

From the Editor

This will be my third, and final, editorial for the *NACADA Journal*, so it seems the appropriate time to evaluate my relatively brief tenure as editor, and offer some unsolicited advice.

The editor of the *NACADA Journal* is charged with a number of tasks and responsibilities. Because the *Journal* is the official publication of the Association, it is the editor's job to insure that the *NACADA Journal* reflects the goals and guidelines as set by the NACADA Board. The editor's philosophy, as reflected in policies and actions, defines the tone and direction of the *Journal*. In addition, the editor is head of the editorial board and is a member of the NACADA Board, and as such is expected to attend the annual board meeting. In conjunction with that meeting, there is to be a yearly meeting of the editorial board. Also, in the past, the editor has presented a workshop or session at the Annual Conference to instruct the members on "How to publish in the *NACADA Journal*." In addition to these duties and expectations, I was charged with trying to get the *NACADA Journal* back on its publication schedule. At the time I became editor, the *NACADA Journal* was more than 1 year behind schedule.

How well did I do? As one might expect, the answer to that question will depend on who you ask, and on which task you choose to focus. As required, I attended the annual board meetings in Denver and Orlando. At those meetings I met with the editorial board and we planned strategies to increase the number of submissions and to get back on a regular publication schedule. In Denver, I presented a pre-conference workshop that was generally well received, and at Orlando, Bob Mattox and I presented a concurrent session that, according to the comment sheets from the session, was very successful.

During my brief tenure as editor, one of my goals was to increase both the number and quality of the research articles. In general, there are two methods for increasing the quality of the articles. The first is to increase the quality and quantity of the submitted manuscripts, and the second is, through editing, to make the acceptable manuscripts as strong as possible. The former method requires long-term commitments and planning, which we were in the process of implementing. These efforts may bear fruit in the future. The latter method is more immediate, and as editor, I implemented this approach by taking an active role in the editorial process. In the tradition of good advising, I tried to take a developmental rather than prescriptive editing

approach with the authors. When a manuscript was deemed "probably publishable with extensive revisions," I provided substantial information and guidance for those revisions in addition to the suggestions from the other reviewers. Most manuscripts required at least one round of revision, while a few required two or more. Based on comments from the authors, I believe these efforts were successful.

I was not as successful as I, or the board, would have liked at getting the *Journal* back on schedule. One step in the process is to move manuscripts through the pipeline as quickly as possible. While my initial replies to authors were timely, my response concerning the acceptance status of their manuscripts was not as rapid as it should have been. I could use the excuse that my reviewers were slow to return reviews, but that would be untrue. My consulting editors were prompt and helpful in their reviews. These capable and caring individuals generously provided quality reviews and good advice, although I did not always follow it. The slowness of my response was due to the extensive amount of time it took to read and evaluate each manuscript, and then to craft a response. It was not unusual for me to spend two or more days working on a single manuscript and to send the author two single-spaced pages of comments. In addition, other tasks, like teaching class and advising students, often got in the way of my editorial responsibilities. In retrospect, I believe I could have taken the advice I give to students and scheduled my time better. In addition, I know I greatly underestimated the amount of time it takes for an issue of the *NACADA Journal* to actually be published. Thus, while I made progress getting the *NACADA Journal* back on schedule, I did not meet my own expectations or those of the NACADA Board.

As a consequence of these deficiencies on my part, I was replaced as editor, and a number of changes in procedure have been instituted. Although these changes might result in faster publication, I fear they will have serious, unintended, negative consequences. These changes and their consequences are the focus of the remainder of this editorial.

Under the old procedures, manuscripts were sent to the editor who would a) send the author a letter acknowledging receipt of the manuscript, b) read the manuscript, c) choose appropriate reviewers, and d) send the reviewers copies of the

manuscript. Reviewers returned their reviews directly to the editor who would synthesize the information from those reviews, add his or her own comments, and respond to the author concerning the acceptance status of the manuscript. Possible actions included *accept*, *accept pending revisions*, *revise and resubmit*, and *reject*. The authors whose manuscripts were in the middle two categories would send their revisions back to the editor who in turn would accept the manuscript, send it out for a second round of reviews, or suggest further revisions. The editor was responsible for all correspondence with the author until the manuscript was finally accepted. At that point, copies of the accepted manuscript would be sent to the copy editor for processing.

Under the new guidelines for processing manuscripts, the executive office and the copy editor will take over the secretarial duties and some of the editorial responsibility. Submitted manuscripts will be sent to the central office, which will send a letter of receipt over the editor's signature. The copy editor and the editor will then select the reviewers, who will return their reviews to the copy editor. She will summarize the reviews and send a summary of the comments, along with those comments, to the editor. All revisions, correspondence, and discussions will be routed through the copy editor, although the editor will have final responsibility for the publication decision. The copy editor will correspond with the reviewers and authors to facilitate timely receipt of their comments and revisions.

While these new procedures will reduce the amount of secretarial work required of the editor, and *may* speed up manuscript processing, I think that the unintended consequences will prove very detrimental to the *Journal*. These procedures insert the copy editor, Nancy Vesta, as intermediary between the editor, the reviewers, and the authors. I anticipate negative consequences for both the editor and the copy editor as a result of these changes. I will discuss these in turn.

These changes will isolate the editor from the publication process. He or she will have a more dif-

ficult time learning the strengths and weaknesses of the reviewers, and it will be more difficult for authors to talk and work directly with the editor. The process would also allow an editor busy with other responsibilities to rely on the summary and comments provided by Nancy, rather than carefully reading and evaluating each manuscript. Across time, editorial decisions might slowly become the province of central office personnel.

The proposed changes will place Nancy Vesta in an awkward position. She is being asked to assume secretarial duties for which she is overqualified and that will subsume valuable time from her other duties. Because she will be the primary contact for authors, she will be put in the position of making, or being perceived as making, editorial decisions. Nancy is a wonderful and knowledgeable copy editor, and her experience, education, and years working for the *Journal* have given her a good sense of appropriateness of articles for the *Journal*. However, she is not the editor and should not be put in the awkward position where her recommendations can even be perceived as being editorial decisions.

I see these consequences as very troublesome and suggest that the new procedures be evaluated, examined, and changed. I would suggest the following changes, which I believe would allow the editor to operate independently and yet expedite processing.

First, a stipend of \$2,000–3,000 per year should be given to the editor. This stipend would appropriately indicate the importance of the *Journal* to the association and compensate the editor somewhat for her or his time and effort. Second, budget money for part-time secretarial help for the editor, to be paid to personnel at the editor's institution. This solution would relieve the editor of some secretarial duties, yet allow him or her to stay in close contact with both the reviewers and authors. Also it would leave Nancy Vesta free to work as copy editor, without being burdened with secretarial duties or inadvertently being perceived as making editorial decisions that rightly belong to the editor.

Joel Freund