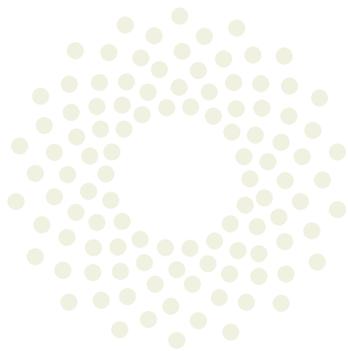


DEAR Labby



Dear Labby,

I am writing to you in an anxious state of mind. I am a 36-year-old Assistant Professor of Cell Biology and this is my tenure review year. I am at a pretty good institution, though not one of the real Ivory Towers. Things have gone quite well for me but my Department Chair told me last summer that my tenure decision could be a close call because my publication record is “just a bit short.” Her comment refers to the fact that although I have published an average of 2.5 papers a year in two leading cell biology journals (*MBC* and *JCB*), I have yet to publish in one of the so-called “elite” journals.

I don't want to get into the controversies about Impact Factors, etc. I have a more specific question. Last year, I submitted what I consider my most important paper so far to one of the “elite” journals and received what I regard as very positive reviews. Nonetheless, the editor turned my paper down. I appealed but the editor dug in her heels.

When I assembled materials for my tenure review, I wanted to include the two referees' enthusiastic reviews on the aforementioned manuscript, but my Chair advised me not to do so. Now I wonder if that was the right decision. If the Tenure and Promotions Committee saw how close my paper came to being accepted in the “elite” journal, maybe that would be an influential factor—perhaps a decisive one? By the way, on the other tenure criteria, teaching and service, my Chair said I am fine.

—Worried

Dear Worried,

Labby would have recommended inclusion of the referee reports—why not? There is no apparent downside. Did your Chair think members of the committee would be turned off knowing that an “elite” journal turned down your paper? It sounds like she was trying to protect you but it may have been overdone. It is likely that every member of the committee has had this experience (Labby certainly has)

It might also have been useful to include the editor's letter, explaining the rejection. The editor must have pulled out a major issue in order to traverse two very positive reviews. (But bear in mind that you have not seen the referees' confidential comments to the editor, and these can sometimes be very different from the tone of the reviews—a totally corrupt practice but it happens.)

You have high marks in two other categories, teaching and service, and at most good institutions these do count. And your research productivity sounds extremely good, more like A- (at least) than warranting your Chair's “close call” remark. The two journals you are publishing in (at a frequency higher than many established, famous labs) are extremely well regarded.

To paraphrase a line from the great reggae song: “Everytin's almost certainly gonna be all right.” But your experience does raise an interesting issue, and hopefully airing it here will be helpful to ASCB members (either pre-tenure faculty or Chairs, as there are teachings for both). Labby looks forward to the news of your grant of tenure.

—Labby ■

Direct your questions to labby@ascb.org. Authors of questions chosen for publication may indicate whether or not they wish to be identified. Submissions may be edited for space and style.

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