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## Editorial

### BBA General Subjects – Changing of the Guard at the Publishing Palace



We are currently seeing wonderfully positive developments in *BBA - General Subjects*. This section of BBA began to appear in 1964, when the original journal, launched by Elsevier in 1947 as a single journal, *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta*, was divided into subject sections. BBA has always sought to publish carefully evaluated, peer-reviewed, high quality papers in the fields of biochemistry and biophysics, but the exact focus and emphasis of the journal has evolved over the decades, as science has grown and developed. Considering the recent years of excellent progress for *BBA - General Subjects*, we may here take a moment to try to understand the factors that make a scientific journal a high-quality vessel for scientific communication.

The final flavor, or personality, of any specific journal is clearly shaped by many forces and different players. The publisher of a journal always has strategic wishes, specific foci, and goals with the product. The history and traditions of a journal are also important factors shaping its trajectory. Certainly the authors are crucial determinants for any journal – their expertise as scientists and writers determine the quality of the submitted manuscripts, as well as the decisions on where to send their papers for publication. Another critically important determinant for the final outcome of any published paper is, of course, the reviewing process. The reviewers who perform the manuscript review – that crucial anonymous assessment of manuscripts that most of us scientists repeatedly perform – constitute the genuine quality control. The basic principles of peer review are indeed at the very core of science and prerequisites for its success in society. Without careful reviewing, the quality of science as a whole would be greatly diminished. This is why reviewing is so important – and why journals facilitating a good peer reviewing process become so important for science. The furtherance of the entire scientific community indeed requires careful, diligent reviewers, and the reviewers are rewarded for their efforts when their own papers receive constructive review, and, hopefully, publication of papers that have been well scrutinized. Thus it is crucial for the scientific progress that knowledgeable reviewers are selected, matching the scientific field of a manuscript with an unbiased setting.

Journals set the context for reviewing and publishing processes and journals also have options of choice to maintain the review processes using different strategies. At *BBA - General Subjects*, and indeed in all BBA sections, we have always taken pride in striving to provide high-quality reviews for most of the submissions that are received. This is actually in contrast to many other journals: An editorial decision to reject submissions outright, without peer review, has unfortunately become a common practice in many other journals. Editors of BBA arrive at relatively few decisions of direct rejection without peer review, but may do so when a paper is clearly too weak or outside the scope of the journal. This, of course, does not imply that all

papers are accepted, since they are reviewed using stringent criteria. At present, about 70% of all regular manuscripts submitted to *BBA - General Subjects* are eventually rejected. But they are so after careful reviewing that gives constructive feedback, which hopefully should help authors to improve any rejected article before a new attempt of submission to some other journal.

Importantly, high-quality reviews cannot be obtained unless reviewers are carefully matched to submissions on a case-by-case basis. This must include finding reviewers whose expertise is appropriate to the contents of a given submission, as well as the exclusion of potential reviewers who have published together with any of the authors of the manuscript in question, in order to avoid potential bias. At BBA, Editors have the services of skilled scientists who are Editorial Staff members that help with this important task. They work hard to find the best possible reviewers for every submission that is reviewed. I am confident that the careful and stringent process of matching the best possible reviewers to each submission establishes a major part of our successful concept at BBA, together with the ambitions of our reviewers to provide us with their best efforts. The final outcome of careful, constructive review and high quality criteria indeed becomes a journal that is well-read, well-used, and well-appreciated by the scientific community. Still, it is clear, that even with all these important people shaping the journal – publishers, Editorial Staff, authors, readers, reviewers – there is a need for an overseeing entity, judging the quality of submissions and reviewer statements, and that is charged with the duty of determining the final scientific decisions of acceptance, revision or rejection. That person is the Executive Editor.

