

## ◆ *Changing Roles of Editors with Emerging Technologies and Globalization*

**Moderator:**

**Barbara Gastel**  
Texas A&M University  
College Station, Texas

**Speakers:**

**Martin Blume**  
American Physical Society  
Ridge, New York

**Denis Baskin**  
University of Washington  
Seattle, Washington

**Cynthia Mulrow**  
*Annals of Internal Medicine*  
San Antonio, Texas

**Reporter:**

**Tracy Candelaria**  
Allen Press  
Lawrence, Kansas

This session focused on the ways in which new technologies are affecting the jobs of editors, including some of the benefits and pitfalls of an electronic workflow.

Martin Blume, editor-in-chief emeritus of the American Physical Society (APS), began with a discussion of the savings and efficiencies of the electronic office. Whereas the APS workflow used to rely on a system of folders, the office is now folder-free, with all information stored and transferred electronically. Blume discussed the challenges of updating without interrupting operations but emphasized the benefits of a paperless system over the costs. He presented a long list of the benefits of the paperless office, including enormous savings in time and effort, decreases in paper

and mail charges, faster training, reclaimed space (by eliminating folders, APS recovered enough space for four people), internationalization of the editorial staff (with editors located throughout the world—one as far away as Perth, Australia), improved morale, and decrease in production time. Another result of online submissions has been an increased rate of submission from Western Europe and the rest of the world. Although unqualified in his enthusiasm, Blume also acknowledged concerns, such as secure storage of electronic documents.

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*Journal of Histochemistry and Cytochemistry*, expressed more mixed feelings about the transition to a paperless workflow. Baskin became editor in 1995, and the transition to a paperless office occurred over a period of 10 years. Baskin noted that as many new technologies have emerged, the editor's role has remained essentially unchanged but has become more complicated. Electronic workflow allows for higher efficiency, but the stress of the editor's job has increased as deadlines have tightened and responses to communication are expected almost immediately. Increased access to scientific literature has resulted in a situation in which no mistake or slip goes unno-

ticed, and consideration of possible public reactions to papers has become a major concern. For the future, Baskin expects the expansion of open access, a decline in print, and the proliferation of new forms of publications, such as wikis and blogs. He believes that the science editor's role is not endangered but will evolve along with technical change.

Cynthia Mulrow, deputy editor of *Annals of Internal Medicine*, rounded out the discussion. *Annals* was already submitted and managed electronically when Mulrow, who lives in San Antonio, was hired as the first telecommuter for the Philadelphia-based journal. *Annals* regularly publishes ancillary materials online and has occasionally published entire databases. Mulrow commented on the increased efficiency enabled by the electronic office but noted that although electronic workflow ostensibly saves time, it also leads to a variety of new tasks for the editor. For example, an increase in submissions from other countries due to the ease of online submission leads to spending more time in addressing language issues. And although the Internet enables searches on topics to determine originality, such searches can be extremely time-consuming. Issues of plagiarism and electronic manipulation of figures are also serious concerns.

The three speakers varied in their enthusiasm about the changes that are taking place in the editorial office as technology develops, but there was consensus that the changes are inevitable. Such changes pose new possibilities and new challenges for editorial offices. 🗨️