

Addressing Ethical Concerns: Editor and Reviewer Guidelines, Conflicts of Interest

As the readers of this newsletter as well as of the Society's journals know, ASPB has been working to develop ethical standards for scientific publishing. Our goal is to articulate a series of guidelines to assist all who participate in the publication process. We live, work, and publish in an increasingly complex academic world in which financial gain, either personal or corporate, may complicate the dissemination of our scientific results. At the same time, our increasing reliance on digital information presents new challenges for maintaining the integrity of the primary data as well as for their publication. We view this as an educational process, with the goals of disseminating information to and encouraging discussion among our members. As the latter goal implies, it is an evolving task in which the thoughtful responses of our members and authors will inform our guidelines in both their content and their implementation. As part of this continuing effort, ASPB's Executive Committee approved on February 26, 2005, two new documents for the Society's Ethics in Publishing series and revised the existing Author's Ethics document (see <http://www.aspb.org/publications/authorethics.cfm>).

In October 2003, the committee approved the first document in its Ethics in Publishing series: "ASPB Policies and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Author Misconduct." At the February 2005 meeting, this document was revised to include a consultative stage whereby the executive director, upon receiving an allegation of misconduct, would confer with the chair of the Publications Committee and the editor-in-chief before convening a formal Ethics Review Committee (executive director, president, past president, chair of the Publications Committee, editors-in-chief of both journals, and the editorial board member handling the manuscript in question). The revised document is online at <http://www.aspb.org/publications/authorethics.cfm>.

Clearly the publication of scientific manuscripts raises ethical considerations for authors, but no less clearly there is a set of ethical correlates for all those involved in the evaluation and publication of those manuscripts. Consequently, the new, second document in the series is titled "Ethics in Publishing: ASPB Policies and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Editorial Misconduct." It is posted at <http://www.aspb.org/publications/editoriaethics.cfm>

and is reprinted here in its entirety. This document offers guidelines for ethical conduct for editors and reviewers and provides a process for handling allegations of misconduct.

The third document is titled "Ethics in Publishing: Conflicts of Interest," and it is posted at <http://www.aspb.org/publications/conflictethics.cfm>. It, too, is reprinted in this issue (page 11). We encourage all of you to discuss these documents with your colleagues, collaborators, and students, as well as with those in the Society's leadership and associated with our journals. We want our publications to be at the cutting edge of plant science. To do so they must also be models of scientific responsibility and integrity. 🌿

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Ethics in Publishing: ASPB Policies and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Editorial Misconduct

The American Society of Plant Biologists expects members of the Society and all individuals involved in the peer review and publication of its journals to maintain high ethical standards for scholarship. This document is the second in the ASPB Ethics in Publishing series, which describes expectations for ethical behavior and procedures for addressing allegations of ethical violations. "Ethics in Publishing: ASPB Policies and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Editorial Misconduct" has been developed to offer guidelines for sound editorial practice. Please also refer to "Ethics in Publishing: ASPB Policies and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Author Misconduct" at <http://www.aspb.org/publications/authorethics.cfm>.

Expectations for Editors and Reviewers

Editors-in-Chief and Editorial Board Members (Editors)

Editors will uphold ethical standards for reviewing and accepting papers submitted to the ASPB journals as outlined below. When ethical issues arise in a submitted manuscript, these issues must be dealt with according to ASPB's Ethics in Publishing policies.

- Editors will base decisions to accept or reject manuscripts submitted for publication on the paper's scientific merit, originality, and clarity and the study's relevance to the mission of the journal, without regard to race/ethnic origin, sex, religion, or citizenship of the authors.

- Editors will treat all submitted manuscripts as confidential.
- Editors will not reveal a reviewer's name without the reviewer's permission.
- Editors will not use previously undisclosed information contained in a submitted manuscript.
- An editor may on occasion need to withdraw from the review process for a particular manuscript because of a real or perceived conflict of interest that would affect or could be reasonably perceived to affect the editor's ability to handle a manuscript objectively.

