ISMTE
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF MANAGING AND TECHNICAL EDITORS

EON
Editorial Office News

Column: *President's Message*

September 2009

What a Success!

From the President - Jason Roberts

Excellent. Cannot rate this highly enough. Extremely informative. These words are extracted from the many, many positive assessments from attendees to the recently held 2nd Annual European and North American ISMTE meetings. For the 2009 US meeting, we returned again to Baltimore, Maryland, but for the 2009 European meeting we charted new territory by heading to the 'dreaming spires' of Oxford and the delightful surroundings of St Hugh's College, which is a constituent college of the University of Oxford.

I thought I would use this month's President's Column to take stock of the meetings. I was most fortunate to attend both this year, learning a great deal in the process. Conference reports will follow in *EON* and a dedicated section devoted to presenting content from the 2009 meetings will be developed at www.ismte.org in short order.

Approximately 120 people, collectively, attended the conferences. Almost half of the attendees were *not* ISMTE members. If you have since joined as a result of attending – thank you, and welcome to the society!

ISMTE was very lucky to secure four superb keynote speakers (Kent Anderson, Peter Binfield, Dr. Harvey Marcovitch, and Prof. Roy Pounder). Prof. Pounder apparently impressed the gods of publishing with his strategies for producing amazing turnaround times to first decision. The gods registered their response during part of his presentation with a very loud, but thankfully brief, thunderstorm – a slight inconvenience while we sat in a building with walls of glass.

The meetings also featured some excellent contributions from Tom McLung, Deborah Bowman, Glenn Collins, Jennifer Deyton and Elizabeth Blalock, and the always-informative Irene Hames. Each of these speakers had clearly spent considerable time planning and producing their presentations. Thanks also to Julie Nash and Meg

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West for moderating some of the discussions in Baltimore.

Attendees of both meetings also generated discussion of the highest quality. Informed opinions, considered advice, and personal experiences were shared generously. The vibrancy of the debates clearly confirmed a desire amongst editorial office staff to learn from peers – a central objective of ISMTE. After all, who better to offer new insights and perspectives than your colleagues at other journals?

Our roles are varied but we all have something in common: Our responsibilities are evolving. ISMTE meetings will always attempt to address this by ensuring some content will be devoted to new practices or examining emerging trends in publishing. The electric reaction to Kent Anderson's presentation in Baltimore, where he explored new social media and other innovative ideas to extend content beyond its traditional presentation, illustrated how many of us are seeking more information on these issues. The beauty of the ISMTE meetings is that this information is presented in a manner that speaks directly to our experiences and the roles we perform.

Beyond professional development, one of the most important reasons for hosting an ISMTE conference is to offer social opportunities, especially as so many of us are locked away in office settings as remote as a Pacific island. Being able to meet with 'old' friends as well as new acquaintances is one of the highlights of these meetings. During the rest of the year we can still communicate, of course, by using the discussion forum.

As already noted, feedback was very positive and observations were constructive. We are clearly addressing a need by providing a setting for the discussion of operational issues. From reading the evaluation forms the message is clear: Keep hosting these meetings! And we will.

I hope 2011 will see even bigger and better meetings. Perhaps by then the economy won't be hurting so much and more of you can attend. I know many members sent their regrets this year. The organizers of these meetings will take on board your suggestions for content themes, dates, and locations. (Though I should warn those of you who suggested Hawaii and Barbados that you will likely be sorely disappointed.) Planning probably will begin in earnest not long after the publication of this issue of *EON*. If you wish to get involved in developing the program/programme for the 2011 meetings please do let Beverlee Anderson, our executive director, know at ismte@hughes.net.

Finally, I absolutely must thank the organizers of the respective meetings. What a tremendous job Glenn Collins did in Baltimore. Colleen Cusworth, Thina Hedbom, Michael Willis, and Irene Hames, similarly, worked extremely hard on the meeting format and logistics in Oxford. My utmost gratitude goes to current ISMTE Vice-President and conference planner extraordinaire, Taylor Bowen. Taylor once again took overall responsibility for preparing both meetings and handled this task quite brilliantly. I hope the success of the meetings leaves everyone involved justifiably proud.

