

Statement of Interest in the Position of Editor-in-Chief of *Systematic Biology*
Laura Kubatko

I have served continuously as an Associate Editor (AE) for *Systematic Biology* from 2007 onwards, and this has been among the most valuable activities of my professional career. *Systematic Biology* is well-known for publishing work of the highest quality, both empirically- and theoretically-motivated, and the journal has a strong reputation for providing thoughtful and careful reviews of the manuscripts it receives. On several occasions, authors whose papers I have handled have approached me to say how useful they have found the reviews they have received from the journal, and in some cases these comments have come from authors whose papers were not actually accepted for publication. The tradition has been that authors receive comments from at least two reviewers, as well as a thorough review and synthesis of the referee comments from the Associate Editor. During my time as AE, many of the Editors have also regularly provided a detailed review (the one who stands out to me in this regard is Jack Sullivan, whose efforts in this area were truly remarkable).

My primary goal as Editor-in-Chief will be to maintain and enhance the high quality and strong reputation of the journal. A crucial means of achieving this is to continue the tradition of thoughtful and thorough reviews of submissions that are appropriate for publication in the journal. I will expect AEs to continue to provide both their own review of the work and to synthesize the comments of the referees, and I intend to provide a review of each manuscript at some level, as well. While the time to return a decision to authors is an increasingly important consideration in publishing, I believe that the quality of reviews is of utmost importance and should not be sacrificed for speed. However, I would not want to see the turnaround time for manuscripts submitted to the journal increase, and will actively monitor the balance between these two factors.

Systematic Biology publishes two main categories of regular manuscripts. The first are papers describing the analysis and interpretation of empirical data sets through the application of state-of-the-art methodology that is appropriate for the problem at hand. This often includes the development of new methodology to address an interesting feature of the data generated, but this need not be the case. Application of existing methods in a way that can serve as a model for the analysis of data of that type, or that reveals new insights into the evolution of the system under study are ideal contributions to the journal. I will encourage submission of manuscripts of this type whenever I can. The second main category of papers that appear in the journal are those reporting new methodological or theoretical developments that impact data analysis. Over the years I have served as an AE, I have observed variation in the quality of these contributions, and, because these are primarily the types of papers I have handled, my ideal requirements for publication of a manuscript of this type have become more focused during this time. In particular, methodological articles should address a problem of broad interest to the journal's readership; should apply to problems at the scale encountered by empiricists (for example, they must apply to more than four taxa); should be compared to existing methodology for the problem being addressed when applicable, which is typically accomplished via simulation-based comparison; and should be demonstrated using a freely-available empirical data set. As in the case of empirically-motivated papers, I will encourage authors whose work fits these requirements to submit their manuscripts to the journal.

The journal also includes sections on Software for Systematics and Evolution and Points of View, which I view as valuable components on the journal. Many Points of View articles have proven to be important contributions to our field over time, and I expect this to continue. We need to work

to increase the relevance of the manuscripts submitted to the Software section, and I view this as something that I would continue to actively develop.

In terms of interaction with AEs, I expect that only rarely will I make a decision that conflicts with their recommendation, though of course this will sometimes happen. Given my background, I will be more comfortable handling methodological papers in many cases, and will thus rely on AEs who are empiricists with knowledge of the systems under study for strong recommendations. I hope to create/maintain a culture in which dialog between the Editor and the AEs is regular and natural, and expect that in cases of conflicting recommendations on a manuscript or in cases of controversy of some sort, direct conversation with AEs will be welcomed as a means of resolution. The opportunity to interact with leaders in this field to discuss cutting-edge science is one of the perks of this position!

My comments thus far have primarily addressed the day-to-day administration of the journal. However, it is also important for the journal to grow and improve, as well. One area in which I see opportunity is to increase the diversity of countries in which authors of published papers reside. This is not simply a matter of increasing submissions from a diverse array of countries, because the quality of articles published in the journal must be maintained. Rather, the journal needs to encourage submissions globally while clearly communicating standards for publication in the journal. One idea to promote this is to initiate a “pre-submission” process by which authors from underrepresented countries could submit a brief (perhaps one page or so) description of their work, and the Editor could give some feedback on whether the work is appropriate for the journal. If appropriate, the Editor could clearly describe the requirements of a publishable manuscript on the topic, with the goal of having the manuscript in line with standards of the journal at the time of submission. Others, including the SSB Council and the AEs, may have additional suggestions for improvement in this area, and I would like to open a discussion of this issue early in my term.

Finally, I would like to increase the participation of the AEs in guiding the direction of the journal. Attendance at the publisher’s meeting at the annual SSB meeting typically includes only a small fraction of the AEs, so other methods may be needed to promote interaction. I will be particularly interested in surveying AEs to determine whether there are new directions in which the journal should push, whether certain areas are under- or over-represented in recent issues, and to provide general feedback on the perception of the journal by the community. It is important for *Systematic Biology* to continue to adapt to trends in the field, while maintaining its central role as the leading journal for new research in evolutionary biology.