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- An editor-in-chief who has submitted a manuscript to his or her own journal must delegate responsibility for the manuscript to an editorial board member.
- An editorial board member must not seek to influence publication decisions on manuscripts he or she has submitted to the journal.
- Because the Society's interest lies in the integrity of the published record, the editor-in-chief must ensure that, where appropriate, important errors in the journal are corrected.

Reviewers

Reviewers will uphold ethical standards for reviewing papers submitted to the ASPB journals as outlined below. When ethical issues arise in a submitted manuscript, these issues must be dealt with according to ASPB's "Ethics in Publishing" policies.

- Reviewers must treat all assignments as confidential, taking care to guard the author's identity and work. The reviewer is obligated to ensure that strict confidentiality is maintained if a colleague is consulted during the review of a manuscript. In such cases, the reviewer of record is solely responsible for the content and accuracy of the review.
- Reviewers are not to contact authors directly without permission from the editor handling the manuscript.
- Reviewers will not retain copies of submitted manuscripts.
- Reviewers will not use previously undisclosed information contained in a submitted manuscript.
- Reviewers will provide prompt, constructive, courteous, and objective assessments of the manuscripts they are assigned. Personal criticism is not appropriate. A reviewer who feels unqualified to assess a manuscript, or who lacks the time to do so, should decline the assignment promptly.
- Reviewers should be alert to an author's failure to cite relevant work by other scientists. Any significant similarity between the paper being reviewed and another paper should be reported to the editor, as

should any suspicion of duplicate publication, fraud, or plagiarism or any other form of author misconduct.

- Reviewers should disclose to the editor who is handling the manuscript any personal or professional connection to the author if the relationship might be considered a conflict of interest or otherwise bias the review. (See "Ethics in Publishing: Conflicts of Interest," at <http://www.aspb.org/publications/conflictethics.cfm>.)

Examples of Scientific Misconduct in Publishing

By Editors

- Forging, fabricating, or altering the scientific content of a reviewer's report
- Misrepresenting the review process to an author
- Unreasonably delaying the review process
- Using ideas or text from a manuscript that is under review to achieve personal or professional gain
- Basing a decision on an author's religion, race/ethnic group, citizenship, sex, or the like
- Intervening in the review process for an editor's own paper or the paper of a colleague or rival

By Reviewers

- Misrepresenting facts in a review
- Unreasonably delaying the review process
- Making use of confidential information to achieve personal or professional gain
- Using ideas or text from a manuscript under review

Procedure for Handling Allegations of Editorial Misconduct

- A. Any person who has reason to believe that an editor-in-chief, an editorial board member, or a reviewer has engaged in misconduct or committed an ethical violation in the course of reviewing an author's work should summarize the reasons for such allegations in writing and transmit this written document to the ASPB executive director. Allegations that are not made in writing will not be considered. The party registering the allegation may not contact the person against whom the complaint is

made, nor disclose the fact of the complaint to anyone, unless asked to do so by the executive director.

- B. The executive director will consult with the editor-in-chief and Publications Committee chair to determine whether to convene an Ethics Review Committee (ERC; president, past president, editors-in-chief of both *Plant Physiology* and *The Plant Cell*, Publications Committee chair, and the editorial board member who is handling the manuscript in question). When an allegation is made against the editorial board member who handled the manuscript, that editor will not be included on the ERC. An editor-in-chief who feels he or she cannot be objective—or cannot be seen to be objective—in the case where a board member is accused should recuse himself or herself from the deliberations.
- C. Depending on the outcome of section B, the executive director will refer allegations to the ERC. The ERC will review the allegations to determine whether further action is necessary.
- D. If the ERC decides to take action, then the executive director shall notify in writing the party against whom the complaint has been made of the allegations and the fact that an inquiry is being conducted. The party shall be asked to respond to the allegations within 30 days. Responses will be sent by the executive director to the ERC for consideration in its decision making.
- E. The ERC will conduct all inquiries it deems necessary and shall consider all relevant information, including any response received from the party against whom the complaint has been made.
- F. On the basis of its findings, the ERC will determine whether misconduct has occurred.
- G. If in the opinion of the ERC misconduct has occurred, the ERC will determine a course of action.
- H. The executive director will consider the findings, decision, and recommendations of the ERC and determine whether Executive Committee and/or legal review is necessary before final action is taken. Once a final decision is made, the party will be notified in writing of the decision and of any

action that will be taken by the Society. In the event of an adverse decision, the party may appeal to the Executive Committee. Such an appeal must be filed within 14 days of receipt of the decision. The procedures for the appeal shall be determined by the Executive Committee.

