Ensuring the Future of JMBE

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In my last editorial, I described the growing success of the Journal of Microbiology & Biology Education (JMBE) and the need for the publication to innovate and evolve. For example, in the past year, we have expanded our editorial board, moved to a continuous publication model, and continued to broaden our audience through themed issues. Since JMBE was established in 2000, the publication has grown exponentially from five articles that first year to over 100 published in 2016. The journal was the American Society for Microbiology’s (ASM) first open-access publication and, throughout these 17 years, the Society has supported the quality of this biological and microbiological sciences teaching practitioner journal and subsidized all production costs.

JMBE is the only education journal that is grounded in the microbiological sciences as well as other branches of biology. The various sections of the journal allow educators at every career level to publish their classroom and laboratory experiences. Just like microbiology itself, JMBE authors and readers are diverse and represent a variety of institution types, student populations and localities (with over 50% international readership!). JMBE is an inclusive publishing venue where current and future faculty can achieve visibility and credibility in their careers. In 2016, nearly 60% of accepted manuscripts came from first-time JMBE authors. Between 2012 and 2015, on average, JMBE ranked the highest among seven other similar journals in publications from community colleges with 8.2% of biology education research (BER) manuscripts coming from two-year college faculty (1). JMBE authors receive recognition for teaching excellence in the tenure and promotion process; to highlight the value of this recognition, a group of STEM education journal editors, including myself, recently published a framework for evaluating discipline-based education research (DBER) (2).

Because JMBE relies heavily on volunteers for reviewing and is published online, you may think that costs are low for producing the journal. Until I became Editor-in-Chief, I did not realize exactly what went into the production of the publication and all its associated costs. I’d like to share this information with the community at large so that all stakeholders can understand the next steps for sustaining the journal. There are many factors that go into publishing a high-quality journal including overhead to manage all the processes such as copyediting, layout, and online publication of articles. There are also fees for these services as well as for indexing articles in major databases and maintaining the software platforms for journal submission, review, and publishing. See Figure 1 for a breakdown of these costs. That said, ASM’s annual investment in JMBE is $200,000.

ASM is undergoing a period of major changes. Decreasing revenues have led to substantial deficits not just for ASM, but for many professional societies, forcing an examination of all member programs and revenue models. ASM leadership is focused on positioning the Society for long-term stability so it can continue to provide outstanding programs and services to its members. However, ASM’s full subsidy of JMBE can no longer be sustained and, beginning in 2018, ASM will implement JMBE author fees.

The fee structure will be as follows:

- For submissions on or after January 1, 2018, authors will be expected to pay a flat production fee for each article published. For a corresponding author who is a member of ASM at the Contributing or Premium level, the JMBE publication fee is $1,600 for manuscripts published in the Research, Curriculum, and Perspectives sections and $800 for manuscripts published in the Tips and Tools section.
- For a corresponding author who is a nonmember or Supporting member, the fee is $1,700 for manuscripts published in the Research, Curriculum, and Perspectives sections and $900 for manuscripts published in the Tips and Tools section.
- There will be no fees for Letters to the Editor, Inside ASM, and the Editorials and Reviews sections.

Because JMBE is so committed to its early career and under-resourced authors, ASM sought funding to support these groups as we make the transition to an author fee model. Thanks to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), JMBE has funding for the next two years to consider fee waivers. The HHMI grant will allow ASM to roll out this new author fee model and test its effectiveness.
Manuscript acceptance is dependent upon editorial and peer review only. Ability to pay the publication fee will have no impact on whether or not an article is accepted. Once a manuscript is accepted, an independent review of any waiver request will be made. No manuscript will be published unless a fee is collected or a waiver granted. Applications for waivers will be considered for corresponding authors:

- from community colleges or minority-serving institutions
- from under-resourced countries (World Bank-defined low-income economies)
- holding temporary positions, such as a graduate student, postdoctoral fellow, or adjunct; or
- who are early-career faculty (within five years of having completed their training)

*JMBE* is not alone in beginning to collect fees from authors (3); this model is becoming increasingly common in the online publishing world, particularly for open access journals. Consequently, many authors have already begun to include publication fees in their grant budget requests, and authors are encouraged to do so in future grant submissions. Institutional and departmental funding is another source of publishing support.

Rest assured, we know this is a big change and that budgets are tight everywhere. ASM is committed to providing a venue for educators to share and replicate best practices in the field. The *JMBE* editorial board and ASM staff will continually support our diverse group of authors and our loyal readers. We look forward to championing the professional development of our authors, publishing excellent work for years to come, and improving student learning in the sciences.

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**REFERENCES**

