Molecular Biology of the Cell: It's Our Journal

Molecular Biology of the Cell (MBC) begins its 16th year, and I am proud to have been asked to serve as its new Editor-in-Chief. I follow in the footsteps of two visionaries in scientific publication, David Botstein and Keith Yamamoto. Under their leadership, MBC set the tone as a journal whose exclusive motivation was to serve the scientific community and to facilitate the communication of important findings. The following philosophy of *Molecular Biology of the Cell*, first articulated in 1992, remains our guide:

Molecular Biology of the Cell is published by the nonprofit American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB) and is free from commercial oversight and influence. We believe that the reporting of science is an integral part of research itself and that scientific journals should be instruments in which scientists are at the controls. Hence, MBC serves as an instrument of the ASCB membership and as such advocates the interests of contributors and readers through fair, prompt, and thorough review, coupled with responsible editorial adjudication and thoughtful suggestions for revision and clarification. Our most essential review criterion is that the work significantly advances our knowledge, and/or provides new concepts or approaches that extend our understanding. At MBC, every editorial decision is rendered solely by active working scientists—true peers of the contributors.

The ASCB and MBC are committed to promoting the concept of open access to the scientific literature. MBC seeks to facilitate communication among scientists by

- publishing original papers that include full documentation of *Methods* and *Results*, with *Introductions* and *Discussions* that frame questions and interpret findings clearly (even for those outside an immediate circle of experts);
- exploiting technical advances to enable rapid dissemination of articles prior to print publication, and transmitting and archiving videos, large datasets, and other materials that enhance understanding;
- making accepted manuscripts freely accessible within days of acceptance via *MBC in Press* and presenting final online format only 2 months after acceptance.

Key to our philosophy is the statement that “the reporting of science is an integral part of research itself, and scientific journals should be instruments in which scientists are at the controls. Hence, MBC serves as an instrument of the ASCB membership and as such advocates the interests of contributors and readers.” In other words, MBC is *our* journal. We are active participants—as editors, reviewers, authors, and readers—in determining how MBC affects research and researchers in cell biology. What are our responsibilities, and how do we exercise them?

SERVING THE READERSHIP

Authors, editors, and reviewers serve the readers and are readers themselves. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that papers published in MBC are of uniformly high scientific quality and are consistent in their thoroughness of presentation. In these days of brief communications, tight and arbitrary page limitations, and ever-expanding online only supplemental material, MBC defines itself by continuing to publish full accounts of the data and by encouraging authors to effectively communicate their results and interpretations in a manner accessible to a broad and diverse audience. MBC is not an archive—we best serve our readers by bringing to our attention those results that will significantly enhance our own thinking and our own research efforts. Other journals—so-called “specialty” journals—should not be disdained for serving a more focused constituency of scientists who benefit from access to the many excellent studies that extend important concepts to new systems, confirm and expand on previous findings, rapidly communicate new findings of narrower scope, and/or present novel but preliminary findings that can serve as a seed for new advances. As put forth in our “Instructions for Authors” (www.molbiolcell.org/misc/ifora.shtml), articles published in MBC should present conceptually new advances that will influence thinking in a given field, open new areas of investigation, and/or link different areas of cell and developmental biology. As our readers peruse the Table of Contents and scan the abstracts, they should be learning about important advances in every area of cell biology.

INTRODUCING “INCYTES FROM MBC”

Speaking of important advances in cell biology, we are introducing a new feature in the ASCB *Newsletter* called “InCytes from MBC.” “InCytes” will highlight important research findings from articles published in the corresponding monthly issue of MBC. The three objectives of the feature are the following:

1. Educate ASCB members on important new advances in cell biology;
2. Increase the visibility of MBC papers within the cell biology community; and

3. Encourage authors to submit their best work to *MBC*, as the *ASCB Newsletter* is sent each month to 10,000 cell biologists world-wide.

We will continue to choose the “*MBC* Paper of the Year” for presentation at the *ASCB* Annual Meeting. Candidates for this award will be derived from those papers highlighted in “*InCytes*.” We hope that “*InCytes* from *MBC*” will enhance the value of *MBC* for readers and contributors.

SERVING THE CONTRIBUTORS

Increasingly, professional editors rather than working scientists are charged with the task of assessing and prioritizing the fruits of our scientific efforts. While this may have led to more rapid handling of papers and faster decisions, this efficiency can sometimes come at the expense of thoughtful and learned consideration of the import and scope of the work presented. Moreover, professional journalists must take into account the marketability of their products and/or the cross-disciplinary nature of their publication’s audience. Thus, more subjective criteria regarding potential impact factors, perceived global interest, and the need for a simple take-home message are considered in making editorial decisions. By contrast, the *MBC* Editors are working cell biologists and respected leaders in their areas of expertise who volunteer their time to serve the journal and our society. Editors are familiar with the philosophy and scope of the journal and have a working knowledge of the research area being considered. Decisions regarding each manuscript submitted to *MBC* are carefully and thoughtfully rendered by knowledgeable scientists, familiar with the research.

Readers will notice several new additions to and departures from the Associate Editorial Board. Many of the departing Associate Editors have served *MBC* since its inception, and we are grateful for their many important contributions to the journal’s success. The new additions will help to maintain the vibrancy of the board and to increase its diversity, ensuring expert coverage of all areas of cell biology.

When it launched in 1992, *MBC* committed to ensuring that every manuscript submitted would be rigorously and expeditiously reviewed by two reviewers. Unfortunately for the contributors—but fortunately for the readers—the number of manuscripts submitted has nearly quadrupled in the past decade, and our attempts to fulfill this commitment have overburdened the peer-review system and our editorial staff. Thus, to better serve our contributors and to expedite the review process, *MBC* has implemented a two-tiered review system. In this system, Associate Editors are asked to determine whether, in principle, the findings reported in each manuscript meet our most essential review criterion—i.e., that the work “significantly advances our knowledge and/or provides new concepts or approaches that extend our understanding.” Submissions judged not to meet this criterion are brought to the attention of the Editor-in-Chief or a Senior Editor, who makes the final decision whether or not to decline the paper without further review. Submissions that meet the criteria are entered into the *MBC* peer-review process. This two-tiered peer-review system will allow editors and reviewers to focus their efforts on the manuscripts most suitable for publication in *MBC* and will benefit contributors by not delaying them unnecessarily from seeking publication elsewhere. Importantly, although a thorough written review is not provided, every paper is still assessed by expert, working scientists before such a decision is made.

The true guardians of *MBC*’s philosophy are the reviewers. They come from the ranks of our readers and our contributors, and so the golden rule applies: “Treat others as you would want to be treated.” Working with the contributors and editors, the reviewers set the tone of *MBC* and how it affects our research—not just what we do, but how we do it. The review process should not be adversarial, but rather collegial, as scientists donate time taken from their own work to comment on and guide the efforts of their colleagues and, in so doing, to ensure that the papers published in *MBC* are representative of the very best in cell biology. Every reader and contributor of *MBC* has a responsibility to serve as referee and to implement the journal’s philosophy. With ownership comes responsibility, and *MBC* is our journal. During my stewardship, I welcome your participation, your contributions, and your suggestions.

Sandra L. Schmid
Editor-in-Chief