

2015 Editorial

From the Desk of the Editor-in-Chief of *Organic Letters*:

First for the good news!

Organic Letters continues to thrive, attracting reports of high quality research from around the world, as exemplified by 2014's outstanding *Organic Letters* Author of the Year Award to Professor Yong Huang of Peking University. His report on preparing nitriles directly from alcohols and aqueous ammonia under mild, aerobic catalysis can be found at 10.1021/ol400459y. We are also pleased to report that our impact factor continues to grow, now at 6.321! More importantly, I believe that the scientific breadth and quality of our Letters are reaching new heights.

The visibility and access to *Organic Letters* has also been enhanced by several new and continuing initiatives. In 2014, the Publications Division of the ACS added the Editors' Choice feature. One new peer-reviewed research article from any ACS journal is selected to be freely available every day. This includes 17 excellent *Organic Letters* papers with more to come. Editors' Choice articles remain open for all to access and read. Importantly, the *Organic Letters* Editors' Choice papers have an average of over 2000 downloads per Letter.

Our Virtual Issues are also freely accessible. The Editorials for the Issues provide important and timely overviews of recent research published in *Organic Letters*, *The Journal of Organic Chemistry*, and the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* on topics of current interest. Our most recent *Organic Letters* Virtual Issue is entitled "All Natural—the Renaissance of Natural Products Chemistry", presented by Guest Editor Professor Tadeusz Molinski from the University of California, San Diego. Our five Virtual Issues have now been viewed more than 67000 times.

We at *Organic Letters* and at the Publications Division of the American Chemical Society also continue to strive for methods to improve both our evaluation protocols and the rapid processing of the research submitted. For example, the transition to a more user-friendly manuscript template has gone smoothly and, we believe, has facilitated submissions to *Organic Letters*. Please let us know your experience with the new template as we continue to fine-tune our procedures to achieve an optimal balance between thoroughness in our review process and the speed with which we publish your best work. *Organic Letters* indeed continues to be "exactly where you want to be".

Now for some troublesome issues!

As many of you may be aware, recently there have been disturbing news reports of individuals and organizations trying to manipulate the research publication process. For example, a researcher was reported to have created a series of fake identities in a publisher's database so that the individual could recommend phantom researchers as reviewers.¹ Equally worrisome, there have also been a number of reports of data manipulation, some in our own journal. Also troublesome is the issue of irreproducibility of research results. In fact, the National Institutes of Health has become so concerned about reproducibility issues that they are now developing a training

module on enhancing reproducibility and transparency of research findings, with an emphasis on good experimental design.²

While such questionable behavior is not new, the electronic environment has to some extent facilitated such behavior. *Organic Letters*, along with other journals, is wrestling with how best to provide the very best high quality accurate research and ensure the integrity of the peer review process in the current environment. The question that arises is: What should our due diligence be? That is, how much of the slogan "Trust, but Verify" is appropriate for a communication/rapid publication journal like *Organic Letters*? While, of course, we at *Organic Letters* are concerned about the integrity of the material we publish, we are not staffed or funded to repeat and verify the reported research vis-à-vis reproducibility. We depend critically on the "covenant of trust" between authors, reviewers, and editors. When users obtain substantially different results using information in an *Organic Letters* paper, we will bring this to the attention of the authors and work to resolve the matter. However, if the differing results cannot be reconciled, those obtaining differing results should submit their results for publication so that these findings can be evaluated. We cannot and will not be a party to an adversarial process. Instead, we view the peer review process as "vested" cooperation between colleagues and we will continue operate under this philosophy! However, it would be foolish not to react and evolve in response to emerging issues.

While the electronic environment can facilitate questionable behavior, the electronic environment also provides tools for detecting such behavior. Toward this end, the Publications Division of the ACS, along with most other major publishers, now routinely checks manuscripts for plagiarism prior to acceptance, given the tools now available for this purpose. Very pleasingly, we have noticed a reduction in the improper reuse of prior published text over the past year, in particular, self-plagiarism.

Organic Letters' closer examination of supporting data, however, has not *as yet* had the same overall success. The rate of edited spectra that we discover continues at the same (albeit small) rate. We at *Organic Letters* and the ACS had hoped that by bringing this problem to the attention of the Chemical Community in my 2014 Editorial a reduction in this problem would have resulted. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. I am therefore once again alerting the Community to this issue.

We now examine ALL spectra before accepting manuscripts for publication and will contact the corresponding authors if anomalies are discovered. Moreover, we now request that authors retain the original FID NMR data for all spectra included as part of the Supporting Information and upon request make this data available to our staff. If evidence of manipulation is confirmed, the submission will be rejected. In

Received: December 17, 2014

Published: January 2, 2015

turn, we will add an alert to the *Organic Letters* database as to the precise nature of the situation uncovered, and all future submissions *from all of the authors of record* will receive special scrutiny. Repeat offenders will be banned from publication in *Organic Letters*. Thus, it is extremely important that all corresponding authors emphasize to their colleagues (students and postdoctoral associates) that manipulation of any data, and in particular, editing of NMR spectra to remove or minimize impurities and/or solvents, even when the chemistry reported is valid, casts considerable doubt on the validity of the entire research, and that, in turn, can damage the reputation *and the ability to publish* of all of the authors involved. It is the continuing goal of *Organic Letters* to publish the highest quality research, without burdening the peer review process with unnecessary impediments. We at *Organic Letters* are very grateful to all those who have helped communicate this important message about data integrity and, of course, look forward, as always, to your suggestions on how to improve *Organic Letters*. Thank you for your continued strong support.

Amos B. Smith, III, Editor-in-Chief

■ AUTHOR INFORMATION

Notes

Views expressed in this editorial are those of the author and not necessarily the views of the ACS.

■ REFERENCES

(1) Fountain, H. Science Journal Pulls 60 Papers in Peer-Review Fraud. *New York Times*, July 10, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/11/science/science-journal-pulls-60-papers-in-peer-review-fraud.html?_r=0.

(2) Collins, F. S.; Tabak, L. A. Policy: NIH Plans to Enhance Reproducibility. *Nature* 2014, 505, 612, <http://www.nature.com/news/policy-nih-plans-to-enhance-reproducibility-1.14586#auth-2>.