

Editorial

AALAS Journals Reader Survey

Survey conducted from 02 to 17 February 2011

Survey results reported to AALAS on 18 February 2011

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The purpose of this editorial is to disseminate and discuss the results of a reader survey conducted for the *Journal of the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (JAALAS)* and *Comparative Medicine (CM)* in 2011. The survey was distributed by email to all silver and gold members, close to 5000 people, and generated 315 complete responses for *JAALAS* and 220 for *CM*. I regret that the response rate was so low and thank those who took the time to provide us with this feedback.

Table 1 summarizes responses to questions related to use of the journals as resources and the general quality of the information published in the journals. Findings were similar to those of our last reader survey, which was conducted in May 2009.² A total of 88% of respondents read, to some extent, most or all issues of *JAALAS*, as did 81% of respondents for *CM*. In terms of quality of content, 80% found *JAALAS* to be above average, as did 70% for *CM*. Most respondents thought that the quality of *JAALAS* and *CM* had improved (25% and 18%, respectively) or stayed the same (53% and 56%, respectively) during the past year. A particularly reinforcing finding was that 92% reported using information from *JAALAS* in their work at least occasionally, as did 90% for *CM*. For both journals, 338 respondents indicate that they also write articles and publish their work. Of those, 296, or 88%, indicate that they cite work from *CM* and *JAALAS* at least occasionally in their publications.

Readers scored the 2 journals as essentially equivalent in terms of overall quality of content, but *JAALAS* was viewed as having more workplace relevance and a greater effect on the field (Table 2). This view is consistent with the content and goals of *JAALAS* as compared with *CM*; *JAALAS* is intended to have a more applied content, whereas *CM* is directed largely at reporting the research that members conduct and support, making it a step removed from day-to-day responsibilities of many of AALAS members.

Tables 3 through 5 summarize questions designed to identify the types of articles and information that readers find interesting and useful. Original research and review articles were reported to be of most interest in both journals (Table 3). When asked to select topics of interest from a list (Table 4), readers of *JAALAS* expressed highest interest in the biology and care of commonly used species and the least interest in the biology and care of unusual species. In *CM*, animal disease and animal models of human disease were primary topics of interest. Table 5 lists write-in responses to the above questions. I specifically direct prospective authors to Table 5, with the request that they consider writing and submitting articles on these topics during the coming year. However, many of the topics listed as of interest for publication in *CM* are actually content that is appropriate for publication in *JAALAS*, consistent with the different goals of the 2 publications.

The narrative comments provided by respondents are particularly informative, and I thank those respondents for taking the time to provide this feedback. I will review some of these comments, paraphrasing and combining responses in some cases.

As in the previous survey, some respondents expressed concerns about the quality of published articles and, in association with that, the quality of review for both journals. Increasing the overall quality of the articles we publish is necessarily linked to 2 factors: what is submitted to us for publication and our need to provide sufficient content for proper binding of each issue. Currently *CM* includes approximately 10 articles per issue (60 per year). For *JAALAS*, the number of articles published was raised from 12 to 16 per issue (from 72 to 96 per year) in May 2010 to reduce the time between acceptance and publication. The number of manuscripts published in 2010 reflects acceptance of 68% of 167 articles for *JAALAS* and 64% of 138 submissions for *CM*.³

To improve quality in *JAALAS*, we are in the process of a gradual return to 12 articles per issue, accepting and publishing only the best articles. To that end, the Associate Editors are now more often rejecting articles without review for reasons such as poor writing, inadequate amounts of data to warrant a full-length manuscript (for example, only one figure or table), or probable lack of interest to our readership.

In *CM*, we are still contending with an inadequate number of submissions. Quality would be likely to increase in parallel with numbers of articles submitted, because we then would have a larger pool from which to select and could be more discriminating with regard to what is accepted. However, increasing both the number and the quality of submitted manuscripts for *CM* is difficult. Authors generally select journals in which to publish their work based on journal focus and impact factor, and, to a lesser extent, on cost to publish. Impact factors are based largely on the number of times articles from a journal are cited. To some extent a journal must have a high impact factor to attract high-quality submissions, yet it takes high-quality submissions to achieve a high impact factor. Thus, increasing a journal's impact factor is a slow process.

