

## On Costs and Benefits of Journal Editorship

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Some months ago, while recruiting new members of the editorial team of PLANT DISEASE, we had occasion to consider the contemporary system of voluntary editorship of scientific journals: the necessity for it, the nature of the responsibility, and the personal and professional rewards and sacrifices. While talking with colleagues, we realized that the sacrifices associated with voluntary editorial service were better known than the nature of the work or the necessity for it, and much better known than the rewards. We decided, therefore, to present this perspective on editorship, which we see as a necessary, worthwhile, and rewarding activity.

**Journals and editorship in contemporary science.** Journals staffed by knowledgeable editors and referees are essential to the contemporary system of nonproprietary scientific research. Journal articles serve not only communicative and archival functions but also as input data for personnel management decisions. Researchers must publish in refereed journals in order to advance professionally; their work is most likely to be respected and held to be credible if it appears in these journals. Research administrators regard articles in refereed journals as evidence of significant accomplishment.

Editors and referees who will be respected by authors must themselves be established scientists whose skills as critical reviewers and judges of manuscripts have developed in parallel with their technical expertise. For this peer-review system to continue, a pool of potential editors must be maintained. Individuals who serve as reviewers of manuscripts provide this pool. For PLANT DISEASE, some who have served ably as outside reviewers are asked to serve as associate editors. (A few people volunteer for these assignments. Offers of service are welcome, and if a volunteer's particular skills are needed, he or she will probably be called.) Those who have served well as associate editors of APS journals may be approached for possible service as senior editors. Senior editors referee the review and revision of submitted manuscripts and often edit them as well. These people, through their attention to technical and editorial details, maintain the quality and integrity of the journals. It is the combination of subject expertise and skill as a reviewer-editor that brings to an individual an invitation to serve as a senior editor. (The new senior editors of PLANT DISEASE will be introduced in this space next month.)

**Journal editorship as an overhead cost of research.** As long as the refereed journals that publish phytopathological research have their current role and staffing patterns, voluntary editorial work for the journals may be considered to be an overhead cost borne by individuals and organizations that perform nonproprietary research. For the individual who is qualified for it, editorial work ought to be considered an obligation—a return of energy to the system that nurtured his or her scientific growth. For the organization, the support of editorial work ought to be provided as a regular part of research administration. Some administrators already do this by assisting their staff members who serve as journal editors and rewarding them for the extra effort that is required to serve as an editor while performing regular duties. This support encourages the editors and allows young scientists to look forward with an affirmative attitude to possible similar service. It would be an error, we think, to take for granted the continued functioning of refereed journals while allocating few or no resources, other than funds for page charges, to this part of the science system.

**Benefits balance the personal costs of editorship.** The personal cost of voluntary editorship is measured primarily in time. In general, reviewers and editors try to prevent their journal work from infringing significantly on research, teaching, or extension; time for journal duties is found at the expense of personal pursuits. For every research article submitted to PLANT DISEASE, for example, 2–4 hours are spent by each of two (often three) reviewers, and an average of 1.2 days is spent by a senior editor supervising review and revision. This much time certainly represents a big commitment and a degree of personal sacrifice.

Some have suggested that if the work load were spread among more senior editors, the burden for a given editor would be more bearable. This concept is worth exploring, although we foresee in such a change an associated loss of consistency in handling manuscripts; editorial recommendations and acceptance decisions will become more variable as more people make them.

On the benefit side of the editorial balance, we find the following: First, the work of reviewers and editors is usually appreciated by authors, who often extend thanks for effective service. One editor of a phytopathological journal even received a complimentary letter from an author whose manuscript was rejected! The stories and cartoons about editors who are hated and harpooned do not represent the real situation for editors who serve plant pathology. Second, editorship helps a scientist keep up to date in his or her area of specialization and in related areas, because the editor gets a preview of publications. The practice of reviewing manuscripts at either the editorial or the peer level also helps a scientist evaluate his or her own research. Third, an invitation to editorship at a senior level is an honor extended to relatively few members of a scientific discipline. Such an invitation carries with it a vote of confidence from one's colleagues (who on a confidential basis have been consulted about the potential editor's skills and judgment). Finally, and perhaps most important, service as an editor fosters humility and self-evaluation, because the editor must continually question his or her own judgment. Every editor or former editor queried by us has affirmed the overall value of the experience. We would encourage students and young scientists in particular to look forward to possible future invitations to editorship at any level—reviewer, referee, or chief editor—as meaningful opportunities for growth and service.

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This space is available. One function of PLANT DISEASE is to promote the sharing of opinions about phytopathological matters. We invite the voluntary submission of statements that can be considered for publication as editorials. The editorial page has been used for more than 100 viewpoints on subjects ranging from journal policy and housekeeping to initiatives of APS; issues and technological changes in research, extension, and classroom teaching; employment trends; and agricultural problems of global importance. If an author would like to offer or promote a viewpoint on a topic of interest to plant pathologists and workers in related disciplines, this page is one place where he or she can do so. If a point of view is too partial or the topic too specialized for an editorial to be appropriate, try a letter to the editor. We pledge to work with authors toward the fair airing of their concerns, and if a contrary viewpoint is needed for balance, we will find a writer who can present it.