

The American Journal of Pathology

SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY POLICY

Available online at <http://ajp.amjpathol.org/misc/integrity.shtml>

The American Journal of Pathology has developed a formal Scientific Integrity Policy in an effort to define more clearly issues of scientific misconduct in journal publishing. This document defines the common issues relating to appropriate scientific conduct as well as the procedures that will be followed should misconduct issues arise. In addition the Instructions to Authors (<http://ajp.amjpathol.org/misc/fora.shtml>) and Instructions to Reviewers (<http://ajp.amjpathol.org/misc/reviewer.shtml>) have been updated to reflect these changes.

The policy is based on recommendations from the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (<http://www.icmje.org>), the CSE White Paper on Promoting Integrity in Scientific Journal Publications (http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/editorial_policies/white_paper.cfm), and the US Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Research Integrity (<http://ori.dhhs.gov>). It should be noted that willful misconduct does not include incidents of honest misjudgment or inadvertent error. Any questions regarding the official policy of the Journal should be directed to the Editorial Office at 301-634-7959 or ajp@asip.org.

Author Conduct

General Authorship Guidelines. Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (<http://www.icmje.org>) defines authorship as "1) substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; 2) drafting the manuscript or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and 3) final approval of the version to be published. Authors should meet conditions 1, 2, and 3." When work has been performed by a large, multi-center group, the group should designate individuals who accept direct responsibility for the manuscript on behalf of the group. These individuals should fully meet the criteria above and should disclose conflicts of interest (see below) on behalf of the group. All members of the group who meet authorship criteria should be provided for listing as a footnote.

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Peer Review Process. The Journal takes great care to secure the confidentiality and integrity of the peer-review process. It is the practice of the Journal to conduct a blinded peer-review process. Thus, it is considered a violation of this process for authors to identify or attempt to communicate directly with peer reviewers or Associate Editors regarding their manuscript. The Editors will consider any deliberate ethical violation in either the reported research or the manuscript preparation and review to be actionable misconduct, the potential results of which may be manuscript rejection or public article retraction, reporting of conduct to the authors' governing institutions, and/or the denial to consider any future submissions to the Journal.

To aid the review process, authors should be ready to comply with Editors' requests for copies of any similar works in preparation, copies of cited manuscripts that are submitted or in press, and/or supporting manuscript data (eg, data not shown but summarized in the manuscript). Failure to do so may result in rejection of the manuscript without further review.

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Ethical Treatment of Research Subjects. If human subjects or samples were used, authors must affirm that the research protocol was approved by the appropriate institutional review boards or ethics committees for human (including use of human cells or tissues) experiments and that all human subjects provided appropriate informed consent. To protect patient privacy, identifying information such as names, initials, or hospital numbers should not be published unless the information is essential for scientific purposes and the patient (or parent or guardian) gives written informed consent for publication. If race/ethnicity is reported, authors should state who determined race/ethnicity, how the options were defined, and why race/ethnicity was important in the study. Authors should be prepared to provide study protocol number(s) if requested.

Ethical Treatment of Animals. If animal experiments were performed, authors must affirm that the research protocol was approved by the appropriate institutional review boards or ethics committees for animal experiments and that regulations concerning the use of animals in research were adhered to. Authors should be prepared to provide study protocol number(s) if requested.

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Scientific Misconduct. According to the US Office of Research Integrity (<http://ori.dhhs.gov>), "fabrication is making up data or results and recording or reporting them; falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record; plagiarism is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit." The Journal has a zero tolerance policy for such matters. For details regarding how the Journal handles such matters, see the later section on Allegations of Misconduct.

Fabrication of Data. Any evidence of fraudulent methods, data, or data analysis may prompt the Editors to request an explanation and access to original data, which the authors must supply.

Falsification of Data. The results presented in the manuscript must accurately represent the data obtained in the course of authors' studies; omission of contradictory or negative data in an effort to support the main hypothesis is unacceptable. No specific feature within an image may be enhanced, obscured, moved, removed, or introduced. The grouping of images from different parts of the same gel or blot, or from different gels or blots, fields, or exposures must be made explicit by the arrangement of the figure (eg, using dividing lines) and in the figure legend. Adjustments of brightness, contrast, or color balance are acceptable only if they are applied to the whole image, whether experimental or control image, and as long as they do not obscure or eliminate any information present in the original (Adapted with permission from the JCB). Any evidence of inappropriate manipulation may prompt the Editors to request an explanation and access to original data, which the authors must make available.

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Redundant Publication. "Redundant (or duplicate) publication is publication of a paper that overlaps substantially with one already published in print or electronic media," as defined by the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (<http://www.icmje.org>). Authors must certify upon submission that the manuscript has not been accepted or published elsewhere and that it is not currently under review at another journal. Likewise, manuscripts under consideration by the Journal should not be submitted or published elsewhere. Publication of short

abstracts in meeting proceedings does not violate this standard. Submissions will be ineligible for review if previously published in any form (print or online) other than as an abstract. This includes any public posting of raw manuscripts or pre-reviewed material. If there is any doubt, the authors should contact the Editorial Office for guidance.