Jason

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ARTICLE

ISMTE Conference Brief: UK

by Taylor Bowen
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Writing immediately after the conference, Taylor Bowen, ISMTE Vice President sent this report to the ISMTE Board of Directors:

I am pleased to report that we had a **very successful** conference today in Oxford! We had 48 attendees – mostly from the UK, but also Finland, Denmark, Germany, France, Japan, and the US. St. Hugh's College was a beautiful venue (modern building on the lovely, old college grounds; glass walls on both sides of the hall looking out on the gardens). We heard wonderful speakers – Dr. Harvey Marcovitch and Prof. Roy Pounder – who stayed with us all day and participated throughout the sessions. Engaged attendees, lively discussion, and nice weather ('sunny spells' as the weather reports say here), and tasty lunch and teas contributed to the successful day. Attendee questionnaire comments and ratings were very positive. It was a great day for ISMTE!

Irene Hames, a member of the conference planning committee, said the workshop sessions, on Ethics and the Editorial Office and Looking After Authors and Reviewers, buzzed with wide-ranging discussions and beneficial suggestions. One breakout group even worked through the refreshment break!

Survey Says . . .

Preliminary survey results showed 68% of attendees who provided a score to evaluate the overall conference gave the maximum possible score of 5 (rated "Excellent"). The mean score response was 4.68.

ARTICLE

ISMTE Conference Summary: US

by Elizabeth Blalock
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The US annual meeting of ISMTE was held in Baltimore, Maryland, August 3-5, 2009. Taylor Bowen, ISMTE Vice President (Aegis Peer Review Management, Charlottesville, VA), thanked Glenn Collins (*JACC;* San Diego, CA) and Ira Salkin (*Medical Mycology;* West Sand Lake, NY) for their work in putting the conference together, as well as our corporate supporters (see p. 18) whose annual contributions enable ISMTE to provide this type of programming.

Following these comments, Jason Roberts, ISMTE President (managing editor of *Headache,* and *Journal of Sexual Medicine,* Boston, MA), addressed the attendees. Jason stressed the purpose of ISMTE, which is to fill an under-served niche in journals publishing by enhancing the professionalism of editorial office staff through networking, training, and education. Member benefits include ISMTE's website (www.ismte.org); its newsletter, *EON*, which has published 250 pages over the past 12 months; and its online discussion forum; in addition to meetings, book discounts, and the opportunity to participate at the ground level in establishing a new professional society.

Figure 1. Kent Anderson, speaking on 'Ideas for Your Journal in the Current Economic Climate'

Featured Speaker

Kent Anderson, executive director, Business and Product Development of the *New England Journal of Medicine* and editor-in-chief of the Scholarly Kitchen blog (established by the Society for Scholarly Publishing; http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/), alerted us to the importance of social networking for journal publishers. While it may seem unlikely at first, your users are discussing publications on Twitter, Facebook, and blogs – perhaps your publications ought to be out there, too. (See the 'Journals on Facebook? Not Such a Crazy Idea' article in the August 2009 issue of *EON.*) To get an idea of what's being said about your titles, go to Twitter.com and search on your journal's name; you might find a few surprises. With low barriers to entry for these media, Kent argues there is low risk in experimentation and high risk (i.e., obsolescence) in not giving it a try. Ultimately, you may understand your customers and the value of your content in ways you have never imagined.

Morning Breakout Sessions

'Best Practice: Journal Office Protocols'
Speaker: Glenn Collins

Glenn Collins, executive editor and director of the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology (JACC)* family of journals, discussed the importance of a protocol, or 'a set of instructions on how to complete a task in the editorial office' (taken from the session handout), to standardizing journal workflows, keeping office staff on the same page and training new staff, and inspiring procedure improvement. The group discussed who should be involved in writing a protocol, access and storage of the current final document, and the process for updating the current document.

