

AALAS Journals: Continual Adaptation to Meet Changing Environments

M A Suckow, DVM, DACLAM* and M T Fallon, DVM, PhD, DACLAM (Emeritus)

DOI: 10.30802/AALAS-JAALAS-24-063

Adapting to changing conditions has always been necessary for AALAS journals, and current times are no different. Since the publication of *Proceedings of the Animal Care Panel* in 1951, AALAS journals have undergone significant name and scope changes, and the publication offerings by AALAS have evolved many times to meet the scientific, clinical care, and technical needs of the AALAS community (Figure 1; adapted from Mulder³). These collective changes have culminated in the current catalog of *Laboratory Animal Science Professional* (LAS Pro), *Journal of the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science* (JAALAS), and *Comparative Medicine* (CM).

LAS Pro is focused on organization news and more technical management and husbandry articles. The scopes of JAALAS and CM can overlap to some extent, but simply put, JAALAS articles involve anesthesia/analgesia and euthanasia of normal animals, management, and compliance issues, while CM articles involve abnormal animals (case studies/series, treatments for diseased animals) or animal models of human and animal diseases.

One of the continuing challenges for editors is to maintain and (preferably) increase the number of manuscript submissions to keep manuscript quality high, readers engaged, and enhance the journal reputation. In 1999, Dr. Van Hoosier, then the Editor of *Laboratory Animal Science* (from which *Comparative Medicine* evolved), listed this as one of the challenges facing that journal.⁷ Since then, the number of scientific journals published worldwide has skyrocketed into the thousands, and competition among journals for quality manuscripts has never been higher. Looking at the trends for JAALAS and CM since 2014 (Figure 2), the number of articles published per year has gradually dropped for both journals, but the trend in the drop in number of CM articles is more pronounced, and the decreasing number of CM articles available for assignment to issues is more concerning. Each journal is currently published in both print and online (electronic) formats in alternating months (January, March, May, July, September, and November for JAALAS and February, April, June, August, October, and December for CM). To have a reasonably populated issue, a minimum of 8 articles per month (48 per year) is needed. If too few pages are printed, the journal spine is not wide enough to print the issue information, as happened in the February 2024 CM issue. The projected number of CM articles available in 2024 is 44, or fewer than 8 per month.

As the consequences of the trend in reduced CM submissions became apparent, AALAS staff leadership and the new

JAALAS/CM editorial team focused their efforts on maintaining the important content scope of CM in the long term. Many ideas were considered such as reducing the number of CM issues per year, but the two most promising ideas were to convert CM to an online-only (electronic) journal that would be less sensitive to printed page counts (option 1) or merge CM content into JAALAS as a dedicated section for comparative medicine articles with the same scope as the CM journal (option 2). Discontinuing AALAS publishing support for comparative medicine content was not considered an option.

In March 2024, a survey was designed for stakeholders to provide input on these options. The survey was sent out by AALAS staff to 3,600 stakeholders, which included authors of JAALAS or CM articles in the past 5 y, Silver and Gold AALAS members (both membership levels received JAALAS and/or CM), the Board of Trustees, and the Editorial Review Board. The overall return rate was 6%, which was modest, but not

