances in medicine and biotechnology. For example, more NIH-funded research is published in the JBC than in any other journal (1), illustrating the penetration and importance of the JBC to the community of NIH-supported biomedical researchers. In addition, the JBC has spearheaded major changes in science publishing. It was the first journal to go online in 1995, and among the earliest to become online-only in 2012. Finally, JBC is a society-published journal: As such, its profits are returned to the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) and used for activities that benefit ASBMB members and the broader life sciences community.

Thus, the JBC in 2016 can look back and be proud of its accomplishments and its reputation. But we must also look forward. As science publishing has evolved, journals face the temptation to place more emphasis on the cartoon or model emerging from a study than on the “beef”—the data and experimental observations, with statistical significance. The JBC has resisted. And while the journal’s Eigenfactor®, a metric that is designed to measure total importance to the scientific community (2), is twelfth across all life sciences journals and second amongst biochemistry and molecular biology journals (3), the oft-used Thomson Reuters Journal Impact Factors for JBC and many of its sister journals have fallen (3). How can the JBC preserve its venerable stature as a home to critically interpreted, biologically important, data-driven research while increasing its impact and appeal for both authors and readers in the highly competitive arena of life sciences publishing? Now is the time to put our heads together and make choices that will enable the JBC to flourish and continue to serve the biological chemistry community—defined broadly—through wide dissemination of scientific advances and effective communication.
In taking the editorship of the *JBC*, I join a team committed to the future of our journal. The team happily includes Fred Guengerich as Deputy Editor. Fred has shepherded the *JBC* over the past year as Interim Editor-in-Chief and prior to that served the journal for many years as Deputy Editor, Associate Editor, and editorial board member. He cares deeply about the journal and knows its workings inside and out. Herb Tabor continues to devote his time to the *JBC*, serving as co-Editor. As most of you know, Herb was Editor-in-Chief of the *JBC* for 40 years and continues to generously provide wise guidance. As Director of Publications for the ASBMB, Nancy Rodnan is a true strength of the *JBC*. We are delighted to add Catherine Goodman, formerly of *Nature Chemical Biology*, as our new Scientific Editor, bringing a decade of top-tier scientific editing experience to the team. Please keep an eye out for her representing the journal at conferences and get in touch at cgoodman@asbmb.org, as she is eager to connect with the *JBC* scientific community.

And of course, the Associate Editors are active scientists who act as guardians of the quality of the *JBC* and as shapers of its vision. They work with the editorial board to ensure the rigor of the science in the *JBC* through a thorough and transparent review process.

This team is now asking what the future holds in store for the *JBC*. The fundamental premise underlying our strategic planning is that we can enhance the *JBC* experience for readers and authors while maintaining its strengths. You are invited to join this discussion and offer input on what makes the *JBC* a journal of choice for publishing top-notch work in mechanistic biochemistry, what draws you to read and cite the *JBC*, and what the *JBC* could do better.

In the meantime, you will see that we already have begun implementing changes—some quite significant, and some seemingly minor, but all responsive to feedback we’ve gathered and geared to enhancing the author and reader experience!

- In April, *JBC* unveiled a completely redesigned website to simplify navigation and improve readability.
- The journal has removed formatting requirements to speed up initial submissions.
- Authors will soon be able to seamlessly submit manuscripts posted to bioRxiv to *JBC*.
- Authors will soon have the option of submitting their manuscripts in LaTex.
- Additional staff at the *JBC* will assist authors as their papers move toward publication, improve readability of the journal, and ensure that critical requirements are met, such as data deposition in appropriate community databases.
- The *JBC* now welcomes Methods and Resources papers that describe new technical advances and large data sets.
- We encourage authors to submit their work as Accelerated Communications (replacing Reports), a return to an old manuscript type but with three important changes. The figure restrictions are now relaxed, such that authors can choose the optimal balance between words and imagery. Supplemental Data are allowed in Accelerated Communications. And, finally, the timeline for review of Accelerated Communications is even faster than the *JBC*’s 21-day average time from submission to first decision: Reviewers are asked to complete their reviews of Accelerated Communications in just five days.

We’re excited about these changes, and we’re still in the midst of reviewing basic journal policies and practices to identify and revise any that present obstacles or disincentives to potential authors. However, we know that the challenges and opportunities in scientific publishing in 2016 go beyond technological and formatting issues. We’re using this period of introspection under new leadership as an opportunity to think creatively about the future of scientific publishing, building on the *JBC*’s strong tradition of innovation, and reaffirming the *JBC*’s commitment to peer review and a shared goal of promoting research that reveals the molecular mechanisms of biological processes.

We welcome your thoughts on these issues at feedback@asbmb.org. And keep watching this space for more updates!

References

3. 2015 Journal Citation Reports® by Thomson Reuters, 2016

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