

EDITORIAL | OCTOBER 01 2017


A few words from the new editor **FREE**

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A few words from the new editor

In October 2011, my predecessor, David P. Jackson, began his reign with an editorial “Why be editor?” Two of his predecessors had written editorials “Why not be editor?” The question may have been sufficiently examined, but I will start my reign (stint? term? sentence?) as editor of AJP with a variation: “Why *I* wanted to be editor of AJP.” The past tense does not imply that I have changed my mind about the job, but rather that I am going to cite a thought from my letter of application. In considering the position I had asked those colleagues whom I could trap what their feelings were about the Journal. The opinions always started with an expression of great affection for AJP (followed by details of what *they* would do if they were editor). I asked myself why all this love, and put the following answer in the application for the position: “Reading professional research journals is part of our work; reading AJP is closer to the fun we remember when we were first learning physics.”

I thank David and his predecessors for making AJP what it is. I thank also what I have come to think of as the “Editorial Army,” the Associate Editors, the Section Editors, the Consulting Editors, and the members of the Editorial Advisory Board. This group makes a too rarely acknowledged crucial contribution without which the Journal could not have maintained its high standards. I owe it to this group, as well as to the readers, to do my best to maintain those standards.

And now a request. Physicists have the very useful concept of the phase space argument: Everything else being equal, things will evolve toward states that are in greater number. That applies to AJP. While it is not perfect, it is way over on the really really good side of the space of journals. The expectation should be that AJP is almost certain to get worse. I will do my best, but I hope that readers keep in mind the strong statistical current I am swimming against.

The likelihood of changing for the worse will not keep me from cautiously tweaking a few knobs because the times are changing, and have changed. In editorials I will discuss the ways in which the Journal will dip its figurative toe in several different puddles. The visions of these changes are mutable, and would make for a too lengthy editorial. Instead, I will defer most of these visions, and many observations, to future editorials. For now I will only list what might be in some of those future editorials:

- What is special and different about AJP?
- AJP and open access.
- Reviews and reviewers of manuscripts.
- Video abstracts.
- New “columns” in AJP.

Here, I will cover only one thought, only one new direction. But it is the one that I think may be the most important. Two thirds of higher education is publicly funded. This means from state and local governments, and those funds have been severely cut. The cuts seem to have stabilized (though the situation varies dramatically from state to state), but the steep decreases that followed the crash of 2008 have become fixed in base budgets. This means higher teaching loads and (easily overlooked) the time demands of extra administrative loads imposed by the cutback in support staff. I could say more about the current “business plan” for publicly supported higher education, and probably will in a subsequent editorial, but here I want to focus on something new that AAPT and AJP can do.

A young person starting a higher education teaching career faces the challenges mentioned above, and another challenge: Due to the parallel cutback in federal funding of science, the overwhelming majority of these young people have very little chance of getting external grants. Despite all this, there is still an expectation of research in many, perhaps most institutions of higher education. These young physicists, our next generation of physics instructors, will be evaluated by venerable professors who received tenure in another era. Do they have justifiable expectations of their young people? Does this contribute to making a challenging career choice even more challenging? Most important: Is a career in physics (more generally STEM) teaching no longer an attractive, or even a viable life?

What answers will these questions lead to: A high school model for college teaching? Unionization of instructors, adjuncts, postdocs, grad students?

The opportunity for the AJP is to give a voice to these young people as one of the steps in exploring the questions and the answers. To that end one of the cautious new features in AJP will be a sequence of guest editorials by young people, sharing with each other their stories and informing us not-so-young people about the future of our field.

Good-bye David. Hello readers. I’ll be meeting you here again in future issues.

Richard H. Price, *Editor*