Reviewer Conduct

Peer Review Process. Reviewers are expected to take their obligation seriously and to consider carefully the merits of the manuscript being assessed. Any delays in completing a review should be brought to the immediate attention of the Editorial Office so that we may assess the situation and make adjustments as needed. It is the practice of *The American Journal of Pathology* to conduct a blinded peer-review process; it is considered a violation of this process for peer reviewers to identify themselves or attempt to communicate directly with authors regarding the reviewed manuscript without the express permission of the Editors. The Editors will consider any deliberate ethical violation during peer review of a manuscript to be actionable misconduct, the potential results of which may be reporting of conduct to the Reviewer's governing institution, dismissal as a peer reviewer for the Journal, and/or the denial to consider any future submissions to the Journal.

Confidentiality. The manuscript is considered a privileged communication. When reviewing a manuscript for the Journal, the peer reviewer takes responsibility for maintaining its confidentiality. Reviewers should not retain copies of submitted manuscripts for personal use after completing their review. Reviewers are not allowed to make any use of the work described in the manuscript or take advantage of the knowledge gained by reviewing it until and unless it is published.

If necessary, the manuscript may be discussed with a colleague in an effort to reach a decision. In such instances, the Reviewer must inform the colleague of the manuscript's confidentiality and ask that they disclose any potential conflicts of interest. Information regarding additional assistance (colleague's name and disclosure information as well as a description of the level of assistance) should be included in the "Confidential Comments to the Editor" portion of the online reviewer form.

Financial Disclosure and Conflicts of Interest. Reviewers must disclose to the Editors any current or former affiliations (eg, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, honoraria, expert testimony) with any organization or entity having a direct financial or personal interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript that could bias their opinions of the manuscript. Reviewers should also consider potential conflicts of interest arising from personal relationships or academic competition. Personal relationships include family members, colleagues (such as collaborators, mentors, students, or trainees), or associates at a Reviewer's institution. At least three years should elapse between the ending of such a relationship and participation in any review. However, for certain relationships such as student-mentor, three years may not be sufficient time, especially if both investigators continue to work in the same field. Thus, Reviewers must err on the side of caution and decline any assignments in which the suggestion of a conflict or bias could be raised. By agreeing to review a manuscript, Reviewers implicitly affirm that any potential conflicts of interest have been disclosed to the Editors and that they are able to provide an impartial review of the manuscript.

Editor Conduct

Peer Review Process. The Editor-in-Chief, Senior Associate Editor, Associate Editors, and Special Associate Editor are expected to take their obligation seriously and to maintain the highest standard of ethics during the peer-review process. Editors should perform their editorial duties without bias for or against any person or institution. Any delays in completing the disposition of a manuscript should be brought to the immediate attention of the Editorial Office so that the situation may be resolved. It is considered a violation for Editors to communicate directly with authors regarding their manuscript outside of normal editorial practices. It is also a violation for the Editors to reveal Reviewers' names to authors without Reviewer consent; as the Journal conducts a blinded peer-review process, such revelations are extremely rare. Any deliberate ethical violation during peer review of a manuscript is considered to be actionable misconduct, the potential results of which may be reporting of conduct to the Editor's governing institution, dismissal as an Editor for the Journal, and/or the denial to consider any future submissions to the Journal.

Confidentiality. The Editors are subject to the same confidentiality requirements as Reviewers. Further, Editors must not disclose information about manuscripts (including their receipt, content, status in the reviewing process, Reviewers' comments, or final disposition) to anyone other than the authors, Reviewers, and Journal staff. Editors should not retain copies of submitted manuscripts for personal use after completing their disposition. Editors are not allowed to make any use of the work described in the manuscript or take advantage of the knowledge gained by reviewing it until and unless it is published.

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Staff Conduct

Peer Review Process. When handling a manuscript for the Journal, the Journal staff is expected to interact courteously and respectfully with authors, Reviewers, and Editors. They should not misrepresent the review process to authors or Reviewers. They should not forge, fabricate, or alter the scientific content of Reviewer comments. They should ensure timely disposition of reviewed manuscripts and publication of accepted manuscripts.

Confidentiality. The Journal staff is subject to the same confidentiality standards as Editors. It is considered a violation of this confidentiality for staff to reveal Reviewer names or to communicate directly with authors regarding their manuscript outside of normal editorial practices.

