

Looking Back and Looking Forward

Ann Chester, PhD and the JSO Editors-in-Chief

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The Editors-in-Chief wish you a happy and productive new year. We would like to let you know about a transition that is taking place in the editorial team for the Journal of STEM Outreach (JSO). Our esteemed founder and leader, Virginia Shepherd, Ph.D. (Ginny) is stepping back to spend more time with family and to guide in an unofficial capacity. She is not completely leaving JSO but will take a much-reduced role in keeping us on the right track.

This journal owes a great deal to Dr. Shepherd, whose vision brought JSO to life. JSO's unique mission is to provide a venue for STEM professionals and educators to publish results from their work that are of interest to those who develop, implement, and conduct research in the field of STEM outreach. The journal specifically focuses on programs and approaches that serve K-12 teachers, students, and/or classrooms in either formal or informal settings, and what makes them successful.

Dr. Shepherd initiated JSO to fill a gap she identified in peer-reviewed journals. She found few, if any, places for STEM outreach professionals to publish their work, sharing program successes, challenges and ways to address them. As a result, those who were new to the STEM outreach field did not have literature to build on when designing new programs. The lack of a peer-reviewed journal also hampered the STEM outreach community's ability to move the science of outreach forward. It hampered career advancement for those in academic positions, who need peer-reviewed publications. As a result of Dr. Shepherd's leadership, we in the STEM outreach community now have a formal place to share and learn from each other. We have a voice and a reach far beyond what we had before.

As part of initiating the journal, Dr. Shepherd identified and oversaw arrangements with Scholastica, the JSO publisher. She also formed the team of co-editors, associate editors, and editorial board. Her leadership set the tone for the journal's editorial approach of offering additional guidance in the editing stage to support first-time authors in successfully publishing their work. Since the journal began accepting manuscripts, Dr. Shepherd has provided overall leadership to make sure manuscripts keep moving through the review and editing pipeline. This has been particularly important since all of the co-editors (including Dr. Shepherd) and associate editors are volunteers. Her gentle nudging and reminders have been essential to the publication process. She also has been the driving force behind the themes for special issues. Through her example, Dr. Shepherd cultivated a culture of giving back to the profession that has given so much to all of us in the STEM outreach field.

The JSO began online publication in January 2018, kicked off with a commentary by Bruce Alberts on the importance of science outreach. As of October 2024, there have been seven volumes, 15 issues, and 194 total articles published. During this time, the JSO has published articles from a number of international groups and produced special issues that focused on timely topics, including adapting programs to the COVID-19 pandemic and improving outreach to underrepresented populations. All papers are open access, broadening their availability to the greater outreach community.

JSO still has the steady hands of STEM outreach veterans Ann Chester, Ph.D. and Kristin Bass, Ph.D. who are continuing their leadership roles as co-editors. Dr. Bass will be taking over some of Ginny's editorial responsibilities, and will continue her vision of important and impactful special issues. She invites JSO's readership to suggest new themes and to volunteer as manuscript reviewers. She will continue to promote JSO at the annual National Institutes of Health's SciEd meeting, while encouraging submissions from a broad variety of scientific disciplines.

In addition, JSO welcomes Louisa Stark, Ph.D., our newest veteran in the field to join the co-editors. Dr. Stark brings over 30 years of experience in the field of STEM outreach. Her experience in science education research, curriculum co-design and development, educational technology, student learning, teacher professional learning, informal science education, and community engagement will enable her to oversee manuscripts from a broad range of STEM outreach programs. Dr. Stark is the Associate Director (formerly director) of the Genetic Science Learning Center at the University of Utah. She also holds appointments at the University as the H.A. and Edna Benning Presidential Endowed Chair, a Professor of Human Genetics, and an Adjunct Professor of Population Health Sciences.

Joe Lopez, Ph.D., continues his background role as journal manager, which entails formatting manuscripts for publication, maintaining the JSO website, and overseeing the business operations of the journal.

We look forward to a successful future of publishing your important research in the Journal of STEM Outreach, promoting STEM education through novel and successful outreach programs and to nurturing new authors in the process.