Thirsty Papers Celebrating Thirty Years of SYNLLETT

Dear Readers,

Thirty years ago, a group of talented researchers led by our inaugural and long-standing Editor-in-Chief Peter Vollhardt set out to establish a journal with a steadfast commitment to young scientists. Peter and his crew of co-editors, Bernd Giese, Steve Ley, and Hisashi Yamamoto, envisioned a journal ‘for the students’, and as such stipulated that students would be given easy (and cheap!) access to papers published in SYNLLETT. Through the years, with an ever-growing (including initial additions of Vic Snieckus, Hak-Fun Chow, and Henry Wong) and ever-evolving Editorial Board (with Laurence Harwood and Yas Uozumi succeeding Steve Ley and Hisashi Yamamoto, respectively), this core commitment has indeed remained. In fact, the value placed in young scientists since the journal’s inception has created a youthful flavor to SYNLLETT, a journal with a now long-standing reputation for high-quality reports that range a myriad of chemical synthesis disciplines. To celebrate these achievements, we have invited some of the top research teams from all over the world to join us in honoring three decades of commitment to scientific excellence and publish herein 30 papers describing exciting, practical, and innovative chemistry.

It was in 2011 that I was honored to succeed Bernd Giese as an Associate Editor, following his more than two-decade commitment to the journal. A year later, the Editorial Board was again expanded with the addition of Tomislav Rovis, now at Columbia University in New York. Since that time, we have continued to evolve our Editorial Board with the recent additions of Rubén Martín (ICIQ, Tarragona) and David Nicewicz (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) in 2018. Today, I am happy to announce the latest addition to our Associate Editor team, Ang Li from the Shanghai Institute of Organic Chemistry.

In 2015, I was approached with the exciting opportunity to succeed Peter Vollhardt as Editor-in-Chief. Peter and I not only share common ancestors (probably), and the family saying ‘better lose a good friend than leave out a good joke’ (maybe), but also a passion to continuously advance SYNLLETT into the leading journal publishing Communications and Accounts in chemical synthesis (definitely!). So, it was with very little hesitation that I agreed in serving in this role. Fortunately, Peter continues to be an influential protagonist on our Editorial Board, staying on to manage all Accounts and Synpacts, which as you can see below, are real success stories, providing some of the journal’s most highly cited articles.

Table 1: Most Cited SYNLLETT Articles in the Last Five Years (2013–2017)

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<th>Citations</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Corresponding Author(s)</th>
<th>Source Article Type</th>
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<tr>
<td>116</td>
<td>Manganese-Mediated C–C Bond Formation via C–H Activation: From Stoichiometry to Catalysis</td>
<td>Congyong Wang</td>
<td>2013, 1606 Synpacts</td>
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<td>108</td>
<td>Cross-Coupling of Amides by N-C Bond Activation</td>
<td>Michal Szostak</td>
<td>2016, 2530 Account</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>Mono- and Oligocyclic Aromatic Ynes and Dyynes as Building Blocks to Approach Larger Acene Ses, Heteroacenes, and Twistaneces</td>
<td>Qichun Zhang</td>
<td>2013, 686 Account</td>
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<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Expanding Structural Diversity: Removable and Manipulable Directing Groups for C-H Activation</td>
<td>Yong Huang</td>
<td>2013, 145 Synpacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Hypervalent Iodine Reagents as Powerful Electrophiles</td>
<td>Thomas Wirth</td>
<td>2013, 424 Account</td>
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One way that Thieme has supported younger scientists is through the Thieme–IUPAC Prize, which, since 1992, has been awarded biennially to a chemist under the age of 40 with an excellent track record of innovative research. Fortunately, we have been able to continue this tradition, and in the last 10 years Seth Herzon (2018), Neil Garg (2016), Martin Burke (2014), Melanie Sanford (2012), and Phil Baran (2010) have been recognized for their significant impacts on the synthetic organic chemistry community. In continuation of such efforts, for the first time this year, Thieme will award the Dr. Margaret Faul Women in Chemistry Award for outstanding contributions in chemistry by a young, female scientist. The first award ceremony and lecture will be held at the 2019 European Symposium on Organic Chemistry in Vienna.

By virtue of this original vision of the inaugural Editorial Board, when I came on as Editor-in-Chief, there were already many traditions within SYNLETT to support the development and careers of young chemists. Consider for example our Thieme Chemistry Journals Award, which is becoming ever more prestigious among independent academic researchers during the early phase of their career.

Two years ago, I wondered if we could go even one step further by involving the younger generation in one of the most historic scientific procedures (which they were often left out of): the reviewing process! And most importantly, do so while actually improving the system. After all, the then generally applied method was merely a technologically advanced version of how peer reviews were conducted when this journal was born, which was already a technologically advanced version of how peer review was done in its own infancy, centuries ago. So, yes, peer review is time-proven; but not all time-proven processes are immune to deficiencies. Is it still the best way for our community to evaluate the manuscripts of our peers?

In the last two years here at SYNLETT, we have tried to answer that question, or at least provide some insight within a fundamentally imperfect world. I, alongside my then-PhD student Dr. Denis Höfler, built a diverse ‘crowd’ of approximately 100 chemists, ranging from highly qualified PhD students and postdoctoral researchers to experienced experimental chemists in industry and tenured professors...
who came with years of practice as traditional peer reviewers. In fact, we estimate that the average age of our crowd is 35 years old, judging from the career level of the reviewers.

