

A New Year's Letter from The Editor

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The end of the 20th Century has brought with it some dramatic changes in the publishing landscape. The advent of online publishing has changed forever the way we as scientists relate to the literature. Routine questions that used to require trips to the library can now be resolved simply by linking to the appropriate citation in almost any major journal. Over the next few years, the ease and extent of online links will continue to improve, creating new space in file cabinets everywhere as dog-eared reprints become relics of the not too distant past. As a result, the dynamics of journal readerships will continue to change. Online subscriptions are, or should be, less expensive than print subscriptions, making them more accessible to a wider range of investigators, fellows, and students in all corners of the world. Site licenses held by academic and commercial institutions reduce the cost of access and will effectively eliminate the remaining barriers to inter-journal links. It is noteworthy that this network developed and will continue to grow even without the intercession of the proposed PubMed Central, the evolving NIH initiative to accumulate all publications in a barrier-free server environment.

Nearly as dramatic have been the changes in the editors, ownership, and organization of the journals themselves. This has been particularly true among journals that operate in the same scientific sphere as *The JCB*. Preeminent journals such as *Cell* have now been joined with a large inventory of more specialized journals, following the acquisition of Cell Press by the large publishing house Elsevier Press. The implications of this realignment for sales, marketing, and pricing

have yet to be determined. The departure of Benjamin Lewin from Cell Press has also changed the community's perceptions of this influential family of journals. Other Elsevier acquisitions have resulted in the ownership of former competitors (e.g., *Current Opinion in Cell Biology* and *Trends in Cell Biology*) by a single corporate entity. At another major commercial publishing house, Macmillan Magazines, there has been a fragmentation of a preeminent and formerly all-inclusive journal (*Nature*) into an increasing number of subject-specific publications. Several of these have successfully seeded themselves in areas of direct relevance to *The JCB*, especially *Nature Cell Biology*.

Here at *The JCB*, we view these changes not as having created a threat, but rather as having created both the incentive and the opportunity to enhance the quality and the operation of the Journal. Our goal is to further position *The JCB* as the publishing epicenter for the field of cell biology, serving the ever expanding community of cell biologists as a forum for our best work and scholarly debate as well as helping to promote cell biology to other fields. We feel that we are uniquely well positioned for such an effort, as ***The JCB is unique among major journals, being run entirely by practicing scientists for practicing scientists.*** Our policies are not influenced by a corporate parent or professional society, but are independently set by a committed Editorial Board drawn from the ranks of the best cell biologists active today. We are backed by a nonprofit university press (Rockefeller) and are administered by an editorial office in New York, headed by Managing Edi-

tor Dr. Mike Rossner, which would be the envy of any commercial publisher.

It was on the pages of *The JCB* that the very field of cell biology was founded, and the Journal remains the most preeminent, widely read, and respected journal in the field. We wish, however, to further increase the visibility and influence of *The JCB*, broadening, enlivening, and elevating it to compete with the top few journals in all of the biomedical sciences. Our desire stems not from hubris, but from a desire that cell biology be more widely recognized as the place where all fields converge as we enter the emerging post-genomic era.

In the coming months, you should look for a number of changes in *The JCB*, some cosmetic, some substantial, and some already underway.

- Operationally, we have substantially streamlined the reviewing process such that authors now receive ***decisions on most manuscripts sent for review within one month, a record we feel competes with any other major journal.*** Due to our biweekly publication schedule, papers generally appear in print within 4–5 weeks after acceptance. The time between acceptance and publication will only decrease as *JCB* papers soon become available online in advance of the print version. Thus, *The JCB* can get your paper published as fast as almost anyone.

- We have also begun a ***new Brief Report format, reviewed primarily by Editorial Board members, making possible even more rapid (14 day) turn around times.*** Still faster review times are possible for truly “hot” papers. Thus, the traditional view that publication in *The JCB* is a slow, interminable process is simply no longer the case. Even more important

is the fact that *The JCB* Board is committed to rapid and scientifically consistent editorial judgements: at *The JCB*, authors deal with colleagues, not professional editors.

- Criteria for publication will be further strengthened and made more consistent by enhancing communication among our Board members, each renowned experts in their respective areas. We aim to publish only those papers showing truly novel mechanistic or conceptual insights, which speak to the broadest possible audience. Our goal is to increase the overall influence and appeal of papers in *The JCB*. This goal is closely related to our efforts to substantially increase the Journal's readership, an effort which is already yielding some significant results.

- We have invigorated our reviews section under the guidance of Reviews Editors Louis Reichardt and Karen Dell in San Francisco. We have planned a series of even shorter comments and editorials together with some innovative new article formats that will enable *The JCB* to become the forum for critical assessment of the field. However, peer-reviewed,

primary articles must and will remain as the ultimate purveyors of scientific information in our pages.

- Cosmetic and structural changes will involve an increased reliance on e-submissions and web-based reviewing, as well as an aggressive effort to expand readership. A graphic redesign is also in the works to make both the online and print versions of the Journal more readable. Links to supplementary material on the web will be used aggressively; perhaps "data not shown" will become a phrase of the past.

- The cost of publication will be reduced, beginning with a significant reduction in color charges, effective with this issue of the Journal (see separate announcement in this issue opposite the Table of Contents).

- Finally, and most importantly, we will expand the scope of the Journal to reflect the spectacular changes in the field of cell biology that have transpired over the past several years. These include adding the relevant aspects of structural biology, protein mechanism, human disease, immunology, neurobiology, developmental biology, and cellular genomics. This effort will involve the re-

cruitment of leaders in each of these areas as active members of our Editorial Board. We will continue to expand the international flavor of the Journal's Board members and authors, reflecting the increasing internationalization of science in general, which is helped along by the ever easier modes of e-communication.

The success of *The JCB* thus far rests not only on the quality of the work it has published for the past 50 years, but also on the special relationship between the Journal and the international community of cell biologists. This relationship exists because of the fact that *The JCB* is run, and always has been run, by your colleagues. Thus, submitting authors are treated in the same fashion that we ourselves hope to be treated when our roles are reversed. Having just accepted a three-year appointment as Editor in Chief, I assure you that safeguarding this trust will be my highest and most important priority.

On behalf of your colleagues, the members of *The JCB* Editorial Board,
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