

## Editor's Comments on the Changing Mission of *Biophysical Journal*

As some of our readers and authors have noted, the first sentence of *Biophysical Journal's Information for Authors* has changed. A year ago it stated, "*Biophysical Journal* publishes original articles, letters, and reviews on molecular, cellular, and general biophysics." It now says, "*Biophysical Journal* publishes original articles, letters and reviews on biophysical topics, emphasizing the molecular and cellular aspects of biology." This change in wording reflects a significant shift in editorial policy.

In the past, any manuscript that described an application of mathematical, physical, or physical-chemical techniques to a system with biological associations, no matter how distant, was "fair game" for *Biophysical Journal*, regardless of the kind of question addressed. The publication that resulted from this "broad tent" approach to biophysics, which *Biophysical Journal* still pursues today to a large degree, was/is so heterogeneous that it is not a key journal for any of the large scientific constituencies represented in the Biophysical Society. Concerned about the declining interest in *Biophysical Journal* among structural biologists and biophysical chemists, who are a critically important part of the biophysical world, the Officers of the Society made a structural biologist Editor in 1997, namely yours truly. One of their charges to me was to increase the focus of the journal on biophysical chemistry. The change in the wording of the first sentence of *Information for Authors* reflects that mandate.

Two policy changes have been put in place that directly affect authors. They are intended to push *Biophysical Jour-*

*nal*—gently—in the direction of biophysical chemistry. First, in order to be appropriate for *Biophysical Journal* today, manuscripts must report investigations that are directly relevant to our understanding of *natural* biological processes. For example, a manuscript that deals with the properties of membranes derived from sarcoplasmic reticulum is more likely to be accepted than one that discusses liposomes made from synthetic lipid, regardless of its scientific merits. (Note that *Biophysical Journal* now asks that authors make the biological implications of their manuscripts clear in both the abstracts and the introductions they write.) Second, manuscripts that deal with cellular and molecular issues will be favored over those that consider larger biological entities like whole tissue, organs, and organisms. For example, a scientifically sound manuscript on electrolyte homeostasis in intact mammals is less likely to be published than an equally sound manuscript that illuminates the function of ion channels in kidney cells.

Unfortunately, given the existence of financial realities that require the *Journal* to remain roughly constant in size, this shift in focus implies that *Biophysical Journal* will no longer be as welcoming as it has been to manuscripts in some fields it has served faithfully in the past. I regret the inconvenience and disappointment some authors will experience as a result of this shift in emphasis, but I remain hopeful that a more vital, focused *Biophysical Journal* will emerge.

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