The group also discussed ideas from Kent Anderson's presentation earlier that morning, asking each other how to determine whether Web 2.0 media resources are worth the time and resources to implement and sustain them, and what a journal's goals should be when considering putting these ideas into practice. Some suggestions for these goals were 1) to drive people to articles, thus increasing traffic and advertising potential, 2) recruiting authors and readers with technology toys, and 3) creating communities.

Figure 2. Glenn Collins and attendees for the 'Best Practice: Journal Office Protocols' breakout session.

'How to Prepare Good Editorial Board / Journal Reports'
Speakers: Jason Roberts, Jenn Deyton, and Elizabeth Blalock

Jason Roberts encouraged the audience to understand their editors' needs and those of the various audiences who will be using their data, and to make information tell a story.

'Translational reports,' which provide information that guides decision-making (i.e., we publish many papers from country x, but we don't have many reviewers from country x; therefore we should tap these authors as reviewers), are recommended over straight data (number of submissions, acceptance rate, etc.). Jason exhorted attendees to present and interpret the reports they prepare, and to become power consumers of data, looking for patterns and trends that can be converted to publishing strategies.

Jenn Deyton (J&J Editorial, Cary, NC) gave visual examples of data that can be created using Excel®. She recommended using consistent reporting periods year to year, so that numbers will be comparable.

Elizabeth Blalock (*Journal of Investigative Dermatology,* Chapel Hill, NC) facilitated a discussion in which participants talked about the types of reports they find most useful, how they have used reports to make important decisions for their journals, and the advantages of report cards for editors.

ISMTE US Conference

Featured Speaker

Peter Binfield, managing editor for PLoS One, helped us envision the future of online publications, where they're all online-only; HTML supplants PDF; publishers move closer to their users; and articles become more important than journals (and rating systems change). Peter envisions that new toys, tools, technology, semantically enhanced articles, and online interactivity will create an environment of experimentation, where the version of record will come under discussion. In many ways that future is at our doorstep. Check out these sites recommended by Peter: ICEROCKET.com, friendfeed.com, authormapper.com

Figure 3. Small groups discussed a case study as part of the 'Publishing Ethics 101' breakout session.

Afternoon Breakout Sessions

'Publishing Ethics 101'
Speaker: Irene Hames

Irene Hames, managing editor of *The Plant Journal,* spoke about the importance of having procedures in place to deal with ethical misconduct. Ethical misconduct issues are time consuming, but they cannot be ignored. Having a procedure in place will ensure that this important issue is dealt with properly.

Having recent experience with an author misconduct case in her own journal, Irene had the following tips:

- Seek help – don't do anything you feel uncomfortable with.
- Keep everything confidential – involve as few people as possible.
- Keep a written (confidential) record of communications and a log of action taken.
- Allow authors (or others) the opportunity to respond to allegations.
- Always check the record of communication/log of action before proceeding to the next step.

The session ended with small groups discussing a case study and reporting back to the group about how they would handle the situation.

'Journal Re-Design'
Speaker: Glenn Collins

Glenn Collins led a discussion on journal re-design, and having completed re-designs of the *JACC* journals, Glenn had useful suggestions. Glenn advised that the process is complicated and may take up to a year, and that re-design affects all aspects of production (workflows, processes). He said unforeseen benefits were new features and content (remembering that form follows function). While designing the new print version (despite today's e-leaning environment, most *JACC* users read only the print version), *JACC* leadership kept in mind the question, 'How will this look online?', and integrated print and online as much as possible (down to details like using the same icons in print and online, etc.). Change can be difficult for readers, but the ultimate goal (and the result

ISMTE US Conference

continued

of a successful re-design) is for your users to forget your old format.

Exchange Forum: Ask Any Question . . . Get an Answer
Moderated by Julie Nash and Meg Weist

In the afternoon, attendees enjoyed the opportunity to ask each other questions and receive practical solutions. Some questions inspired discussion among a number of people who offered their tips for best practice. It was a great opportunity to learn more about how our colleagues manage their editorial offices.

