

## Peer Review of Manuscripts Submitted Via the Academy Fellowship Track

When the American Society for Microbiology set out to create a topflight entry into the new world of online, open-access journals, it had a number of assets in its favor. Endorsement by the American Academy of Microbiology (AAM), ASM's honorific branch, was one of the critical assets. The AAM is home to more than 2,000 Academy Fellows, each of whom has been identified by a highly selective election process as an outstanding, internationally respected scientist. When *mBio* was launched, AAM Fellows were given the opportunity to submit their research findings on a privileged track (see <http://mbio.asm.org/site/misc/fellows.xhtml> for complete details), similar to that provided to members of the National Academy of Sciences for publication in that organization's *Proceedings*. This track can lead to very rapid decisions when the editors accept the reviews provided by the submitting author.

Contributions from AAM Fellows have been invaluable in the successful launch of the journal. Because established scholars have been willing to submit their best work to this fledgling journal, its impact is already substantial. Papers submitted via the Academy Fellowship track have been among the most important and highly cited work *mBio* has published to date. Without these articles, *mBio*'s path to success would have been far longer and less certain.

However, we must emphasize that direct submission to *mBio* by AAM members is a privilege, not a right, and inevitably, some manuscripts will not be accepted for publication. Such rejections are not arrived at lightly. All Academy-track submissions are reviewed by *mBio*'s editor-in-chief, who then assigns them to the appropriate editor. The editor can recommend accepting the paper as is, rejecting it, or sending it out for additional review. Soliciting additional outside opinions necessarily requires time, delaying the publication decision, but it means that the paper will have been scrutinized by several peers, generating reviews in addition

to the those submitted by the author. Occasionally, these additional evaluations will lead to a decision to reject the paper.

Receiving a negative decision for a manuscript submitted via the Academy track is understandably disappointing to the author(s), and there is no doubt that some rejected papers may eventually prove to be groundbreaking. Determining what work represents the top 10% of the field is an inevitably subjective process, but such judgments are essential if *mBio* is to emerge as a leading journal in our field. Automatic acceptance would reduce the credibility of all Academy-track papers and, ultimately, of *mBio*.

We certainly hope rejection of directly submitted manuscripts by AAM members will be rare and that Academy Fellows, whose work has been so critical to *mBio*'s early success, will continue to submit their boldest work, despite the risk of rejection. As we continue to build this new journal together, respectful give-and-take between authors and editors will result in an *mBio* as exciting, vibrant, and important as the field of microbiology itself.

### Arturo Casadevall

Founding Editor-in-Chief, *mBio*

### R. John Collier

Chair, Board of Governors

American Academy of Microbiology

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Address correspondence to Arturo Casadevall, [casadeva@aeom.yu.edu](mailto:casadeva@aeom.yu.edu).