

American Society for Microbiology

2023 Annual Ethics Report

Overview

The Ethics Committee focuses on issues surrounding scientific, research, and professional misconduct. It oversees matters involving noncompliance by Members or Nonmember Affiliates with the Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct. The Ethics Committee provides support to ASM programs to ensure that ethics concerns across the society are handled in a consistent manner. Further, the committee ensures that ASM is advised to the best ethics practices within the scientific community.

As directed by the ASM Board of Directors (BOD), the Committee will be the authoritative body in resolution of issues relating to science ethics, misconduct, and harassment. This Committee of the Board also ensures accountability for ethics matters involving Members or Nonmember Affiliates. If an ASM staff member is found to be in violation, the ASM Headquarters Employment Policies will be followed; this is distinct from the Ethics Review Process for ASM Members and Volunteers.

Ethics Committee

There are currently six (6) members of the Ethics Committee, including the Chair. In 2023, the Committee welcomed a new chair, Dr. Jennifer Lodge. The current Ethics Committee members are:

- Jennifer Lodge, Ph.D., Duke University (Chair)
- Gundula Bosch, Ph. D, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
- Dennis Dean, Ph. D., Virginia Tech
- Corrie Detweiler, Ph.D., University of Colorado Boulder
- Cindy Munro, Ph.D., University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies
- Floyd Wormley, Jr., Ph.D., Texas Christian University
- Stefano Bertuzzi, ASM CEO (ex officio, non-voting)
- Amy Kullas, ASM Ethics and IDEAA Director (ex officio, non-voting)
- Kim Shankle, ASM Chief People and Change Management Officer (ex officio, non-voting)

In 2023, the Ethics Committee and Program initiated an “Open Call” process to identify two new members and actively recruited them. The “Open Call” process helped to open the opportunity for interested members to apply across all ASM membership. There were 31 applications. Previous Ethics Committee members who made valuable contributions to this process by sharing their expertise were Stanley Maloy (chair) and Michael Imperiale. They rotated off the committee in July 2023.

Ethics Matters Reviewed and Adjudicated

In 2023, three cases were discussed and adjudicated by the ASM's Ethics Committee.

An unresolved ethics case from 2020 remains under investigation and is currently awaiting a court's final decision. A Publisher's Expression of Concern is published in the interim. This complaint is research-related, which includes issues such as: fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, etc.

One case is an ongoing matter since 2021. The Committee reviewed a formal report from an institutional scientific misconduct investigation and approved publication of seven Retractions for papers published in two ASM journals. The previous Publisher's Expressions of Concern regarding these papers have been updated accordingly and the Retractions published. Additionally, in this matter the Committee supported the publication of 10 Publisher's Expressions of concerns across various ASM Journals for image-integrity issues.

One case had been pending the outcome of ongoing litigation in court between the author and their employer. Three Publisher's Expressions of Concern were published in the interim. However, ASM has sold this journal to another scholarly publisher, so the final resolution will utilize that publisher's policies and guidelines.

One case was an appeal from a corresponding author against a retraction request from ASM Journals. In this publication, there was no misconduct, but erroneous, unsubstantiated conclusions presented as a cause of potential concern to the journal and readership. The Committee recommended not retracting the paper. A Publisher's Expression of Concern is published to alert the readership of the potential scientific concerns in the article. The Committee recommends ASM Journals explore options for an alternate committee or panel to adjudicate matters that may not be 'ethics-related', especially those necessary to correct the scientific record.

Outreach and Community Support

ASM upholds its efforts to proactively educate and advise the microbial sciences on its Code of Ethics and Conduct by offering annual ethics-related sessions and support at its annual meeting. After approval of the updated ASM Events Code of Conduct to include public health policies and recommendations in 2022, the [policy](#) was well implemented and upheld in all ASM events and meetings in 2023. It also supports the ASM's Events Code of Conduct (CoC) at both in-person and virtual events and at the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritized Scientists (ABRCMS). ASM received two CoC complaints at Microbe. One matter was resolved on site. However, in the other matter, ASM issued a formal warning and provided additional resources to an attendee.

