

ASM Launches *mBio*

With this issue, ASM launches a new, interdisciplinary journal designed to accommodate the universe of microbiology and its allied disciplines under one roof. While perusing the pages of this first issue of *mBio*, one will note that there are articles addressing a myriad of questions in virology, bacteriology, mycology, parasitology, immunology, ecology, and basic cell biology. To have papers from different disciplines in the same journal is a departure for ASM, which heretofore has published the highest-quality, first-rate science in journals that are focused on a single discipline (or field). This *modus operandi* has made it possible for ASM to publish a series of journals that are grounded in their respective fields and renowned for rigorous peer review and publishing excellence. Given that *mBio* is an interdisciplinary journal, and the first such journal for ASM, the first question one might ask is why *mBio*?

The answer is both simple and complex. *mBio* is the brainchild of Tom Shenk, Chair of the ASM Publications Board—a brainchild that was given form by members of the Publications Board and support by ASM leadership. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of high-visibility journals focused on different problems in microbiology ranging from pathogenesis to host-microbe interaction. These journals have developed a high profile in the scientific literature and have become very desirable venues for publishing microbiology-related research. As a result of the increasing view of microbiology as a multidisciplinary field, more narrowly focused, single-discipline-oriented journals are sometimes overlooked as a first choice for submission of cutting-edge research. Mindful of the wider and wider net that is cast to answer questions in microbiology and the evolution of the field towards multidisciplinary questions, Tom and Barbara Goldman, Director of ASM Journals, worked with many people at ASM to launch a new ASM journal that welcomes the very best work in any field related to microbiology. Hence, the scope of *mBio* is catholic (small “c” to connote universal), as it seeks papers that address the entire universe of microbiology and related fields. The goal of *mBio* is to provide a big tent for the very best work in the field of microbiology and allied disciplines, including all disciplines that bear on microbiology or microbiology research. As such, *mBio* has constructed a large tent covering ground from immunology to exobiology.

mBio endeavors to bring innovation to the world of scientific publishing. Experimentation is a required component of the scientific method, but when it comes to publication, scientists tend to be conservative. Perhaps this is good. However, it is noteworthy that many currently accepted standards, including rigorous peer review, were once novel innovations that were vetted by experimentation. Therefore, innovation in publishing is worthy of consideration and evaluation by experimentation whenever possible. With *mBio*, we introduce two innovations. First, we ask every author to state in plain English why the work is important in a section that follows the abstract. We hope that this will allow the importance of the work to be appreciated by nonspecialist scientists and critical nonscientific audiences, such as lay media, policy makers, and the general public. Second, we will provide authors with a rapid and clear decision on the disposition of their paper.

Papers will be either accepted with minimal revisions or rejected. Today, many authors often receive ambiguous decision letters following lengthy peer review, which leaves the author uncertain as to what is needed for acceptance and with even further uncertainty as to the chance for eventual acceptance, even if they think they can address the reviewer’s criticisms. In our view, this uncertainty is inefficient and distracting and thus not in the best interests of science. Hence, papers for which reviewers and/or editors identify significant concerns will be rejected with the understanding that the authors can address the issues and submit a new version of the paper for publication. At that point, the authors can either go elsewhere or revise their manuscript. Although some may feel that this is akin to a “modify” disposition, we disagree, because a “modify” decision is not a decision, as it is ambiguous with respect to ultimate acceptance of the article and places authors and editors in the role of negotiators and/or arbiters in decisions on what experiments to do, what data to remove, etc. We are hopeful that clear gladiatorial “up or down” dispositions will help authors make the best decision on what to do with their papers when the outcome is rejection.

The launch of *mBio* was done in association and in close consultation with the American Academy for Microbiology, in particular, John Collier, Chair of the Board of Governors. The AAM is the honorific leadership group within ASM. The AAM was involved in all steps of the launch of *mBio* and has contributed the overwhelming majority of the board of editors. The close alliance between AAM and *mBio* is designed to raise the standing and privileges of election to AAM, as each AAM member has the right to submit one paper per year to *mBio*, provided that they arrange for expert independent review of the manuscript. Direct submission to *mBio* by AAM members does not guarantee automatic publication, because there are procedures in place for review by members of the Board of Editors. However, the right to submit a paper whose review has been arranged by the AAM member recognizes that AAM members are leaders in our field and deserving of a special right—a privilege earned by the excellence of their contributions that merited their election to AAM. Nevertheless, we will monitor direct contributions carefully for quality and will periodically assess the merits/success of this process.

mBio is the inaugural open-access publishing venture for ASM. In the opinion of this editor, open access is the future for scientific publishing and *mBio* hopes to serve as a laboratory for exploring mechanisms by which this approach can be improved and expanded.

One question that is frequently asked is what does “mBio” mean? The answer is that on one hand, it means nothing; “mBio” is a made-up word that was suggested by Tom Shenk. On the other

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hand, it is possible to insert meaning into the word “mBio.” “MBIO” is often an abbreviation for microbiology courses on college campuses, suggesting that it will provide some name recognition with regard to its content. In “mBio,” the capitalized B connotes images of biology with its immense reach in encompassing all the life sciences. Finally, “mbio” is the Swahili word for race or contest (<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/mbio>), and even this interpretation fits, since all life, and particularly the microbiota, is always in a state of contest for survival.

mBio went from an idea to reality, accepting its first paper in approximately 7 months. This rapidity is even more remarkable when one considers that this is ASM’s first foray into open-access publishing and its first general-scope primary data journal. This accomplishment would not have been possible without the extraordinary efforts of the following individuals, among the many who helped make *mBio* a reality, whom I note with gratitude and

admiration (in alphabetical order): Rob Arthur, Carol Colgan, John Collier, Michael Goldberg, Barbara Goldman, Maisha Miles, and Tom Shenk. We are all extremely grateful to the 80 or so scientists who are serving on the Board of Editors. This group of outstanding, successful, and extremely busy scientists, representing an extremely diverse slice of the microbiology universe, have agreed to serve as gatekeepers for publications in *mBio* and thus perform the critical role of identifying the best of what is important.

We plan to remain flexible and to respond rapidly to new developments and changing trends in science. We are open to suggestions and criticisms and hope to hear from our readers on ways that we can improve.

Arturo Casadevall

Founding Editor-in-Chief, *mBio*