Practical Workshops

Taking Excel® to the Next Level
Speaker: Tom McLung

Several of us have already saved hours of work by using Tom McLung's (ACE Private Risk Services) Excel® tips. He showed us how to use conditional formatting and filters to identify data of interest in an Excel® file. VLookup lets you relate elements in one table to those in another. (e.g., Do you spend lots of time hand-assigning countries to regions for your reporting? VLookup can automate this task for you.) Pivot tables allow you to look at your data in flexible combinations, and, once created, can be used as a shell with which to process updated data. Mastering these and other Excel® features will streamline your reporting tasks no matter your peer-review system.

Managing Your Journal's Editing
Speaker: Deborah Bowman

If your journal does not have a style guide, start one. Deborah Bowman, managing editor, American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (St. Louis, MO), advises: first, pick a general style guide (AMA, APA, Chicago, etc.) appropriate for your journal and its specialty. A general style guide will give the basics, but your journal-specific style guide can address issues you and your editor find particularly annoying (such as 'firstly' and 'lastly'), as well as common errors you find when proofing articles. By noting these as you go along, you will, after several months, have a style guide. Deborah suggests sending important changes to your copyeditors immediately as a 'tip of the day,' while minor changes should be compiled, and the updated guide sent once or twice per year. Last, Deborah said, be a difficult customer; demanding journals are assigned the best staff. A journal-specific style guide will help you enforce the rules that ensure your journal's content is clear, concise, and understandable for its readers.

So, When Is the Next ISMTE Conference?

Check the ISMTE website, www.ismte.org, for upcoming information (dates, venues, speakers, etc.) on the 2010 ISMTE conferences.

ARTICLE

Finishing the Hat[1]: Journal Readership Surveys

by Andrew Harmon
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You've reviewed your online metrics, subscription numbers, and industry-wide standards such as Impact Factor. You've looked over your submission and review statistics, analyzed the competition by the numbers, and run the reports for your editor or editorial board. Even so, sometimes the best, or at least most intriguing, portrait you can draw of the environment feeding off of and nurturing your journal is by conducting a survey.

Hardly a trendy topic, perhaps, in the tropophilous age of Google Analytics, where one can develop the obsessive habit of measuring interest in a journal to the minute, but surveys serve a distinct purpose for journals in understanding their marketability and the effectiveness of their content. Taken repeatedly over time, they can bring to life the characters behind the metrics, drawing a portrait of a journal's readership that a placid Impact Factor can't begin to describe.

In May 2009, I presented at a day-long workshop preceding the annual meeting of the Council of Science Editors. I was part of a new short course focusing on journal metrics and my topic was surveys. Since I had not even worked on those my employer, the American Society of Hematology (ASH), had conducted, I decided to learn about and focus on our own efforts in the past decade and to tell the story of how our journal, *Blood*, has designed, conducted, and learned from its surveys.

Though ASH's publications are varied, ranging from newsletters to educational resources, as a society publisher our primary output is the one journal, which turned 64 this year. *Blood*'s scientific content is peer reviewed. We publish about 1,200 articles and 11,000 pages of scientific content per year, out of a pool of more than 4,600 unsolicited manuscripts. This is our first year of publishing weekly, and we have been averaging 25 articles and nearly 250 pages per issue. Our 2008 Impact Factor is 10.432.

As such, we take care with our readers and, by extension, with our advertisers. Together, they make up the greatest sources of our revenue. In turn, providing rigorously peer-reviewed articles means taking care with the other two primary stakeholders: our authors and reviewers. Surveys play an important, regular part in that care.

Since 2002, we have conducted four readership surveys, some of which have included questions for contributing authors. During this time, the method of surveying has changed – from mass mailings in 2002 and 2005, to one combined with e-mail in 2007, to a Web-only survey by e-mail invitation earlier this year.

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[1] The title refers to the song "Finishing the Hat" from the Sondheim musical *Sunday in the Park With George,* inspired by Seurat's painting "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte."

Journal Readership Surveys *continued*

Our most recent survey objectives have included determining the demographics of our readership, reader satisfaction with the balance of clinical and basic research in *Blood*, establishing our competition by asking what other journals *Blood* readers look at, assessing *Blood* as a benefit for ASH members and as a reason to join or renew membership, confirming from past surveys our readers' future expectations for the print version of *Blood* versus interest in an online-only option, getting feedback on the newly instituted weekly publication of the journal, and measuring the utility of our various online features such as publishing ahead of print.