Other concerns raised by several respondents with regard to *CM* were that the content was "esoteric" and "not relevant to the work that I do." One respondent asks "who is this journal serving?" *CM* is intended to be a venue for publication of articles on animal disease and animal models of human disease, as presented in either original hypothesis-driven research or scholarly overviews. Animal disease and animal models of human disease are broad areas in terms of potential topics, and articles are not expected to necessarily be of high immediate or work-related focus to the majority of readers. Rather, some readers may be interested in some articles, as is the case for most journals, even the leading journals that enjoy high impact factors.

Table 1. Summary of responses to questionnaire

Question	JAALAS (315 respondents)		Comp Med (220 respondents)	
	Number of responses	Percentage of responses	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
How often do you read or look over articles in each issue?				
Every issue	205	65	125	57
Most issues	73	23	53	24
Some issues	34	11	42	19
Never	3	1	0	0
Overall the quality of printed manuscripts is				
Excellent	86	27	54	25
Above average	167	53	198	45
Average	51	16	61	28
Below average	9	3	6	3
Poor	2	1	1	0
Over the past year, the quality of journal has				
Improved	79	25	40	18
Stayed the same	166	53	123	56
Declined	9	3	8	4
No opinion	61	19	49	22
How often do you refer to or use information from this journal in your work?				
Often	107	34	56	25
Occasionally	184	58	143	65
Never	24	8	21	10
How often do you cite articles published in this journal in your publications?				
Often	49	16	29	13
Occasionally	113	36	105	48
Never (I never cite this journal when I publish)	23	7	19	9
Never (I never publish)	130	41	67	30

Table 2. Respondents' perceptions of AALAS journals

How do you rank the journal in terms of	JAALAS						Comp Med					
	Very high (5)	High (4)	Average (3)	Low (2)	Very low (1)	Overall score ^a	Very high (5)	High (4)	Average (3)	Low (2)	Very low (1)	Overall score ^a
Quality of content	45 (14%)	161 (51%)	94 (30%)	14 (4%)	1 (0%)	3.8	48 (22%)	88 (40%)	76 (35%)	6 (3%)	2 (1%)	3.8
Relevance to your work	107 (34%)	132 (42%)	63 (20%)	11 (3%)	2 (1%)	4.1	54 (25%)	87 (40%)	50 (23%)	21 (10%)	8 (4%)	3.7
Impact on the field	84 (27%)	157 (50%)	60 (19%)	9 (3%)	5 (2%)	4.0	56 (25%)	88 (40%)	59 (27%)	12 (5%)	5 (2%)	3.8

^aResponses of "no opinion" were not included in calculating this average.

I agree with some respondents that the quality of reviews remains a problem. Respondents noted that published manuscripts can contain poor experimental design, lack of rigorous controls, wrong or no statistics, and unsupported or wrong conclusions. As I stated in my report on the 2009 reader survey,² the Associate Editors maintain rating scales for reviewers based on the quality and timeliness of their reviews, and reviewers with poor scores are not likely to be asked to review again. However,

identifying 3 qualified reviewers for each manuscript submitted can be difficult. I renew my invitation that readers who are interested in serving as reviewers submit their names, areas of expertise, and citations for a few of their relevant publications to the Associate Editors for consideration as reviewers. I also renew my invitation that those who see problems with published work submit letters to the editor to alert other readers, as well as reviewers and authors, to the perceived flaws.

Table 3. Levels of interest in types of articles

What is your level of interest in the following types of articles?	JAALAS						Comp Med					
	Very high (5)	High (4)	Average (3)	Low (2)	Very low (1)	Overall score ^a	Very high (5)	High (4)	Average (3)	Low (2)	Very low (1)	Overall score ^a
Original research	69 (22%)	142 (45%)	89 (28%)	9 (3%)	5 (2%)	3.8	53 (24%)	83 (38%)	62 (28%)	15 (7%)	6 (3%)	3.7
Case reports/studies	60 (19%)	130 (41%)	95 (30%)	19 (6%)	8 (3%)	3.7	–	–	–	–	–	–
Overviews	79 (25%)	130 (41%)	90 (29%)	11 (3%)	2 (1%)	3.8	57 (26%)	97 (44%)	58 (4%)	4 (2%)	1 (0%)	3.9
Letters to the Editor	18 (6%)	61 (19%)	124 (39%)	71 (23%)	31 (10%)	2.8	14 (6%)	50 (23%)	91 (41%)	36 (16%)	25 (11%)	2.9
Editorials	16 (5%)	73 (23%)	129 (41%)	54 (17%)	31 (10%)	2.9	13 (6%)	48 (22%)	93 (42%)	35 (16%)	27 (12%)	2.9

^aResponses of “no opinion” were not included in calculating this average.