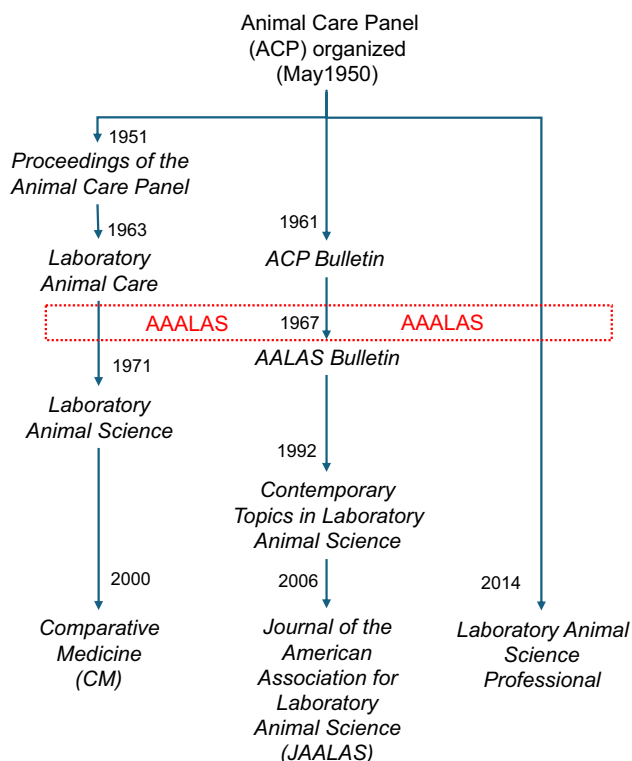


Figure 1. Brief history of AALAS scientific and technical publications. The red dotted line and “AALAS” text denote the organizational name change from Animal Care Panel to the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science in 1967.

Submitted: 18 Jun 2024. Revision requested: 19 Jun 2024. Accepted: 19 Jun 2024.

Drs. Suckow and Fallon are the Editor in Chief and Executive Editor, respectively, of the *Journal of the American Association of Laboratory Animal Science* and *Comparative Medicine*

*Corresponding author. Email: marks@aalas.org

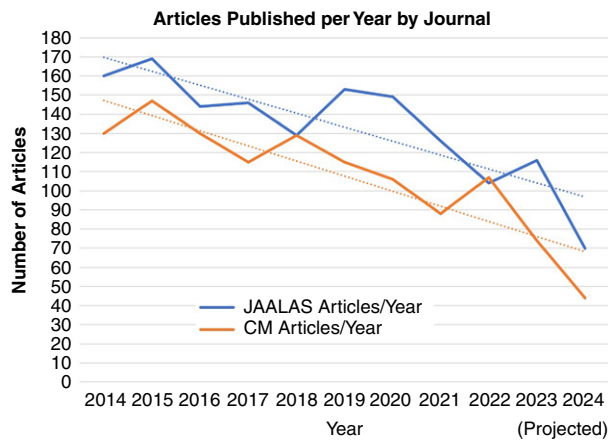


Figure 2. Articles published per year in JAALAS and CM. Articles counted include original research and reviews for JAALAS, and original research, case studies, and reviews for CM. The annual total for 2024 is projected based on the article totals in the first 3 of 6 2024 issues for each journal. The dotted lines are trend lines added by Microsoft Excel for each plot.

unusual for surveys. A variety of questions were asked in the survey, but for the purposes of this Editorial, just the options of making CM an online-only journal or merging CM into JAALAS will be discussed. The data from the 5 questions relevant to these topics, labeled questions 1 to 5, are presented in Tables 1–7.

Option 1: Converting CM to an Online-Only Journal

Questions 1 to 3 (Tables 1–3) addressed the conversion of CM to an online-only journal. For question 1, a significant majority of respondents with an opinion supported the publication of CM as an online-only journal, by a factor of 7.8 (164 to 21; Table 1). In question 2, 2 issues were addressed: publishing CM only online and merging CM into JAALAS (discussed later below). The responses pertaining to a possible merger were removed from Table 2 to focus on the option of CM being an

Table 1. Question 1: Given the trend of reduced CM submissions, would you support CM as an online-only journal?^a

Answer	n	Percent
Yes	164	72.9
No	21	9.3
Don't know	40	17.8
Total	221	100.0

^aOnly one choice was allowed.

Table 2. Question 2: Would your potential to submit manuscripts to CM change with the publication method (select all that apply)?^a

Answer	n	Percent
I would be less likely to submit to CM if it was online-only	17	18.9
I would submit to CM regardless of the publication method	73	81.1
Total	90	100.0

^aMultiple answers were allowed for this question. Responses that indicated that the question did not apply were removed from the analysis (data not shown).