While for the most part these objectives have been consistent since 2002, as they should be to understand readers' opinions over time, through the years we have also asked questions that have resulted in evolution. We've asked about open access to our content, the launch of our Web-based manuscript submission system, and the launch of our publish-ahead-of-print feature, First Edition.

We ask about the survey taker's highest degree, years in medical research or practice, place of employment (school, pharmaceutical laboratory, government), and job title. We ask respondents to rate each of our article types on a scale of importance. We ask from where and how often they access *Blood* online, how important the website is compared to the print version of the journal, and how long they expect to continue receiving a print copy. This year we asked ASH members if any of them originally joined the society primarily to get a subscription to the journal or if they've renewed their membership to keep the subscription. In every survey since 2002 we've asked if a reader has submitted a manuscript to *Blood* in the past five years.

With a randomized selection of survey invitations, our response rate has been fairly consistent since 2002 when we received a 13.5% response rate. In 2005, our response rate was 10.5%, in 2007 9.2%. In 2009, we sent survey invitations to 1,500 US members of ASH, 1,000 international members, and 500 non-member personal subscribers (domestic and international), including students but excluding ASH leadership and *Blood* Editorial Board members. By our cut-off date, we had received 626 responses, a 20.8% return – more than twice the rate from two years earlier.

We've found over the years, that while the majority of our survey participants continue to hold MDs over PhDs or combined degrees, they are getting slightly younger. By 2007, a wider distribution of our respondents had careers spanning 5 to 25 years. In previous surveys the majority had career spans over 25 years. The majority has always come from academic institutions, though the percentage of pharmaceutical employees has risen slightly over the years (1% in 2002, 4% in 2007). The majority always say they've submitted at least one article to the journal in the past five years.

We've also found, while there is a wide variety of opinion concerning the balance of basic research versus clinical study, satisfaction with this balance is improving, if only incrementally. Also, the perception of the usefulness of First Edition has risen, while fewer respondents than

Journal Readership Surveys

continued

in previous years have indicated a lack of knowledge about the digital object identifier, or DOI, used as a reference tool for publish-ahead-of-print articles. This year, respondents have shown high satisfaction with *Blood*'s new weekly publication.

As far as other journals of interest, this year proved an eye-opener for us in how we should view our competition. Whereas we tend to look at competing journals in our Impact Factor category, we've found our readers are looking to either general science journals or to subspecialty research or clinical journals for further information. In 2009, our survey takers' highest-rated "other" journal was *Nature*, with the *British Journal of Haematology* coming in second, and *Biology of Blood and Marrow Transplantation* third. Journals falling within our Impact Factor category ranked surprisingly low.

Web Resources

SurveyMonkey
InstantSurvey
Zoomerang
QuestionPro
Wufoo
SurveyGizmo
Cool Surveys

The biggest change over the years – and one we've patiently but closely tracked since 2002 – has been our readers' attitudes toward the online journal compared to print. In every survey we've asked how long readers expect to continue receiving a print version of the journal as part of a subscription, using a scale of 1–2 years, 3–5 years, 6–10 years, indefinitely, and 'do not use print.' The percentages answering to the specific year timeframes have not changed much, but the percentage of respondents saying they expect to receive print indefinitely has gone down dramatically, from 46% in 2002 to 29% this year. More telling is the percentage of respondents saying they 'do not use print.' In 2002, 6% indicated they do not use the print version. In 2009, it was 28%.

It is, at least in part, because of these surveys that we explore options and policy changes that in time become part of the tradition of the journal. Before 2002, our website served only in support of the printed journal. We began posting data supplements and launched First Edition to illustrate the vitality of the site. Perhaps it was inevitable in hindsight, but it would have been hard to see in 2002 how in seven years we would find more than a quarter of our readership choosing the website, ignoring the print edition all together. We post to First Edition every day. In effect, that makes our Web journal a daily. Maybe there is a reason for the obsession with Google Analytics after all.

