

PNAS will eliminate Communicated submissions in July 2010

As of July 1, 2010, PNAS will no longer allow the submission of papers “Communicated” to the journal by NAS members and will instead handle these papers as Direct Submissions. Authors are free to ask an NAS member to edit their paper as a “Prearranged Editor” prior to submission to PNAS. Assignments are handled by the Editorial Board, and members who agree in principle to edit a paper are given special consideration by the board. NAS member contributions are not affected by this policy change.

PNAS has a nearly 100-year history of scientific publishing that is governed by principles established by George Ellery Hale in 1914, which include publication of work by a nonmember that appears to an NAS member to be of particular importance. Until 1995, the majority of papers published in PNAS were authored by nonmembers whose work was “Communicated” by an NAS member who believed the work to be of sufficient significance to warrant publication in the Academy’s journal. Many such papers were landmarks in their field, such as the 1950 paper by John Nash (1) that described a principle now known as the Nash equilibrium, the 1977 discovery of split genes and RNA splicing by Phillip Sharp (2), and the 1979 finding by Hershko et al. of the ATP-dependent proteolytic system responsible for protein degradation (3).

In 1995 PNAS Editor-in-Chief Nicholas R. Cozzarelli introduced the option of “Direct Submission” by authors, both members and nonmembers. Manuscripts submitted directly to the PNAS office that pass initial screening by the Editorial Board (now comprised of 167 NAS members) are anonymously peer-reviewed by experts in the field of the paper, and the final decision on publication is made by an NAS member. This option has enjoyed enormous success, growing from 31 submissions in 1995 to 10,573 in 2008. Indeed, PNAS continues to experience dramatic growth in submissions (Fig. 1) and impact (4).

As the popularity of the Direct Submission path increased, many members declined to communicate papers and instead asked authors to send their work directly to PNAS, naming a member as a potential editor. Through a process called

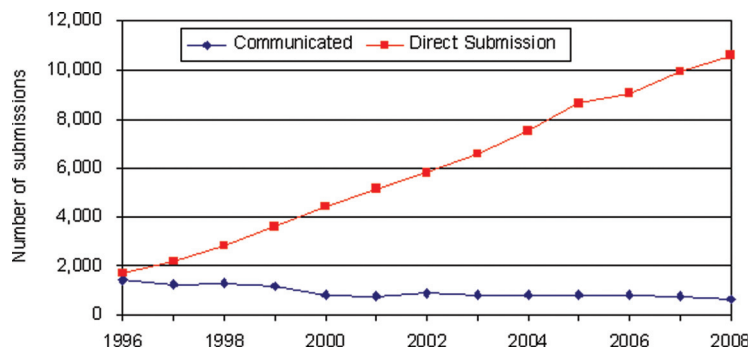


Fig. 1. A graph of the number of Communicated and Direct Submissions received since 1996.

“Prearranged Editor,” an author may ask an NAS member to edit a Direct Submission paper, as they would have done for a Communicated paper. When the manuscript is received by PNAS, the NAS member designated as the Prearranged Editor is asked to comment on the significance of the work and recommend a final decision on publication after peer review, which is handled—as for all Direct Submissions—by the PNAS office. Before the peer-review process is initiated, a member of the PNAS Editorial Board is asked to confirm that the Prearranged Editor has the requisite expertise and the paper is appropriate for publication in PNAS (see the PNAS Information for Authors at www.pnas.org/site/misc/inforc.shtml).

The popularity of Direct Submission and the declining number of Communicated papers factored heavily in a recent proposal by the Editorial Board to eliminate the latter. Votes of the Editorial Board affirming this proposal were followed by a poll of all NAS members, who favored the proposal by a large margin. After extensive discussion at its meeting in early August and on the recommendation of its Committee on Publications, the NAS Council voted to approve the proposal to eliminate Communicated papers from PNAS, effective July 1, 2010, and strengthen the system of Prearranged Editors. At the same time, the Board and the Council affirmed the unique role of PNAS in publishing the most important work of its members in the form of Contributed papers, a feature of the journal that will not change.

The publication of papers that NAS members recognize as exceptional, but out of the mainstream, is encouraged under the Prearranged Editor system, as it has been with Communicated papers. The Council endorsed the view that this change—which permits members to facilitate the publication of such papers in PNAS but without the administrative burden of managing the review process themselves—will make the review process more uniform by centralizing it in the PNAS office for all manuscripts submitted by nonmembers and will assure readers of PNAS that all manuscripts are vetted by an appropriate authority in the subject area. Academy members continue to make the final decision on all PNAS papers, unlike the process in place at such journals as *Nature*, *Cell*, and *Science*, where final editorial decisions are often made by staff rather than practicing researchers.

The Editorial Board believes that the Prearranged Editor process for Direct Submissions combines the best of the Communicated and Direct Submission processes. PNAS is unique because of its relationship with the NAS and its members—leading scientists in the US and abroad—who not only publish some of their own best work in PNAS but who also manage the journal and make all editorial decisions. In the end, every paper published in PNAS has the seal of approval of an Academy member. With the introduction of NAS member Inaugural Articles, Commentaries, Perspectives, Feature Articles, and Letters, PNAS strives to serve the entire scientific community.

We welcome questions and comments about this policy change.

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1. Nash JF, Jr (1950) Equilibrium points in n -person games. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 36:48–49.
2. Berget SM, Moore C, Sharp PA (1977) Spliced segments at the 5' terminus of adenovirus 2 late mRNA. *Proc Natl*

Acad Sci USA 74:3171–3175.

3. Hershko A, Ciechanover A, Rose I (1979) Resolution of the ATP-dependent proteolytic system from reticulocytes: A component that interacts with ATP. *Proc Natl*

Acad Sci USA 76:3107–3110.

4. Fersht R (2009) The most influential journals: Impact Factor and Eigenfactor. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 106:6883–6884.