Table 3. Question 3: What reservations, if any, would you have with CM as an online-only journal?^a

Answer	n	Percent
I am enthusiastic about CM being published only online	11	5.9
I have no concerns about CM being published only online	83	44.6
Neutral	1	0.5
I disagree that CM should be published only online	7	3.8
I have concerns about CM being published only online	84	45.2
Total	186	100.0

^aOnly one answer was allowed for this question, but an optional narrative response was prompted for respondents who indicated they had concerns (last response option, “I have concerns...”). The narrative responses are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of narrative concerns generated by question 3^a

Comment	n	Percent
Would embargo remain and reduce access?	1	1.2
Ease of access would be reduced	5	6.0
Figures more difficult to read online	3	3.6
CM readership outside AALAS would decrease	1	1.2
Likelihood of taking the time to view online reduced compared with print version, print version easier to read anywhere	61	72.6
CM impact factor might be reduced	2	2.4
Would an email reminder come out when a new issue was available?	5	6.0
Ingenta article archive website hard to use, poor search function	2	2.4
Would I be able to get a print copy if needed?	1	1.2
Would ACLAM Board requirements be affected?	1	1.2
Would future access to past issues be harder?	1	1.2
What if the Ingenta article archive website is down?	1	1.2
Total	84	100.0

^aSee Table 3 for response numerical data.

Table 5. Question 4: Given the trend in reduced CM submissions, would you support having CM as a separate section of JAALAS in traditional print format?^a

Answer	n	Percent
Yes	164	74.2
No	20	9.0
Don't know	37	16.8
Total	221	100.0

^aOnly one response was allowed.

Table 6. Question 2: Would your potential to submit manuscripts to CM change with the publication method (select all that apply)?^a

Answer	n	Percent
I would submit to CM regardless of the publication method	73	82.0
I would be less likely to submit to CM if it was merged into JAALAS	14	15.7
I would only submit to CM if it remained a separate print journal	2	2.3
Total	89	100.0

^aSame dataset used in Table 2, but only responses relevant to a CM merger with JAALAS are shown in this table.

Table 7. Question 5: What reservations, if any, would you have with CM as a separate section in JAALAS in the traditional print format (merging CM into JAALAS)?^a

Answer	<i>n</i>	Percent
I am enthusiastic about a merger	21	11.6
I have no concerns about a merger	112	61.9
Neutral	5	2.7
I disagree with a merger	7	3.9
I have concerns about a merger	36	19.9
Total	186	100.0

^aOnly one answer was allowed, but respondents having a concern (last response in table above, "I have concerns...") were prompted for a narrative response. The narrative responses are summarized in Table 8.

online-only journal. Over 80% of the responses indicated that respondents would publish in CM regardless of publication method (print or online or merged with JAALAS), with about 19% indicating that they would be less likely to publish in CM if it were only online.

Question 3 (Table 3) uncovered more concern from a reader (compared with author) perspective than the responses in Tables 1 and 2 might suggest. About 50% of respondents were enthusiastic about an online-only CM or had no concerns (50.5%), but over 45% had concerns. These concerns are characterized in Table 4. By far, the largest general area of concern (about 80%) was the ease of access: that readers would be less likely to take time to view the online version compared with the print version or the print version was easier to carry around for more convenient reading (72%) or the ease of accessing CM online content would be reduced (6%).

Considering responses to questions 1 to 3 together, most respondents were supportive of an online-only CM from an authoring viewpoint, but there were significant concerns that fewer people would read the online versus the print version.

Option 2: Merge CM into JAALAS as a Separate Section in JAALAS

This option would discontinue the publication of CM as an independent journal but merge the CM content into JAALAS by creating a distinct standing CM section within JAALAS. The JAALAS issue article and page count page would increase as a result of the additional CM content.

Responses to question 4 (Table 5) showed strong support for a merger. Of those giving a "yes" or "no" response, 8.2 times (164/20) as many respondents indicated they supported a merger of CM into JAALAS compared with those who did not. Table 6 utilizes the question 2 data underlying Table 2, but this time only with the responses relevant to a possible merger. Over 80% of responses suggested that authors would publish comparative medicine material no matter what publication form was available compared with a combined 18% of responses suggesting that authors would be less likely or resistant to publishing comparative medicine content if CM was merged into AALAS.