In researching for the presentation, I learned quite a lot, not just about *Blood*'s surveys but about how surveys are seen in the STM (Science, Technology, Medicine) publishing world and how they can be conducted. For every survey, including this year's, we've hired a consultant, but that is not necessary if yours is a smaller publication with more limited financial means. Web resources include SurveyMonkey, InstantSurvey, Zoomerang, QuestionPro, Wufoo, SurveyGizmo, and Cool Surveys. They allow you to design, implement, collect, and analyze on your own, and they tend to employ staggered pricing models depending on the number of people you want to canvas and how often you want to conduct a survey. Prices for a survey or a survey-site subscription, such as to SurveyMonkey, which we used this past year, can range from $19.95 per month to $600 and higher.

After you've found the service, though, you have to provide the right questions to ask. For a longitudinal study, the same questions are asked

Journal Readership Surveys

continued

each time, leading to a trend analysis of the responses – that means considering your publication's long-term strategic planning and objectives. At the same time, Robert Frary, of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's Office of Measurement and Research Service, has written that a survey should not overindulge in the art of the possible. A publication should 'define precisely the information desired and endeavor to write as few questions as possible,' avoiding 'something that might just be nice to know' at the expense of something that is truly strategic.

Example: in 2002, we considered it vital at *Blood* to determine the growing interest in an online-only subscription option, realizing it was just a matter of time for attitudes about paper and environmental sustainability, as well as information portability, to change. ASH has taken steps over the years to attract pre-med students in college and those in medical school working toward careers in hematology. Those younger scientists bring different perspectives on information gathering and technology from those of their predecessors. As many journals do now, we have to consider options in a world that shifts to post-paper, which is the media basis for advertising as a primary source of revenue. Where will advertisements go if there are no pages for them on a website and, as is our policy, if we cannot place them directly next to scientific content? How will we reconcile the general trend toward Web information as freely accessible to all when we've operated a gatekeeper system for so long? How will we appeal to a younger generation on the Web with greater interactivity and general commentary about and analysis of our scientific content while, at the same time, ensuring the continued quality of our peer-reviewed science and the continued viability of the journal as its parent? If not ads, where will we find the revenue to continue our publication? What will our financial demands be both in a post-paper environment and during the long transition to it? Not that surveys answer these kinds of questions, but our longitudinal approach to this topic shows us the growing imperative to find answers.

For more than 20 years Carol Tenopir, from the School of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee College of Communication and Information, has studied and written about information technology and surveys. In an interview with Elsevier's *Library Connect* in 2006, she advised the following to help your survey's effectiveness:

1. Keep the survey length manageable, restricting the length of time to complete it to no more than 10–12 minutes, and keep the survey-taking period short, no longer than six weeks.
2. Offer an incentive, such as a prize drawing. The last few surveys *Blood* has conducted have included drawings to win an iPod or, this year, an iPod Touch.
3. Use mostly quantifiable questions, on which you can easily run reports, including multiple-choice, scales, and agree/disagree formulas. At the same time, leave room for free-form text answers that allow for open-ended discussion. This allows for context, but it also requires the surveyor to read all results. In a report to our publications committee this past summer, we included not only metrics of the quantifiable responses from our most recent survey ('X% replied "Disagree,"' for example), but also excerpts from free-form replies, positive and negative.
4. Focus attention on 'the last incident of reading,' such as the most recent issue of the journal the survey taker has read. This

Journal Readership Surveys *continued*

will allow for better recollection and a more instinctive reply.

5. Define your terms clearly. As an example, 'reading' a journal should be defined as 'going beyond the table of contents, title, and author into the body of an article.'

Other considerations:

1. Use at least a 10%, randomized sampling of your readership.
2. Test your survey instrument, such as your SurveyMonkey questionnaire, before making it public. You may want to ask a small group of colleagues, such as members of your editorial board or your publications committee, to try out the survey first and to give you feedback.
3. In a multiple-choice question, avoid 'Other' unless absolutely necessary and offer a text box or line to allow the respondent to elaborate.
4. When offering scales (*e.g.*, 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree' or '0' to '10'), keep your options brief: four to five options versus, say, six to seven. In some cases, you may even want to avoid differentiations all together: simply 'Agree' or 'Disagree.'
5. Organize your scales from lower level to higher: '1) Never' to '4) Frequently,' for example.

