

The autophagy community

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There are various definitions of community. A definition that I found in one of my dictionaries is the following: “A social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists.” Thus, I think it is fair to say that there is a worldwide autophagy community. That is, there is a group of researchers (our occupation), whose members share an interest in autophagy (our common characteristic), and that group is distinct from the larger society (I do not want to begin describing the many ways this applies). But do we feel like a community, and do we need a community? I suggest that a community is indeed beneficial, and I propose one mechanism for enhancing the development of the autophagy community.

It is increasingly true that science is not conducted in isolation. For example, we rely on the results of other researchers to inform our own experiments. In addition, with the seemingly constant advances in technology it is becoming impossible for a single lab to carry out all of the techniques that might be applicable to their own topic and model system, let alone perform experiments in a different model organism. We also expect people to provide reagents upon request, and perhaps to even provide information and material prior to publication. However, many of these ideas require a certain level of trust and respect among the members of the community. I think that the autophagy community has in general established a tradition of being welcome to new researchers and of the open exchange of ideas and reagents, at least as much as can be expected considering the highly competitive nature of today's science. I also consider it important to maintain this atmosphere as the field continues to grow. So, the question is, how do we continue to build the autophagy community?

If you read the journal *Autophagy* you may have noticed the Perspective articles that I have been writing the past few years, which highlight researchers in the field who have retired, or are near retirement. I generally only write one such article per year. However, while working on the revised guidelines I realized that the autophagy community is now quite large, and it is continuing to grow. While there are some people in the community that we hear about routinely (e.g., people who have chaired conferences and give talks at these conferences), they represent only a small percentage of the total people doing research in the field. Therefore, I have been trying to think of a way to introduce some of the other people in the field to the larger community. There are several reasons for doing this. First, trust and respect can only be developed over time, and through interactions, but a starting point is to learn something about the person. Second, if you find out what another researcher is interested in, you may see the possibility for a collaborative effort. Third, reading the thoughts of other people who work in the same field

may spark ideas in your own mind for areas to pursue; I think everyone working on autophagy has something to contribute, and it is therefore important that the larger community be exposed to as many of these people as possible. There are only a limited number of spots to talk at a conference, but that is not the only venue for sharing information.

Accordingly, *Autophagy* is launching a new type of article under the category “Autophagy Community.” These articles will provide a very short synopsis of researchers working in the field of autophagy. I plan to run several of these articles per issue (except in the yearly issue in which there is a Perspective), starting with the current one. Therefore, I will be contacting many of you in the near future and asking you to provide information on your background, your views of the field of autophagy, and some personal information that will allow the rest of us to learn something about you as an individual. I hope that you will agree to participate, and I hope that the readers of these articles find them useful in making the autophagy community a reality and a positive endeavor.

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