

Closing the loop: Editors' feedback on the ASHG readership survey

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Last year, the *American Journal of Human Genetics* (*AJHG*) and *Human Genetics and Genomics Advances* (*HGG Advances*) jointly conducted a survey of American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) members, as well as authors of papers published in the journals in recent years. At that time, *HGG Advances* was in its first year of publication, and *AJHG* had been around for more than 70 years. It had been about six years since we had last run a survey about *AJHG*, and with the new journal and rapid evolution both of our field and of publishing in general, it seemed like a good time to take stock. We received nearly 4,500 responses, representing multiple career stages and six continents. This was more than eight times the number that responded to the 2015 survey. In this brief commentary, we will outline some major points that we learned from the survey and how the editorial staffs at *AJHG* and *HGG Advances* are responding to suggestions provided.

We were gratified to see that the human genetics research community values both journals and feels that it remains important for ASHG to support scientific publishing in human genetics. We were not surprised to learn that many were not aware of *HGG Advances*, given that it had been launched only a few months prior to the survey, and we have undertaken an awareness campaign to be sure that prospective authors are aware of the new journal. We hope that authors will continue to view the ASHG journals as attractive venues for publication. Authors can submit their work to either journal and might be offered transfer from *AJHG* to *HGG Advances* if the editorial staff feel that the paper is a better fit for *HGG Advances*.

HGG Advances is a fully open access journal, whereas *AJHG* is a hybrid open access journal, which means that all published papers become freely available after six months unless authors pay a fee to have their paper become open access immediately upon publication. We found that respondents, especially those under 30 years of age, were generally strongly supportive of open access. On the other hand, concern was raised about the potential for high article publishing charges (APCs) if *AJHG* were to become fully open access. *AJHG* has carefully considered the possibility of becoming a fully open access journal, but the concern about increased APCs is real, especially the possibility that this would become a barrier to authors from lower-income regions. For now, *AJHG* will remain a hybrid journal, although our publisher, *Cell Press*, has been working toward developing open access agreements with many institutions and funders. We are committed

to making scientific publishing as accessible as possible, both to readers and to prospective authors.

Further to this point, we were concerned to see that nearly 40% of respondents from Africa or Latin America noted that ASHG journals did not provide equitable opportunities for publishing. Although this problem has deep roots that extend to all scientific research, both *AJHG* and *HGG Advances* have initiated a policy of offering open access discounts to corresponding authors from World-Bank-designated low-income (100% waiver) and lower-middle-income (75% waiver) countries. Remember also that both journals offer publishing discounts to ASHG members.

The importance of data sharing has long been recognized by *AJHG*, and now also by *HGG Advances*, and is expected by many funding bodies. Although respondents overwhelmingly expressed support for the concept of data sharing, there remains concern about exactly what types of data should be shared and exactly how to share the data. In our newly revised [author guidelines](#), we are providing information to help authors identify appropriate venues for sharing their data. This issue remains an area of attention in scientific publishing in general, especially in human genetics and genomics, and ASHG journals will continue to monitor developments in data sharing.

Finally, on the subject of evolving standards in publishing, many respondents expressed interest in innovations; not surprisingly, this was especially true among respondents under 30 years of age. *AJHG* stopped automatically distributing paper copies of the journal a few years ago, and *HGG Advances* has been all electronic from its inception. Both journals distribute electronic tables of contents, although younger respondents noted a higher usage of social media and electronic alerts to learn about newly published papers. There was interest in introducing graphical abstracts, which is now a practice at *AJHG*. We did note differences in the degree to which respondents of different ages felt that the content of the journals reflected their scientific interests. Human genetics and genomics is a remarkably rapidly evolving area of research, and it will be critical for both journals to remain responsive to new approaches and areas of focus. We encourage readers to submit their best work and not assume that past published content is an accurate indication of the scope of either journal. As always, presubmission inquiries are welcome and are a good way for authors gauge the degree to which a potential submission is within the scope of the journal.

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We greatly appreciate that so many took the time to thoughtfully respond to the survey. We are aware of the risks of survey fatigue, so we won't be issuing another formal survey for some time. The information gleaned has already led to some changes at the journals, as described above, and we are always interested in reader, author, and reviewer

feedback. Most of all, we are heartened by the continued interest on the part of the human genetics research community to publish in ASHG journals and remain committed to the mission of these journals to provide a forum for the human genetics research community to disseminate their findings as widely and accurately as possible.