

## What Do Editors Do All Day?

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**ABSTRACT:** The duties, responsibilities, and activities of the Editor are discussed in anticipation of the process to find the next editor-in-chief of the *Journal*.

**KEYWORDS:** *General public*

On a recent trip, your Editor was browsing books in the children's section of a remarkable bookstore, revisiting some of the "classics" that were an integral part of his offspring's early formative years. One of those titles, *What Do People Do All Day?*<sup>1</sup> is on the "to buy" list for a new grandchild but also provides inspiration for the title of this piece. Your Editor has been involved in the early discussions related to the selection of the next editor: the Division of Chemical Education Board of Publication,<sup>2</sup> the group responsible for *Journal* fiduciary and governing issues, will be defining a process, timeline, and documents that outline the responsibilities and potential activities for the new editor. This is not a sudden announcement of a retirement: the intent is to inform the community about the position and to seek their input in the multiyear selection process.

So what DO editors do all day? This one has a "day job", serving as a faculty member in a chemistry department that has the normal requirements corresponding to a Ph.D. institution: the usual triumvirate of research/scholarship, teaching, and service. Your Editor teaches large-enrollment general chemistry courses and serves as the departmental coordinator for all who teach those courses. In addition, scholarly activities in chemical education research include mentoring postdoctoral associates and graduate students, the necessity and desire to fund the activities with grants, and scholarly publications and presentations. (The ACS Paragon Plus submission and manuscript tracking system does not allow any editors to see their own submissions, even the editorials, which are not peer reviewed; in either their perceptions or practice, reviewers show no special "kindness" simply based on an author's office.) The last several editors<sup>3</sup> have all been at similar academic institutions, although some of the reasons that made that historically necessary have become less important because *JCE* is now co-published with the ACS Journals Division. Among other features of the collaborative association, the ACS Paragon Plus manuscript tracking system provides authors, reviewers, editors, and staff with an elaborate set of tools, all of which can be accessed from anywhere in the world with appropriate Internet connectivity.

This Editor has chosen to work with Associate Editors, a group of qualified individuals from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and a range of institutions meant to broaden the scope and representation of your *Journal*. Individual Associate Editors (AEs) and the Editor-in-Chief (EIC) acting in that role assign reviewers and shepherd manuscripts through the review

process, accepting, rejecting, or returning manuscripts to authors for revision. The EIC monitors AE activities with the help of staff, provides some advice and guidance, and hears author appeals of negative decisions. Ethics violations are handled via the Editor's office. COPE, the Committee on Publication Ethics,<sup>4</sup> an international group of journals and their publishers (including ACS Journals and *JCE*), have established guidelines and suggested protocols, particularly for violations. ACS Publications make some tools available in the ACS Paragon Plus system to assist the editors and staff in identification of ethical violations. Thus, *JCE* uses the tool iThenticate<sup>5</sup> to verify originality in submitted manuscripts; unfortunately, plagiarism and self-plagiarism appear regularly in the journal publication process. The EIC adjudicates these cases, for which outcomes can range from a warning to being banned from publishing in *JCE* for some period of time. The latter activities are necessary yet represent a very small fraction of what gets reviewed and ultimately published. Although aspects of the peer-review system have some challenges, the creative scholarship of the chemical education community is both uplifting and inspirational.

In November 2014, the U.S. political process elevated another group of individuals to public office. The popular mandate to have these folks in public office seems to empower some of them to speak on topics for which they have little actual knowledge. Getting elected does not automatically make one smart in an absolute sense or even smarter than before. Such is also the case for the Editor-in-Chief (and the Associate Editors). We don't know everything about chemical education or even claim to approach that level. Reviewers and the peer-evaluation system enable us to solicit help in order to make informed decisions. It is not the goal or aim of the EIC or *JCE* to decide in what novel, interesting, and useful activities the chemical education community should engage. We don't tell you what to do. Our task is to archive your interests and activities, disseminating the information on behalf of our international community. The focus is on the research and scholarship related to teaching and learning chemistry. Because there are many other venues for it, we don't publish scientific research or papers entirely about an individual's research that the author feels everyone in the world should teach their students about.

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The Editor-in-Chief is asked to represent the chemical education community in several ways, in part giving rise to the *authoritas*<sup>6</sup> of the position. The Editor serves as a consultant to the ACS Society Committee on Education (a.k.a. SOCED), as an ex officio member of the executive committee of the ACS Division of Chemical Education, as a member of the selection committee of the James Flack Norris Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Teaching of Chemistry<sup>7</sup> (of the Northeastern Section of the American Chemical Society) and often as an invited speaker to local sections of the ACS. The Editor is asked to evaluate promotion and tenure packages for many individuals; being asked to evaluate someone's teaching is virtually impossible *in absentia*, although at least one can comment about scholarship and research in chemical education, based on measurable quantities and community standards. As the contributions to the *Journal* from the international chemical education community increase, the Editor has represented the *Journal* at international meetings and venues. Closer to home the Editor has the unique responsibility of ensuring a monthly editorial that discusses chemistry teaching and learning and advances the "community of effort".<sup>8</sup>

The tasks of the Editor represent more than meeting deadlines or processing submissions, although there are certainly opportunities to do the latter and to improve various publication benchmarks. For example, we continue to decrease the time from submission to publication, with substantial progress from when we started to process manuscripts electronically in 2009. Especially as the result of the efforts (and ideas) from staff in Georgia and Wisconsin, the day-to-day operations are more routine and very sustainable. Associate Editors are reappointed annually and provide continuing leadership and another component of expertise both in content and also editorial process. Having experience in various positions and stages in a career, a passion for chemical education broadly defined, and the willingness to provide some leadership and vision are all integral to the success of an editor.

As we begin the succession plan, we expect to provide opportunities for members of the chemical education community to learn more about the operation of the *Journal* and the role of the Editor in making it successful, to help identify potential candidates (including themselves), and to contribute to discussions about the future of the *Journal* and publication of chemical education research and scholarship. We hope that this editorial starts the process. A "town-hall" panel will be convened at the next BCCE and at other venues to elicit conversations about the future of *JCE* and the successor to your Editor, Norbert VIII.<sup>3</sup> We look forward to your contributions to the *Journal* as an author and reviewer and also in the selection of a new editor.

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### Notes

Views expressed in this editorial are those of the author and not necessarily the views of the ACS.

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success. He currently also serves as the editor-in-chief for the *Journal of Chemical Education*.

## REFERENCES

- (1) Scarry, R. *What Do People Do All Day?*; Random House: New York, 1968.
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- (3) JCE staff. *Journal History: Guiding the Journal of Chemical Education—The Seven Editors*. *J. Chem. Educ.* **1998**, *75* (11), 1373–1380.
- (4) For information about COPE, see <http://publicationethics.org/about> (accessed Apr 2015).
- (5) For information about iThenticate, see <http://www.ithenticate.com/> (accessed Apr 2015).
- (6) *Authoritas* is defined as influence, responsibility, prestige, reputation, opinion, or judgment. <http://www.latin-dictionary.org/Latin-English-Online-Dictionary/N/1/authoritas> (accessed Apr 2015).
- (7) For information about the James Flack Norris Award, see [http://www.nesacs.org/awards\\_norris.html](http://www.nesacs.org/awards_norris.html) (accessed Apr 2015).
- (8) Gordon, N. E. Editor's Outlook. *J. Chem. Educ.* **1924**, *1* (1), 1. The founder and first editor of this *Journal* (and Gordon conference namesake), Neil Gordon worked to encourage community of effort as one of the key functions of the *Journal of Chemical Education*.