Furthermore, the Ethics Committee continued to support ASM as the society embraces and exemplifies inclusive diversity with equity, access, and accountability (IDEAA) in the life sciences. With ASM's 2021 revised Code of Ethics and Conduct that now includes IDEAA-related principles, ASM expanded its online, anonymous reporting web portal as way for all ASM stakeholders to share feedback related to IDEAA, Ethics, and Compliance. This portal can be found at:

<https://asm.org/Ethics>. ASM did receive a complaint from the portal and further reviewed the allegations. However, after receiving additional communication and information from the institution, ASM was unable to substantiate the concerns and the case was dismissed.

The Ethics Program shares its knowledge and expertise throughout the organization, ensuring ASM's robust commitment to ethics and integrity. The Ethics Program remains a valuable resource to the Journals Program, offering guidance on in-depth ethics cases and matters. Additionally, all ASM Journals are members of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE); accordingly, ASM Publishing Ethics Policies and Procedures align with COPE's Guidelines. As such, the ASM Ethics and Journals programs worked closely to develop ASM's policy on use of generative AI at ASM Journals in accordance with COPE guidelines and industry standards.

As ASM expands its global reach to other countries, the Ethics Program collaborated with the ASM Journals' editorial team in September to present at the Peer Review Week in China on status of artificial intelligence (AI) Policies in Scientific Publishing. The ASM Ethics Program also presented at the International Society of Managing and Technical Editors annual meeting. The Ethics program collaborated with the ASM Journals' team on piloting a new AI based tool, [Image Twin](#), to detect potential image concerns (e.g. duplications) prior to publication.

At Microbe 2023, the Ethics team led a session titled, "[Navigating the Complexities of Scientific Ethics](#)" in the Professions of Microbiology track hub. This talk was designed to accomplish the following learning objectives:

- A day in the life of the Ethics team trying to maintain scientific integrity which is crucial to maintain confidence in research presented in ASM Journals.
- Educating attendees about ASM's publishing ethics policies and procedures and how they are applied to specific anonymized cases. This provided a framework for attendees to understand why/how an ethics-related matter needs to be addressed.

The session was well attended and led to engaging discussion later along with valuable interaction with the attendees.

This year, the ASM Ethics Program published two articles. In June 2023, "[Five C's of Ethics for Peer Review in Scientific Publishing](#)" was published to share with our readership and the scientific community the relevance of maintaining the integrity of a peer review process especially in the age of artificial intelligence. An article titled, "[Laying Publication Ethics Nightmares to Rest](#)" was published in October 2023 discussing the various ethics-related concerns that our authors may come across and how they can address them preemptively or reach out to the ASM Journals Ethics Program for appropriate potential resolutions.

To assist the larger scientific community, ASM participates in the Leadership Council of the Societies Consortium on Sexual Harassment in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medical fields (STEMM). The Consortium has more than 130 member societies. The ASM Ethics Program is committed to monitoring industry standards and continues to successfully collaborate to strengthen editorial policies at ASM Journals as new changes affect scholarly publishing.

2024 Plans

After 1 year of piloting the Image Twin software, we intend to publish ASM's key findings and outcomes in ASM Journals. This will report data from March 2023- March 2024 along with recommendations to publications workflow based on these findings. Additionally, we will be transitioning to move beyond the pilot-phase and codify the integration of Image Twin into the workflow processes.

At Microbe 2024, the Ethics Program along with ASM Journals is organizing a Lounge and Learn session titled "Artificial Intelligence and Scholarly Publications: Expectations, Equity, and Ethics" to discuss AI in the scholarly publishing landscape, both the possibilities it presents and the perils it poses. This will be a helpful conversation for the microbial sciences community as the AI landscape continues to evolve.

Former and current members of the Ethics Committee are working together on the next edition of *ASM's Scientific Integrity* textbook. The Ethics program will continue to educate and interact with ASM members on publishing ethics through additional ethics-related online articles and a campaign in March for Ethics Awareness month activities.

The Committee and ASM are committed to supporting and expanding our scientific community as we advance the microbial sciences.