Table 4. Level of interest in subject matter of articles

Subject matter of highest interest to readers	Subject matter of lowest interest to readers	Would like to see more on
<i>JAALAS</i>		
Biology and care of commonly used species (57%)	Biology and care of unusual species (20%)	New experimental techniques (47%)
Anesthesia/analgesia (52%)	Colony management (30%)	Anesthesia/analgesia (34%)
Experimental techniques (44%)	Health surveillance (34%)	Facility management issues (31%)
<i>Comp Med</i>		
Animal disease (61%)	Infectious disease (46%)	Overview of new research methods (57%)
Animal models of human disease (63%)	New models (51%)	Animal models of human disease (48%)
	Overviews of established models (51%)	Animal diseases (36%)

Respondents were permitted to check up to 3 topics on a provided list in response to the question “What subject matter interests you most in the journal?” The percentage values indicate the percentage of responses for each topic from the total number of responses for all topics. Subject matter of lowest interest refers to topics with the fewest numbers of checks; however, the question was not asked in this manner. Responses of “other” were low for both journals (6% for *JAALAS* and 3% for *Comp Med*).

Table 5. Other topics of interest in AALAS journals

Other topics of interest	Would like to see more articles on
<i>JAALAS</i>	
Personnel management	Spontaneous disease or pathology of rare lesions
Cat and dog specifics	Surgery
Models of human disease	Efficient enrichment for facilities with a large number of animals
Automation, facility design, quality assurance	Laboratory animal welfare and wellbeing
Nonhuman primate-related information	Significant advances in refinement using current models
Regulatory issues, occupational health issues	Cost benefit of barrier housing practices, voodoo vs science in barrier housing
Pain assessment	Innovative equipment and husbandry technique
Spontaneous disease issues	Comprehensive review articles
Husbandry innovations	Regulatory, training, and euthanasia issues
Noninfectious diseases	Animal behavior, pain assessment, disease and treatments
	Primate-related information
<i>Comp Med</i>	
Refinement techniques in current models	3Rs practical ideas
Pathology related	Pain assessment and anesthesia and analgesia
Enrichment, pain assessment and treatment	Information on problems (diseases, sampling, diagnosis, etc) in pathogens relevant to the modern vivarium, zoonoses
Anesthesia and analgesia	Comprehensive Review Articles
Spontaneous disease and treatments	Ethology
New treatments for common diseases, conditions	Research involving large animals as models for cardiovascular disease
	Enrichment

One respondent commented that “the editor publishing in the same journal that they edit is a conflict of interest.” Consistent with the competing interest policy of the AALAS journals,¹ the review process is designed to exclude editor-authors from review of their work and to assure that their submissions receive a thorough, fair and unbiased review. Articles authored by editors undergo the same review process as do articles submitted by noneditor authors, and editor-authors have no involvement in or knowledge of confidential details relevant to the review of their submissions. Speaking personally, I have had manuscripts rejected from the journals, and I find that the Associate Editors often assign my work to 4, rather than 3, reviewers. I submit my work to the AALAS journals to support them by providing what I view as appropriate and worthy content and to attest to my belief in their value.

Finally, I thank those readers who provided positive com-

ments. Among those we received, particularly with regard to JAALAS, were “I love my subscription,” “critical for industry communication and very valuable for performing my daily job,” “good journal that I enjoy reading,” “a high quality publication,” “well done, thoughtful and thoroughly practical and useful for lab animal science professionals,” and “keep up the good work.” Thank you for your continued support.

References

1. **Hankenson FC, Silverman J, Dysko BC, Thomas SA, Benner D.** 2009. Competing interests policy for AALAS journals. *J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci* **48**:249–250.
2. **Toth LA.** 2009. AALAS journals reader survey. *J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci* **48**:704–707.
3. **Toth LA, Compton S, Tolwani R.** 2011. The AALAS journals: 2010 in review. *J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci* **50**:9–10.