Recent studies by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) indicate over time 'response rates across all modes of survey administration have declined, in some cases precipitously.' Carol Tenopir calls it 'survey fatigue.' Perhaps the iPod Touch got more of our respondents interested this year, or perhaps it was the way we approached them to begin with, but the 20% response rate we had in 2009 was unusual compared to previous years. In any event, when publishing your survey results, always include the response rate. As AAPOR states, 'consumers of survey results should treat all response rates with skepticism, since these rates do not necessarily differentiate reliably between accurate and inaccurate data.'

In addition to the portrait created by a survey, include your metrics, and, as Carol Tenopir has advised, don't use your survey results alone to effect changes in your publication. 'You shouldn't over-conclude or try to answer questions not in your survey,' she told Elsevier's *Library Connect*. 'Sometimes just straight reporting of numbers, means, medians, modes, and standard deviations is sufficient, and there is no need for elaboration.' Survey results can be a supplement to your metrics. Even though we have seen a change over time in the preferences of our readers toward our website over print, we continue to see a distinct percentage of respondents expecting and even desiring a printed journal. Because we don't already have an online-only subscription option, the survey is our best way to understand these preferences and the trends since 2002.

6.

ARTICLE

Standard Formatting for Manuscripts

by Jan McColm
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I read with interest an article published in a recent issue of *The Scientist*[1] about standardizing the formatting of manuscripts for submission to journals. Having been an author, reviewer, and now a managing editor, I see the wisdom of the authors' arguments and want to suggest that ISMTE, as a professional society, take this up for discussion.

Let me start with a question. Do you know why your journal uses the style it does? While you ponder your answer, let me tell you about my experience.

When I first started as a managing editor I didn't question our style guide. I had a lot of other things to learn and it wasn't my top priority. Instead, I just made sure the authors followed the guide. I had been an author, and I knew when submitting to most journals it was important to get the style right or the manuscript was coming back from the editorial office without anyone reading one word of the science. So when I started as a managing editor I had no idea why most of the styles had been set up the way they were, but I assumed just because I didn't know the reason why didn't mean the reason wasn't a good one!

That assumption was quickly tested when after six months as a managing editor I received an e-mail from an author asking if we had a template style file for referencing software. Referencing software is a wonderful tool for an author. It is essentially a reference database that allows the author to insert a field code in a part of the text that links back to that reference in the database. As the author cuts and pastes text during the editing process, the field code remains always linked to that reference, so if the authors change the order of the references the software runs an update and reorganizes the reference list accordingly. It saves hours of reformatting. We did not have a template style file for our journal and asked the company that makes the software to make one for us, but without luck. I relayed this to the author and the author asked us why we didn't use the *JAMA* style, as it is a standard and there is a template file for it. I had no idea and neither did my editor-in-chief. So after discussion we changed our style to *JAMA*, updated our instructions for authors, and have been using it ever since.

That got me thinking about the number of different journals I have submitted to as an author, each with their own special formatting. I especially remembered one manuscript submitted to five different journals, being rejected without review from four of them, before finally finding its home in the highest ranked journal of the specialty field. (I put that in so you don't think it was just a poorly written manuscript!) How much time had I spent reformatting each version? Hours and hours.

[1] Brischoux and Legagneux. "Don't Format Manuscripts". *The Scientist*. 2009:23;24

Standard Formatting

continued

Considering all the journals asked for basically the same information, it was frustrating.

Then I thought about being a reviewer. What was important to me was that the general layout was followed: introduction, methods, results, discussion, references. Did I care where the acknowledgments went? The reference style? The format of the images? The answer is 'no' to all of them. As long as the information was present, clear, and in a logical order it did not affect my ability to review.

I now realize my editors aren't that fussy either. Like reviewers, they notice if tables and figures are missing or if references are incorrect, but I don't think I've ever been asked by an editor to send a manuscript back to the authors to format the references.