Question 5 (Table 7) allowed a narrative response in addition to the selection of one answer. Respondents that were enthusiastic about a merge or had no concerns about it were a strong majority at over 72%, but about 20% did express some concerns. The most common concern (Table 8) was that CM would lose prestige or recognition if it were merged into JAALAS. A variety

Table 8. Summary of narrative concerns generated by question 5^a

Comment	<i>n</i>	Percent
Enough pages or loss of space for JAALAS articles?	5	13.9
Maintain quality of science in CM?	1	2.8
CM would receive fewer citations, exposure, or decreased perception of quality	11	30.6
CM readership outside AALAS would decrease	1	2.8
Should combined journal be called CM instead of AALAS?	2	5.6
Combined issue might be too long	4	11.1
Reduce impact factor of JAALAS or CM?	5	13.9
Delay the publication process?	2	5.6
Affect ACLAM board requirements?	2	5.6
Would CM articles overwhelm most JAALAS readers?	1	2.8
Hard to tell which journal is which	1	2.8
Would AALAS be published every month to maintain dues value?	1	2.8
Total	84	100.0

^aSee Table 7 for response numerical data.

of other less common concerns were expressed, but all could be readily addressed.

Considering the responses to questions 2, 4, and 5 together, a strong majority of respondents were supportive of a merger of CM with JAALAS.

Discussion

Although a significant majority of respondents were supportive of an online CM journal (option 1), there were significant concerns expressed about discontinuing the printed version of CM. Also, AALAS is not considering an online-only JAALAS, so variation in the delivery of the 2 journals would add considerable complexity to managing, publishing, and marketing the journals. The online-only CM option also did not address the problem of long-term decreases in manuscript submissions. The reasons for decreasing submissions of both JAALAS and CM are complex and beyond the scope of this editorial, but significant factors particularly relevant to CM are the exponential increase in the number of specialty journals and a tendency for authors to publish in such journals within their scientific specialty or discipline. The entire publishing community is under increasing pressure for this and other reasons.^{1,2,6} Whatever the reason(s), decreasing submissions to CM would be expected to consistently result in issues with too few manuscripts for an independent journal in the near future.

The option to merge CM into JAALAS (as a standing CM section) in both print and online formats (option 2) was also supported by a significant majority of respondents but with fewer concerns compared with the online-only option for CM. From a practical standpoint, the merge option has the advantage of better managing issues when few CM manuscripts are available- any available manuscripts would go into the CM section within the larger JAALAS issue. In addition, AALAS could now manage all manuscript submissions within one Scholar One (S1) account compared with the 2 currently needed (one for JAALAS, one for CM), and remaining with a bimonthly publication schedule for JAALAS would mitigate the current monthly pressures to release either a new JAALAS or a new CM issue. This would allow editors to focus much more on initiatives to improve both the number and quality

of submissions. Another advantage would be better planning opportunities to populate journal issues with a consistent number of manuscripts from issue to issue, which helps move accepted manuscripts to publication more quickly. Although not primary drivers in a decision, supporting one journal instead of 2 would also generate savings in printing, postage, and editorial team labor.

Decision

After reviewing the survey results and discussing options with the AALAS Executive Committee, AALAS staff leadership, and the editorial team, a decision was made to select the merge option as the best strategy to continue support for comparative medicine content while avoiding unwanted compromises in an independent CM journal. This option was supported by the Editorial Review Board in a videoconference held on May 3, 2024, and approved as an Action Resolution by the full AALAS Board of Trustees on June 21, 2024.

The merger is not expected to have any appreciable impact on the JAALAS journal impact factor because of the factor calculation method, and no specific page limits are set for the new JAALAS issues to ensure that manuscripts continue to be published as soon as possible.

Transition Plan

Moving from 2 independent journals to one has many impacts, and a transition plan was developed to minimize disruptions and confusion among AALAS members as well as authors, who are the lifeblood of all journals.