I have had the genuine pleasure and joy of working with Professor Sharon Krag of the Department of Biochemistry, School of Hygiene and Public Health, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA, as my fellow Executive Editor for *BBA - General Subjects*. Professor Krag–Sharon–held one of the two Editor positions for this section of the journal when I began as an Editor little more than five years ago. Together, we have seen ourselves, in a way, as *guards of our publishing palace*. When we met for the first time and began to get to know one another, we found out that each of us actually had had our own first papers published in BBA! In 1974 Sharon published a paper entitled *Biosynthesis of diglyceride from phosphatidic acid in the membranes of Bacillus subtilis* [1], and in 1984, I had the publication *Maximal flux responses after multiple challenges with vasopressin* [2], which became my own entrance into science. Having had your first paper published in BBA is certainly not a selection criterion for becoming an Executive Editor, but it was a good feeling to realize that we had this rather unique common denominator experience with "our own" journal. Perhaps this relationship helped us early on to identify BBA as an important and well established venue for scientific

publishing within the fields of biochemistry and biophysics. Still, despite BBA's long and solid tradition, we, like most Editors, have had ongoing strategic discussions to determine whether we could do more for *BBA - General Subjects*. Was it perhaps possible for us to improve the journal further, in terms of quality, readability or interest to our readership? Indeed, we thought a few years ago that there were ways that we could accomplish this. Our discussions led to changes in our publishing policies and strategies, most publicly reflected in a clear revision of our scope statement. A strong emphasis was directed to papers judged by the authors themselves to have general interest for a wide audience, and an extra focus was placed on papers from emerging novel research areas, as well as studies of biomedical interest (see the *Instructions for Authors* for a full description of our scope).

During the few years that have passed since we revised our journal policies, we have been most happy to see that our efforts, together with those of all our authors, Editorial Staff, reviewers and readers, have clearly benefited the journal. We have been fortunate to see a remarkable continuous growth in the number of high-quality submissions, a pronounced increase in our impact factor, acceptance and publication of many new high-profile and well-cited papers, and overall, continuing growth. Virtually all bibliometric parameters are currently rising. Our major challenge at this stage will be to support and continue this positive trend, or at the very least, maintain our present favorable position.

Although the tasks of maintaining the high standing of a journal is a demanding task, it is clearly more thrilling to be the guard of a genuine publishing palace, rather than that of a smaller regular publishing venue. It is thus in a stage of pride and growth that we are now experiencing a partial changing of the guard. Professor Sharon Krag will be leaving her post as Executive Editor for *BBA - General Subjects* during the spring of this year, having completed a long and very dedicated service. Personally, I am certain that I will stay in touch with Sharon in years to come, as I have tremendously enjoyed working with her. This is a joy that I know I have shared with our Editorial Staff members, our authors, Guest Editors, and reviewers. With significant pride, Sharon can take leave of this job, knowing that it was excellently done. Thank you so much, Sharon, for all of your dedication and efforts for *BBA - General Subjects*!

It is clear that "*changing of the guard*" carries the implication that a new Executive Editor will take Sharon's place. Indeed, I am most happy to welcome Professor David Litchfield of the Department of Biochemistry, University of Western Ontario, Canada, as my new fellow Executive Editor. Sharon's scientific career has been within the field of glycobiology; David is well-known within the fields of signal transduction, protein phosphorylation cascades, and proteomics. He is, furthermore, proof that having had your first paper published in *BBA* is not a selection criteria for becoming Executive Editor: David waited until his publications numbered in the twenties before choosing *BBA* as his publishing venue. He then presented the journal with an important study identifying p34cdc2 as the kinase phosphorylating the Ser-209 residue of the beta subunit of casein kinase II [3]. David's scientific interests will likely be reflected in future special efforts and initiatives for *BBA - General Subjects*, such as the topics chosen for Special Issues or invited Review Articles. Importantly, however, as Executive Editors, we always work for the benefit of all of the scientific fields covered by our journal. Since *BBA - General Subjects* indeed covers a very broad field of science - all the research in biochemistry and biophysics that is judged to have a general interest to a wide audience - this is a most exciting and also most rewarding task. I know that David and I together shall do all that we can to maintain *BBA - General Subjects* as a flourishing and inviting *palace of publishing*, also after this current "changing of the guard." Thank you so much, Sharon! And, welcome, David!

#### References

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