

Editorial

Some news for 2017:

It is my true delight to report to you that **Rubén Martín** (ICIQ, Tarragona, Spain) and **Dave Nicewicz** (UNC Chapel Hill, USA) will be joining the *Synlett* Editorial Board from January 2018. As rising stars, they have both already made recognizable contributions to synthesis and catalysis, Rubén most notably in the area of transition-metal-catalyzed CO₂ utilization reactions, and Dave as one of the photoredox catalysis pioneers. Both of them are great additions to the board, bringing in a fresh note to our activities. Please join us in giving them a very warm welcome to the Thieme family!



Rubén Martín

Dave Nicewicz

At the same moment, it is time to say goodbye to one of the most influential and founding board members of *Synlett* - **Vic Snieckus**! Vic's last term on the *Synlett* board will end in December 2017. It would go beyond the scope of this editorial if I started to recapitulate Vic's career and his influence on the development of *Synlett* since the end of the late 80s. You are encouraged to read last month's massive special issue dedicated solely to him, and the accompanying editorial by P. Andrew Evans, James R. Green and Tomislav Rovis. As the editor-in-chief, let me take this opportunity to wholeheartedly thank Vic for his many and wonderful contributions to our journal! Vic will remain close to *Synlett* as an honorary member of the Editorial Advisory Board. I am confident that with the 'Thieme family spirit' deeply rooted in Vic's DNA we can continue to count on his advice.

In 2017, seven well-received **clusters and special sections** were published in *Synlett* on prebiotic organic chemistry and chemical pre-biology (Victor Snieckus and Ramanarayanan Krishnamurthy), asymmetric Brønsted base catalysis (Benjamin List and Choon Hong Tan), catalytic aerobic oxidations (Tomislav Rovis and Shannon Stahl), recent advances in protein and peptide synthesis (Hak-Fun Chow and Lei Liu), silicon in synthesis and catalysis (Benjamin List and Martin Oestreich), C–O activation (Victor Snieckus, Naoto Chatani, and Mamoru Tobisu), and a special on the ISHC conference (Oliver Reiser and Benjamin List).

Due to the widespread success of these activities, several new clusters are currently planned for 2018, including one each on C–C activation (Yasuhiro Uozumi and Masahiro Murakami), alkene halofunctionalization (Tomislav Rovis and Jeff Johnston), atropisomerism (Laurence Harwood, Victor Snieckus, and Kurt Mislow), and the synthesis of materials (Timothy Swager and Steve Ley).

2017 also brought advances in peer reviewing. We have proposed **crowd reviewing** (CR) as a new tool for scientific evaluations. CR has made major advances and garnered significant attention in 2017, even beyond the scientific community. While our peer review at *Synlett* works well with the majority of the manuscripts we receive, we aimed at improving our system even further. Specifically, our intention has been to simultaneously accelerate and qualitatively improve peer reviewing. CR works by allowing a selected group of around a hundred referees to confidentially but interactively discuss manuscripts. In contrast to traditional peer reviewing, with CR we are not looking for full reports from individual referees but rather striving to obtain a significant amount of substantive crowd comments that jointly define the reviewing results. It is from these results that an editorial decision is generally made.

During our initial tests at *Synlett*, we validated the new approach by directly comparing it to conventional peer reviewing, which was conducted in parallel. CR indeed provided faster and more detailed feedback and the discussions of the crowd proved to be qualitatively high and helpful in substantiating editorial decisions. With these promising results in hand, we reported our observations in a 'world-view article' in *Nature* to share our vision of CR with a broader audience. We were pleased to find that the

scientific community and other media became highly interested in CR. For examples, see:

<https://www.nature.com/news/crowd-based-peer-review-can-be-good-and-fast-1.22072>,

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/the-future-of-peer-review/>,

<https://xianblog.wordpress.com/2017/06/20/crowd-based-peer-review/>,

<https://www.chemistryworld.com/news/chemistry-journal-introduces-intelligent-crowd-peer-review-/3007534.article>,

<http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/cen-09524-notw4>,

<https://phys.org/news/2017-06-intelligent-crowd-scientific-papers.html>,

<https://cen.acs.org/articles/95/i24/Cloud-based-peer-review-passes-test.html?type=paidArticleContent>,

<https://arstechnica.com/science/2017/06/journal-tries-crowdsourcing-peer-reviews-sees-excellent-results/>,

<https://hailscience.com/2017/06/08/intelligent-crowd-reviewing-of-scientific-papers-tested/>,

<http://librarylearningspace.com/anonymous-crowd-based-peer-review-delivers-promising-results/>,

<http://www.knowledgespeak.com/newsArchieveview.asp?intMonth=6&intYear=2017>.

In the meantime, we tested CR on many more manuscripts and further improved our online platform. CR has been quite popular with our authors and is becoming an integral part of *Synlett* as a result. We now offer our authors a choice: they can pick traditional peer reviewing or crowd reviewing. In addition, for a certain period we offer our authors to choose both types of reviewing to be conducted in parallel. We hope this will allow our authors to develop their own opinion about CR. Personally, I am already rather optimistic about this new format. Crowd reviewing is much faster than peer reviewing but the quality is by no means inferior. In contrast, the increased number of referees, the interactive style, and the critical self-reflectiveness of the system all contribute to improve the scientific review process. Let's see where this will take us in 2018.

I wish you all a successful, happy, and healthy New Year!

Ben List