Allegations of Misconduct

Reporting Suspected Misconduct. To maintain the integrity and high standards of the scientific publishing process, the Journal welcomes reporting of possible misconduct or other concerns related to manuscripts published or under review by the Journal. Suspected misconduct relating to authors, Reviewers, or Editors should be reported in writing to the Editorial Office at The American Journal of Pathology, 9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Maryland, USA 20814-3993 or ajp@asip.org. Issues relating to staff conduct should be directed to the ASIP Executive Officer at American Society for Investigative Pathology, 9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Maryland, USA 20814-3993 or mesobel@asip.org. Willful misconduct does not include incidents of honest misjudgment or inadvertent error.

The anonymity of the whistleblower(s) will be maintained throughout these procedures. With respect to all other communications arising from examination of misconduct, the ability to effectively investigate and administer an allegation of scientific misconduct shall be carefully balanced with the need to maintain confidentiality in order to protect the rights and reputations of all concerned.

Procedures for Suspected Author Misconduct. Upon written notification of possible author misconduct, the Editors and Editorial Office will first perform a preliminary evaluation to determine if there is merit to the claims. The Editors reserve the right to involve the Publications Committee, Executive Officer of ASIP, and/or legal counsel as deemed appropriate. If the manuscript is currently under review, the review process will be put on hold pending resolution. If the claims appear to have merit, the next step is to contact the authors.

The Editor-in-Chief will contact all authors, and the corresponding author will be asked to respond formally to the Editors' concerns, and may be asked to provide source data, within 30 days. Authors are expected to cooperate fully and in good faith. Upon review of said data and explanation, the Editors and Editorial Office will determine whether an innocent error was committed (requiring publication of a Correction or Retraction) or whether further reporting or investigation is warranted. If needed, the authors' institutions and/or funding agencies will be contacted, as it is not the responsibility of the Journal to perform such an investigation. During the investigation, the Journal will not receive or review new manuscripts from authors named in the disputed manuscript.

The appropriate authorities at the authors' institutions and/or funding agencies will be notified of the original complaint and may be asked to conduct an independent investigation. Once an investigation has begun, the Editors may choose to publish a Note of Concern informing the scientific community that an investigation is underway regarding the manuscript in question. The investigation is expected to proceed in a timely manner, and upon completion of an investigation, the institution should quickly notify the Journal of its findings.

If an institution or funding agency declines to conduct an investigation on a timely basis, or if an author does not have such an affiliation, the Journal may conduct its own investigation.

If all authors are cleared of any wrongdoing, an unpublished manuscript may re-enter the review process. If a Note of Concern was published, the Journal will publish a Correction to rectify the matter in the public record.

Upon receiving final determination of misconduct (including final appeal), the Journal may publish a Correction, Note of Concern, or Retraction, depending on the findings of the investigation and the effect on the paper as a whole. If misconduct is determined by the authors' institutions, then the Editors may request that the authors retract their paper. If the authors refuse, the Journal will notify all authors of the intent to publish a Retraction, to which the authors have 30 days to respond. The final Retraction will describe the reason for retraction as well as a list of authors agreeing (and if necessary those disagreeing) with the retraction. For unpublished manuscripts, the manuscript may be rejected or acceptance may be rescinded.

At any point during the course of the investigation, the authors may withdraw their unpublished manuscript or request a Retraction. If this occurs prior to formal investigation, the Editors may still determine to inform the authors' institutions and/or funding agencies.

These procedures do not supersede or diminish the general authority of the Journal to reject a manuscript as part of the review process.

Procedures for Suspected Editorial Misconduct (Reviewers, Editors, Staff). Upon written notification of possible editorial misconduct, the Editors and/or Editorial Office will first perform a preliminary evaluation to determine if there is merit to the claims. If the complaint involves an Editor or Journal staff, that person will be excluded from any review. The Editors reserve the right to involve the Publications Committee, Executive Officer of ASIP, and/or legal counsel as deemed appropriate. If the claims appear to have merit, the next step is to contact the person involved.

The Editor-in-Chief or Executive Officer of the Society will contact the person involved, requesting a formal response to the concerns within 30 days. Upon review of said explanation, the Editors and Editorial Office will determine whether an innocent error was committed or whether further investigation or reporting is warranted. If needed, the person's institution and/or funding agency will be contacted, as it is not the responsibility of the Journal to perform such an investigation. During the investigation, the Editor or Reviewer will be excluded from reviewing or submitting new manuscripts.

The appropriate authorities at the person's institution will be notified of the original complaint and may be asked to conduct an independent investigation. The investigation is expected to proceed in a timely manner, and upon completion of an investigation, the institution should quickly notify the Journal of its findings.

Upon receiving final determination of misconduct (including final appeal), the Journal may publish a Note of Concern if the disposition of a manuscript(s) was affected. Depending on the severity of the misconduct committed, the Editor, Reviewer, or Journal staff may be relieved of all future Journal-related duties.

These procedures do not supersede or diminish the general authority of the Journal to dismiss an Editor, Reviewer, or Journal staff.

[Revised: May 2008]