Here’s how it works: we send our crowd a link to a manuscript, which has been uploaded to an online platform called Filestage. They follow this link and anonymously make interactive comments throughout a manuscript and the corresponding supporting information. On average, the manuscript is ‘live’ for 3–4 days and already at this point, we have collected enough substantive opinions and perspectives to make an editorial decision. We have now used Select Crowd Review to evaluate more than 150 manuscripts submitted to SYNLETT, and our authorship who can choose between either peer review and/or crowd review has been generally happy with this process and is making more and more use of this rapid and deep reviewing format. Their papers are improved, and often so in areas they have not been forced to consider using traditional peer review. After all, it is the younger generation that is really in ‘the trenches’ of the research – so we should give them a platform to speak alongside the more experienced reviewers, who (ideally) hold a broader perspective. What I have personally found with the inclusion of younger chemists in the review process is that they are eager to check even the small details within the supporting information, a trait that you often only see from the top-of-the-top peer reviewers. We publish better science. And we do so with a reviewing process of less than one week. For more information on this approach, please see my personal account published in Nature 2017, 546, 9 or a write-up published this year in C&EN 2018, November 26, Vol. 96, issue 47, entitled, ‘The case for crowd peer review’.

Scientists, of all people, should be willing to evolve with the times and with the advancing technology. I have made it a goal, as Editor-in-Chief, to continually focus on improving the peer-review process. Maybe our crowd will not solve all the problems, but I think our journal’s ‘founding fathers’ would support a system that improves the science we publish and provides a platform for young scientists to be involved in that process. In fact, to help with the ever-evolving tactics of our method, our Editorial Board has recently brought on a Crowd-Review Editor, Dr. Manuel van Gemmeren, an assistant professor at the University of Münster, who is as passionate about crowd review as we all are. We are excited to see how this reviewing format will grow and develop and we are constantly looking for new, qualified, and highly motivated crowd members!

Within a similar sphere as our crowd-review system, there has recently been an uptick in preprint publishing – before any reviewing. The underlying concepts are fundamentally different from our approach to peer review and preprint publishing has its own advantages and challenges. In any case, we are very open to submissions to SYNLETT of manuscripts that have previously been posted on a preprint server.

When I am not thinking about crowd review, one of my favorite tasks as an Editor is to, at the end of the year, look back at the stellar manuscripts that we have published in that year and recognize the stand-out papers. As the Editorial Board, along with the members of our Advisory Board, we each propose papers from a given year for the SYNLETT Best Paper Award. One of these recommendations will receive this distinction, along with a nice cash prize. This year, we were excited to award James P. Morken and his team for publishing in SYNLETT their development of a method for the stereospecific conversion of primary, secondary, and even tertiary boronic esters into the corresponding alkylamines.

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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Synthesis of Tetraarylmethanes by the Triflic Acid-Promoted Formal Cross-Dehydrogenative Coupling of Triarylmethanes with Arenes</td>
<td>Masakazu Nambo and Cathleen M. Crudden</td>
<td>2017, 2936 Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Asymmetric Homogeneous Hydrogenation of 2-Pyridones</td>
<td>Frank Glorius</td>
<td>2015, 1557 Letter</td>
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In 2018, five well-received clusters and special sections have been published in SYNLETT on alkene halofunctionalization (Tomislav Rovis and Jeff Johnston), C–C activation (Yasuhiro Uozumi and Masahiro Murakami), atropisomerism (Victor Snieckus and Laurence Harwood), synthesis of materials (Timothy Swager) and a special section on the 9th EuCheMS Organic Division Young Investigator Workshop.

For 2019, several new Clusters on hot topics are planned, including metathesis beyond olefins (Benjamin List and Bill Morandi), biocatalysis (Tomislav Rovis and Todd Hyster), electrochemical synthesis and catalysis (Benjamin List and Phil Baran), organoselenium chemistry (Hak-Fun Chow and Y.-Y. Yeung), iterative synthesis methods for C–H functionalization (Dave Nicewicz and Corey Stephenson) and a Special Issue on the International Symposium on Synthesis and Catalysis 2019 (Anthony Burke). A big thank you to all enthusiastic editors and guest editors that join us for this successful initiatives.

Great news also comes with the report of our increased impact factor (2.369 in 2017). In fact, of all the chemical journals, right after The Journal of the American Chemical Society and Chemical Science, the biggest gain has been made by SYNLETT! As we celebrate 30 years of SYNLETT, I would particularly like to thank Peter Vollhardt, Bernd Giese, Steve Ley, and Hisashi Yamamoto for not only establishing a journal committed to excellency in science, but for envisioning a journal that would support the young scientist. I too benefitted from their efforts as a young assistant professor, and now, as Editor-in-Chief, I am dedicated to carrying on such an important tradition. Another big thank you goes to our authors for continuously sending us exciting work to publish, to our referees, especially to our enthusiastic crowd members, and last but not least, to you, our readers!

Benjamin List
Editor-in-Chief
Mülheim/Ruhr
February 2019