- The last issue of CM will be the December 2024 issue. Comparative medicine content will appear thereafter in a standing CM section of JAALAS, starting with the January 2025 issue.
- At midnight on August 15, 2024, new manuscript submissions to CM via the S1 online portal will be discontinued. Manuscripts submitted to CM before that time will continue to be handled on the CM S1 portal and, if accepted, will appear in the October and December 2024 CM issues.
- All manuscript submissions after August 15, 2024 will be submitted to JAALAS via the JAALAS S1 portal. Authors submitting manuscripts with comparative medicine content will be prompted to recommend that their manuscript be considered for inclusion in the CM section within JAALAS.
- As always, the editorial staff will be happy to answer any questions and assist with any problems.

Additional Consideration: ARRIVE Guidelines

For many years AALAS journals have recommended that authors address the ARRIVE Essential 10 Guidelines⁵ but the level of author detail provided and the level of reviewer attention varied considerably. Consistent with very broad support from respondents in the survey (data not shown), as of January 2025, a requirement for authors to address the ARRIVE Essential 10 guidelines will be fully implemented for new manuscript submissions, as strongly encouraged by the National Institutes of Health.⁴ A revised manuscript template facilitating this process will be made available. This will simplify the task of authors to address the guidelines and the task of reviewers to evaluate them.

Continuing Commitment

Both AALAS staff and editorial team will uphold the tradition of communicating excellent animal care practices and science started 75 y ago by the Animal Care Panel. The legacy of service to the AALAS community and authors passed down by dozens of journal editors and AALAS staff members will continue as it evolves over time and as new challenges arise. Importantly, the integrity of the peer review system will remain as bedrock under the entire journal system.

To better serve authors, we are in the process of implementing streamlined submission, review, and production processes that will reduce the time to decision and the time from acceptance to publication. For example, an online system is now in place for authors to review, edit, and approve their proofs after acceptance. Additional enhancements will include a simplified copyright and conflict of interest declaration process, and better screening of manuscript figures prior to the proof stage to reduce delays. Collectively these practices will save time and reduce barriers to submitting manuscripts to AALAS journals. Future editorials will address other upcoming challenges. As we reflect on the astounding advances in all aspects of laboratory animal science and care in the past 75 y, we also see that the future of AALAS journals is bright, and there is much more to come.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their sincere appreciation to Dr. Jennifer C Smith, Director of the AALAS Education and Scientific Affairs Department/Managing Editor of AALAS Journals, and Degan Messler, AALAS Digital Media Marketing Strategist, for their efforts to design the survey, manage its distribution, and capture the raw data from responses. The authors also express their sincere appreciation to Thomas L. Joseph, AALAS Executive Director, the AALAS Board of Trustees, the AALAS Executive Committee, and the AALAS Editorial Review Board for their continuing support of AALAS journals as well as their dedication to serving the members of the AALAS community.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Funding

AALAS funds were used for the survey and to support preparation of this article.

References

1. **Else H.** 2021. The fight against fake-paper factories that churn out sham science. [Internet]. 2021. Nature news feature. [Cited 2 June 2024]. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00733-5>.
2. **Laccourreye O, Rubin F, Maisonneuve H.** 2018. "Predatory" journals threatening the scientific medical press. *Eur Ann Otorhinolaryngol Head Neck Dis* **135**:37–39.
3. **Mulder JB.** 1999. Creation and development of AAALAS programs, p 12–15. In: McPherson CW, Mattingly S, editors. Fifty years of laboratory animal science. Memphis (TN): American Association for Laboratory Animal Science.
4. **Office of the Director, National Institutes of Health.** [Internet]. 2023. NIH encourages the use of the ARRIVE Essential 10 checklist in all publications reporting on the results of vertebrate animal and cephalopod research. Notice NOT-OD-057. [Cited 1 July 2024]. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7393194/>.
5. **Percie du Sert N, Hurst V, Ahluwalia A, Alam S, Avey MT, Baker M, Browne WJ, et al.** 2020. The ARRIVE guidelines 2.0: Updated guidelines for reporting animal research. *PLoS Biol* **18**:e3000410.
6. **Subbaraman N.** [Internet]. 2024. Flood of fake science forces multiple journal closures. Wall street journal. [Cited 1 June 2024]. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/science/academic-studies-research-paper-mills-journals-publishing-f5a3d4bc>.
7. **Van Hoosier GL.** 1999. Reflections: 1995–1999. *Lab Anim Sci* **49**:584.