Top 10 Downloaded Articles in *Comparative Medicine* in 2010

Article Info	Total Downloads
Sato A, Klaunberg B, Tolwani R. 2004. In vivo bioluminescence imaging. <i>Comp Med</i> 54 :631–634.	466
Callicott RJ, Womack JE. 2006. Real-time PCR assay for measurement of mouse telomeres. <i>Comp Med</i> 56 :17–22.	346
Cray C, Zaias J, Altman NH. 2009. Acute phase response in animals: a review. <i>Comp Med</i> 59 :517–526.	237
Chichlowski M, Hale LP. 2009. Effects of <i>Helicobacter</i> infection on research: the case for eradication of <i>Helicobacter</i> from rodent research colonies. <i>Comp Med</i> 59 :10–17.	159
Hukkanen RR, Gillen M, Grant R, Liggitt HD, Kiem HP, Kelley ST. 2009. Simian varicella virus in pigtailed macaques (<i>Macaca nemestrina</i>): clinical, pathologic, and virologic features. <i>Comp Med</i> 59 :482–427.	159
Xie X, Ramkumar V, Toth LA. 2007. Adenosine and dopamine receptor interactions in striatum and caffeine-induced behavioral activation. <i>Comp Med</i> 57 :538–545.	157
Rowland NE. 2007. Food or fluid restriction in common laboratory animals: balancing welfare considerations with scientific inquiry. <i>Comp Med</i> 57 :149–160.	156
Venn-Watson SK, Ridgway SH. 2007. Big brains and blood glucose: common ground for diabetes mellitus in humans and healthy dolphins. <i>Comp Med</i> 57 :390–395.	150
Dyson MC, Alloosh M, Vuchetich JP, Mokelke EA, Sturek M. 2006. Components of metabolic syndrome and coronary artery disease in female Ossabaw swine fed excess atherogenic diet. <i>Comp Med</i> 56 :35–45.	139
Novak MA, Meyer JS. 2009. Alopecia: possible causes and treatments, particularly in captive nonhuman primates. <i>Comp Med</i> 59 :18–26.	139

Top 10 Downloaded Articles in *Journal of the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science* in 2010

Article Info	Total Downloads
Portfors CV. 2007. Types and functions of ultrasonic vocalizations in laboratory rats and mice. <i>J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci</i> 46 :28–34.	312
Duran-Struuck R, Dysko RC. 2009. Principles of bone marrow transplantation (BMT): providing optimal veterinary and husbandry care to irradiated mice in BMT studies. <i>J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci</i> 48 :11–22.	169
Heffner HE, Heffner RS. 2007. Hearing ranges of laboratory animals. <i>J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci</i> 46 :20–22.	165
Kastenmayer RJ, Fain MA, Perdue KA. 2006. A retrospective study of idiopathic ulcerative dermatitis in mice with a C57BL/6 background. <i>J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci</i> 45 :8–12.	165
Villar D, Cray C, Zaias J, Altman NH. 2007. Biologic effects of fenbendazole in rats and mice: a review. <i>J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci</i> 46 :8–15.	156
Wilson JM, Bunte RM, Carty AJ. 2009. Evaluation of rapid cooling and tricaine methanesulfonate (MS222) as methods of euthanasia in zebrafish (<i>Danio rerio</i>). <i>J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci</i> 48 :785–789.	154
Rosenbaum MD, VandeWoude S, Johnson TE. 2009. Effects of cage-change frequency and bedding volume on mice and their microenvironment. <i>J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci</i> 48 :763–773.	144
ACLAM Task Force Members, Kohn DE, Martin TE, Foley PL, Morris TH, Swindle MM, Vogler GA, Wixson SK. 2007. Public statement: guidelines for the assessment and management of pain in rodents and rabbits. <i>J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci</i> 46 :97–108.	141
Stephens Devalle JM. 2009. Successful management of rabbit anesthesia through the use of nasotracheal intubation. <i>J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci</i> 48 :166–170.	139
Turner JG, Bauer CA, Rybak LP. 2007. Noise in animal facilities: why it matters. <i>J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci</i> 46 :10–13.	130