- I. The fact that any allegations were made, and all information relating to allegations and subsequent inquiries, will be kept confidential by the party making the complaint, the ERC, and any Society members and staff working on the matter and will not be disclosed to any third parties unless necessary. It is important to recognize that the Society's investigation shall focus on our concerns as a publisher and that the appropriate course of action shall not exceed the constraints of this interest. If deemed appropriate, the party's home institution may be notified. Notification of the home institution will be informational only, so that the home institution is free to consider an independent investigation.

All actions, including telephone calls, must be documented for all situations, even those resolved immediately. Copies of correspondence should be sent to the director of publications. A summary of alleged scientific misconduct or ethical violations, but with no names and other identifiers, should be part of the journal staff report that is delivered to the Publications Committee and the Executive Committee.

A number of sources were consulted during the development of this document. Parts of this document were adapted from Committee on Publication Ethics, *The COPE Report 1999*, <http://www.publicationethics.org.uk/reports/1999/1999pdf13.pdf>.

The section "Examples of Scientific Misconduct in Publishing" is adapted from "Scientific Misconduct," in C. Iverson et al., eds., *American Medical Association Manual of Style*. 9th Edition. Baltimore: William & Wilkins, 1998, p. 105.

This document was approved by the ASPB Executive Committee February 26, 2005.

Ethics in Publishing: Conflicts of Interest

As part of a series of documents detailing the Society's expectations for ethical behavior among its authors, editors, and staff, and guidelines for addressing allegations of scientific misconduct, ASPB has prepared this statement to address potential conflicts of interest for editors and reviewers. This document is adapted from "Conflict-of-Interests and Confidentiality Statement for NSF Panelists," NSF Form 1230P (2/04), National Science Foundation, Arlington, VA 22230.

"Ethics in Publishing: ASPB Policies and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Author Misconduct" and "Ethics in Publishing: ASPB Policies and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Editorial Misconduct" can be viewed at <http://www.aspb.org/publications/ethics.cfm>.

I. Your Affiliations with an Institution Could Create a Conflict If You:

- Have a known ownership interest of any kind in any entity involved in the research.
- Hold a current membership on a visiting committee or similar body at the institution. (This is a conflict only for manuscripts that originate from the department, school, or facility that the visiting committee or similar body advises.)
- Hold any office, governing board membership, or relevant committee chairmanship in the institution. (Ordinary membership in a professional society or association is not considered an office.)

II. Your Relationship, Professional or Financial, with an Author Could Create a Conflict If You:

- Have a family relationship such as a spouse, child, sibling, or parent with an author.
- Have a business or professional partnership with an author.
- Have an association as a thesis research adviser or thesis student with an author within the past 10 years.
- Have an association as postdoctoral adviser or postdoctoral student with an author within the past 5 years.

- Have collaborated on a research project or a research publication with the author within the past 2 years.

III. Other Affiliations or Relationships with an Author Could Create a Conflict If:

- An author is legally your partner, or an author is a relative living in your immediate household.
- You have any relationship with an author, such as close personal friendship, that you think might tend to affect your judgment, or create the appearance or inference of doing so by a reasonable person familiar with the relationship.

IV. Your Interest in the Subject Matter of the Manuscript Could Be a Conflict If You Have:

- Any financial interest in the subject matter described in the manuscript or if you have a professional interest (e.g., a manuscript submitted or in preparation that addresses very similar experimental work) that an observer might reasonably conclude could affect your ability to offer an objective evaluation.

Editorial board members should report real or potential conflicts of interest to the journal's editor-in-chief. Reviewers should report real or potential conflicts of interest to the editorial board member handling the manuscript. 

This document was approved by the ASPB Executive Committee February 26, 2005.