Editorial

Effective with the July 2005 issue, we will institute a number of changes in the Journal of General Physiology. From the authors’ point of view, the most important change will be a new formula for calculating page charges and the cost of color figures. Presently half the articles published in the JGP have one or more color figures, and color allows for clearer presentation of both results and concepts. Color also remains costly to print. At the last two meetings of our Advisory Editors and Editorial Board members it therefore was discussed how to revise page and color charges. As a result of these discussions it was decided to make the following changes: effective July 1, 2005, the page charges will be $95 per page, which will include five free color pages (we charge per color page, not per color figure); if authors of an article need more than five pages of color figures, the charge will be $250 for each additional page.

Another outcome of the most recent meeting of the Advisory Editors and Editorial Board members is that we will implement a new type of article, “Communications,” which will be short articles (no longer than six published pages) that will go through the Journal’s usual review process. We decided to do so in attempt to correct a common misconception, namely that the JGP will publish only long, detailed articles. Indeed, articles that provide mechanistic insight tend to be long, and we are pleased to publish them. But discoveries that open up new areas of research or provide unexpected insights into important problems often can be reported succinctly, and we are equally pleased to publish articles that describe such discoveries. Communications should be prepared and submitted like any other manuscript, except that they cannot refer to online supplemental material. Communications will not be subject to accelerated review, as the median time from submission to the first decision already is just 31 days. Nevertheless, short manuscripts tend to be reviewed faster than longer manuscripts, and we expect that the median time from submission to first decision will be less than for regular articles. If a manuscript that is submitted as a Communication turns out to be longer than six printed pages, it will be published as a regular article in the same issue that it would have appeared in as a Communication.

In addition to these two initiatives, we will merge the Advisory Editors and the Editorial Board into a single Editorial Advisory Board and implement a number of minor, largely stylistic changes.

Finally, I wish to comment briefly on the new National Institutes of Health (NIH) policy on enhancing public access to articles resulting from NIH-funded research, which takes effect May 2, 2005. Under this policy, which will affect more than half of the articles published in the Journal, the NIH requests that publications resulting from NIH-funded research be deposited by the authors in an archive at the National Library of Medicine (NLM). This policy raises a number of issues. Though one can only support the NIH’s establishing an online archive, the archive will be incomplete because it will contain only articles resulting from NIH-funded research (published after May 2, 2005). It cannot therefore supplant the much larger archives that already are available through HighWire Press and similar resources. Indeed, the JGP and many other journals already have invested significantly in making their back issues available, and much of this information is not accessible through PubMed.

The JGP provides free access to all back issues 12 months after publication. The Rockefeller University Press journals were among the first to institute such a policy. When the online archive became available, we maintained this practice, including the PDFs going back to Vol. 1, issue 1. This practice is being adopted by an increasing number of journals published by scientific societies and other not-for-profit publishers, which means that the most complete, and therefore most useful, archives will be provided by the journals through resources like HighWire. So, though it may be useful for NIH to maintain an electronic archive of publications resulting from NIH-funded research—after all, NIH receives paper copies of publications resulting from NIH-funded research, so why not provide the PDFs—this archive will not be a major resource. Given this context, the proposed implementation of the new policy is likely to become a burden to both authors and readers, because NIH/NLM does not wish to receive PDFs of the published articles, only the accepted manuscripts (in pre-copyedited form). It therefore will be a burden on the authors to ensure that the articles in the NLM Archive are identical in content to the articles in the Journal’s (or any other publisher’s) web site. We can safely assume that glitches will occur, so it also will be a burden on the readers to ensure that they indeed are reading and referring to the article of record. The accompanying editorial by Mike Rossner, Editorial Director at The Rockefeller University Press and Managing Editor of the Journal of Cell Biology, http://www.jcb.org/cgi/content/full/168/7/991, describes some of the concerns that affect all of us, whether we are users or publishers of the scientific literature.

Olaf Sparre Andersen
For the Editors
The Journal of General Physiology
On February 3, 2005, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced its policy on “enhancing public access to archived publications resulting from NIH-funded research.” Through this policy, the NIH requests that publications resulting from NIH-funded research be deposited by the authors in an archive at the National Library of Medicine (NLM). Authors can elect to have their publications released to the public immediately or up to 12 months after publication.

There are three stated reasons for this policy:
1. to provide public access to the results of NIH-funded research.
2. to create an archive of NIH-funded research.
3. to make the full text of that archive searchable.

Public access
The NIH policy is in part a response to the refusal of commercial publishers to release their archival content from behind subscription controls, denying the public access to the results of research that they funded. At the Journal of Cell Biology, we have tried to balance our obligation to the public for funding the research we publish with our need to recoup the costs of peer review and journal production. To do this, we wait six months before releasing our content to the public for free, and we sell subscriptions to institutions and individuals who want to see that content in the first six months.

We have offered (through HighWire Press) to provide the NLM with all of the NIH grant information in our publications, which they can use to create records in their new database of NIH-funded publications. We have thus offered to automatically provide information to the NLM that they have only requested from authors, thereby enhancing the content of their database.

In return for this information, we have asked only that they provide a link to the content on the journal’s website, exactly as they do now for content in the PubMed database. If authors are willing to wait six months for release of their content, their obligations to submit their work to this archive could be completely fulfilled, without having to make a separate submission to the NLM. As currently proposed, such a submission would require authors to check several sets of page proofs. We are simply trying to give our authors the choice of avoiding this additional effort.

Archiving
We are strongly in favor of the establishment of an archive of NIH-funded research; in fact, we would prefer to see a truly complete, electronic archive of all the scientific literature established, with limited access controls that allow publishers to recoup their costs. This is where we believe the NLM should direct their efforts.

To ensure that the final, published version of a paper is what is included in such an archive, we are willing to give the NLM all of our content as pdf files. This would prevent any problems of quality control related to html interpretation across platforms. We have been told by the NLM, however, that they want our complete html content, because they want to build a full-text search engine.

Searching
It is a useless duplication of effort for the NLM to host html (or SGML, or XML, or whatever comes next) simply for the purpose of full-text searching—Google and other search engines are currently indexing our full text, and already far more users arrive at our content via Google than via PubMed. If, despite the duplication, the NLM goes ahead and develops a full-text search engine, we have offered to allow them to index our text by crawling our website. In addition, the text content of pdf files can be indexed for searching, which is how full-text searches of our content from before 1997 are done on our website.

The current NIH policy is a misguided attempt to achieve laudable goals. We hope they can be convinced to reconsider how to achieve those goals.