Reflections

We can Weather the Storm

Full Open Access for *HortTechnology* by January 2019

I am pleased to report that at our spring meeting the ASHS Board voted to approve making *HortTechnology* a fully Open Access Journal starting in January of 2019. The board also approved moving to make the *Journal of ASHS* and *HortScience* fully Open Access by 2021 (or earlier), contingent upon our society’s success in moving forward with *HortTechnology*.

I would like to thank all ASHS members who responded to my April Reflections column. Many of the responses had a similar theme. Thus, rather than answering each individual response, I will take this opportunity to address the two areas of concern that were most apparent in the responses from the membership.

First, the majority of members were fully supportive of the move to Open Access and feel it is a positive move for our society, and many indicated that we should have made this move several years ago. Several members were supportive of our journals being as “transparent and accessible as possible.” Some expressed the opinion that in Open Access “the wider visibility will attract more and better submissions.” One member expressed the following sentiment that I feel resonates well with our graduate student and younger members, “We must understand that the situation we just understood has already changed,” and “if we want to be part of the future, Open Access is just one step.” Another of our colleagues stated, “Students 99.9% of the time will do an online search for literature rather than go to the library” and that “without immediate Open Access (not the 3 year waiting period), students are much less likely to find and/or use ASHS journals”. I agree with these statements and, based on these responses and conversations with many colleagues over the last few years, I feel strongly that this move is not only positive for our society’s financial security but also that it is essential for maintaining our society’s position as a leading force in the horticulture profession.

The second common theme (about 20% of the responses) concerns the cost of publishing in Open Access. None of our colleagues expressed any opposition to Open Access other than the matter of cost. The other members of the ASHS board and I share that concern. In fact, much of the academic world shares that concern, and I will discuss current worldwide activities on Open Access in a future newsletter. However, the focus of this discussion will be on our membership’s current concerns. Some colleagues mentioned that the ASHS Member publishing fee of $100 per page for *HortTechnology* might have to be doubled or tripled, which would impose a severe impact on many members who operate with “shoestring” budgets. Another concern was that doubling the cost of publication in *HortTechnology* would be a burden on authors who are “least likely to have the resources to pay the high publishing fees compared to the other two ASHS journals.” Another constructive comment was that “it would be helpful to know how much ASHS would need to increase page charges or subscriptions” and that “it would be helpful to members to encourage them to include a funding request in grant proposals to cover extra publishing fees.” I understand these concerns and agree that more detailed information about cost relative to the transition to Open Access needs to be shared with our authors. At the
board meeting, I presented scenarios of Open Access cost based on maintaining our society’s current revenue from *HortTechnology*, *HortScience* and the Journal of the American Society for Horticultural Science. These scenarios were based on current revenue from personal subscriptions and institutional subscriptions minus the total publishing cost for each journal. *HortTechnology* has the lowest revenue impact on our society and thus presents not only the lowest risk for lost revenue but also presents the best opportunity to publish Open Access at the lowest cost per article. ASHS leadership and staff are currently finalizing exact cost to ensure the society can provide Open Access at the lowest cost possible to its authors while assuring future financial success of *HortTechnology* and our society.

It is important to focus on several advantages of Open Access. First, the length of an article will no longer be a concern related to cost. Color and images will also no longer incur a cost. There will be a tiered system where short articles (1-2 pages) will have a reduced fee. As soon as a final pricing system is fine-tuned and approved by the board, I will present that information to the membership.

Open Access provides greater visibility for the authors’ work, which in turn, provides greater visibility for their university. If you are to be evaluated on impact, then the easiest way to help increase your impact is by helping you utilize Open Access. If our members collectively increase their impact, it follows that the impact of their universities will also increase.

I believe that our members who publish in *HortTechnology* present outstanding information that would directly benefit many, not only in the US but worldwide, who cannot afford to purchase our journals and will thus not see our information. In my opinion the real impact of our members’ research will increase in a way that transcends the importance of a calculated impact factor, and will be much more likely to improve society. It remains true that the burden for publication will remain with our authors who are publishing the information, but I believe we can get creative and work out ways to get us to Open Access. Given current and predictable continuing decreases in personal and institutional subscriptions in a few years, we will have no choice. The cost of publishing scientific research will have to increase to sustain our journals either way over the next 3-5 years. My desire is to be proactive and get into Open Access before we are left behind and cannot catch up.

I can share some options for funding Open Access articles. Many universities currently have programs to supplement publication in Open Access journals. Some authors may find that this movement by ASHS to Open Access will actually help them considerably because our current hybrid Open Access structure has not allowed them to be eligible for this funding. Most funding agencies will support publication charges resulting from research supported by their programs. In fact, many funding sources are encouraging Open Access publication, and some are considering requiring it in the near future, as discussed in my April Reflections column. I suggest that all of our membership (especially our fellow members who are serving in administrative positions) encourage our universities to create and support internal programs.
(perhaps from some of the indirect cost recover from funded project) to support Open Access publication.

I seek and welcome input from all of my fellow members on the ideas expressed in and the content of, this column. Please feel free to contact me at earlsamd@utk.edu; or go to the ASHS President’s page at ashs.org, where all members are invited to provide input in an open discussion. I hope to hear from all of you and appreciate ideas to better serve and support our society.