

# ANNUAL MEETING Highlights

authors gain visibility for their work because *MBoC* emails each table of contents to more than 10,000 scientists.

Another virtue of *MBoC* and ASCB is their strong tradition of service to the scientific community, said ASCB Executive Director Stefano Bertuzzi, noting the ASCB's early embrace of National Institutes of Health policies on access to scientific literature.

But Drubin warned of some challenges ahead. Submissions fell in 2012, as did the journal's impact factor. The widespread misuse of the impact factor is a concern, he said, as he described a meeting of journal editors to develop strategies to promote better metrics and better practices for evaluating scientists. (See story below). Some Board members were incensed to learn that there are major U.S. universities where the impact factor of the journals in which they publish is used to evaluate candidates for promotion, a practice one participant called "totally irresponsible." ASCB President Ron Vale said that scientists need to take ownership of the process by which they evaluate people throughout their careers.

The members of the *MBoC* Editorial Board are listed at [www.molbiolcell.org/site/misc/edboard.xhtml](http://www.molbiolcell.org/site/misc/edboard.xhtml).

—*W. Mark Leader*

## Editors Decry Misuse of Journal Impact Factors

The widespread misuse of journal impact factors to evaluate the work of individual scientists is detrimental to both journals and scientists. At

the ASCB Annual Meeting in San Francisco, a group of journal editors held an ad hoc meeting to develop a strategy for addressing the problem. The meeting was called by *Molecular Biology of the Cell* Editor-in-Chief David Drubin and *Traffic* co-Editor Michael Marks and was attended by editors from 10 highly regarded journals.

The group noted that the Thomson Reuters impact factor was originally developed as a tool for use by librarians to evaluate their journal collections. But problems arise when individual scientists are evaluated for academic advancement by the impact factors of the journals in which they publish. This causes junior scientists to fear that their careers will be hindered if they do not publish in high-impact journals and creates a culture in which the quality of a scientist's work is perceived as less important than where he or she publishes it.

In such an atmosphere, submissions to an otherwise highly regarded journal may decrease if its impact factor drops. Indeed, many of the journals upon which ASCB members rely heavily have seen their impact factors decline recently. Several of the editors at the meeting felt that this is due in part to the limitations imposed by some publishers on the number of citations in an article, which encourages authors to cite reviews rather than the primary literature.

A journal's impact factor is calculated as the number of published citations made in a year to *any* material published in that journal in the previous two years, divided by the number of "citable articles" published in that same two-year period. What constitutes a citable article is at the discretion of Thomson Reuters, but most primary research papers and classical reviews are included and commentaries, news, and editorials typically are not. Oddly, citations to articles not counted in the denominator may contribute to the numerator.

Even for its original purpose, the impact factor is a flawed metric. For example, because the impact factor is calculated as a mean rather than a median, it can be skewed by a small number of highly cited papers.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the raw data used to calculate impact factors are not publicly available, and some publishers have found Thomson Reuters to be uncooperative when questions arise about how a particular impact factor has been calculated.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the group of editors felt that better and varied



*Molecular Biology of the Cell Editorial Board meeting*

# ANNUAL MEETING Highlights

metrics of a journal's value are also needed. Among the group's goals are:

- Engage the scientific community (scientists, university administrators, journal publishers) to embrace appropriate methods of evaluating individual scientists and their work and to discourage misuse of the impact factor for that purpose.
- Encourage citation of the primary literature rather than reviews, and remove policies that limit the number of citations in articles.
- Replace the impact factor with a more carefully designed, relevant, and transparent metric of journal value.

Toward those ends, the group will develop a statement to be jointly published by the

journals, reach out to organizations that can educate scientists about the issue, and identify avenues for the development of alternative metrics. Other strategies are under consideration, and the participating editors plan to hold regular conference calls as they pursue their goals. ■

—*W. Mark Leader*

## References

<sup>1</sup>Editor. (2005) Not so deep impact. *Nature* 435, 1003–1004. [www.nature.com/nature/journal/v435/n7045/full/4351003b.html](http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v435/n7045/full/4351003b.html).

<sup>2</sup>Rossner M, van Epps H, Hill E. (2007) Show me the data. *J Cell Biol* 179, 1091–1092. [www.jcb.org/cgi/content/full/179/6/1091](http://www.jcb.org/cgi/content/full/179/6/1091).

## Membership



*Membership Committee meeting*

### Membership Committee Strives to Make ASCB Important to Members Year-Round

The Membership Committee's discussions at its meeting in San Francisco focused on how to make members, and potential members, view ASCB as an important part of their day-to-day lives beyond the Annual Meeting.

Led by ASCB Secretary Kathleen Green, both current and incoming Committee members discussed targeting programs and services to specific member groups to match the right product to the particular need. Among the ideas discussed were:

- Expand the CV/resume review program to include a mentoring program.

- Develop apps for ASCB programs in addition to that for the Annual Meeting.
- Provide better communication through the website, emails, and social media.
- Emphasize career training and job-placement programs and services.

Green noted the ASCB Council's recent establishment of a new committee, representing both students and postdoctoral members, and stated that the Membership Committee looks forward to working with this new committee to make the Society an integral part of the future of our scientific community. ■

—*Katherine Hempel, Membership Manager*

### 2012 Membership Committee

Kathleen J. Green,\* *Chair*  
Angela R. Hess  
Katherine Hempel,\* *Staff Liaison*  
Guangpu Li\*  
Anthony G. Moss  
Ivan R. Nabi\*  
Lucy E. O'Brien\*

\*In attendance at December meeting