For the biomedical journals[2] the solution has been here for over 30 years. Back in 1978 a group of biomedical journal editors got together and published the "Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication" freely available at http://www.icmje.org/. More than 500 journals state they follow these basic guidelines for submission and, what's more, I also read in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*[3], "...if authors prepare their manuscripts in the style specified in these requirements, editors of the participating journals will not return the manuscripts for changes in style before considering them for publication. In the publishing process, however, the journals may alter accepted manuscripts to conform with details of their publication style."

Thus we journal editors would maintain the right to format for style, but only **after** review. We would save the authors hours of needless reformatting if, for whatever reasons, we rejected a manuscript without review. I guarantee if you accepted an article *pending formatting*, the authors would 1) get it formatted quickly and 2) get it right.

There is perhaps one format that bears looking at more closely, namely word and figure limits. As an author, editing the text of the manuscript to fit word limits is an acceptable reformatting in my opinion, as being concise is something to be strived for by any author. If you cannot fit your manuscript into the word and figure limits set by the journal, I would contend it is time to find another journal.

I also would argue, as a professional society, a set of standard guidelines is good for us. There is no way we can possibly know every journal's formatting, but a standard set of guidelines gives us a professional knowledge. We would all be using one style guide as a baseline, but we would be able to apply the intricacies of each journal's style after review.

Lastly, as a teacher of science writing to graduate students, my job would be much easier if I could teach a standard set of guidelines. It's incredibly difficult to teach the basics of science writing when the students don't have a simple, single set of guidelines to follow. In turn, this would make our jobs as managing editors much easier because all authors will have learnt the basics of article formatting (rather than totally ignoring each of our laboriously written instructions for authors).

So are you ready to move to standard guidelines or is your journal unable to review articles unless they are formatted exactly as your current instructions for authors states? I'm interested in opinion on this, so please head to the ISMTE discussion forum where there is a new discussion waiting for your input.

[2] As my background is in biomedicine I am unaware of any standard set of guidelines for other disciplines such as social and basic sciences, but if there are, please add them to the discussion forum. Brischoux[1] refers to LaTeX for mathematical journals and I would be interested in hearing whether this is a good solution.

[3] ICMJE. "Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals". *Annals of Internal Medicine* 1997:126;36-47

EON *Style Guide for Authors*

by Jan McColm
Section Editor, EON
jmccolm@med.unc.edu

Editor's note: EON's *style is flexible, but please consider the suggested formatting guidelines below when submitting an article to* EON.

Submission Guidelines

Please submit articles in 12 pt font and double-spaced.

Language

As an international journal we accept all forms of English; however, please use the same version of English throughout the manuscript.

Word Limits

We do not enforce strict word limits, but full feature articles are generally around 2000-2500 words. If you are over 2500 words please contact the Editor of *EON,* Kristie Overstreet at kristen.overstreet@mac.com.

Reference style

EON suggests the Vancouver style for formatting references. References should be numbered sequentially in the order in which they appear in the text and listed in that order at the end of the article. Reference citations will appear as superscript numbers in the text. Full details are available at www.icmje.org/ and examples are available at www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/uniform_requirements.html.

Footnotes

Please use footnotes sparingly as they tend to interrupt the flow of the article. Number footnotes sequentially.

Tables and Figures

Most forms of figures are acceptable (JPEG, TIFF for example) but for specific guidelines please read Jason Roberts' article "Fuzzy Logic" in the April 2009 issue of *EON.*

Miscellaneous

Journal names should be italicized. When using an acronym, spell out the complete term the first time you use it and present the acronym in parentheses.

If you have further questions on these, or any other style issues, please contact the Editor of *EON,* Kristie Overstreet at kristen.overstreet@mac.com.

Working with an Offline Editor

by Meghann Knowles
Editorial Assistant
J&J Editorial, LLC
meghann@jjeditorial.com

The development of online manuscript submission and peer-review systems, such as ScholarOne™ Manuscipts and Editorial Manager™, has helped editorial offices streamline the path from submission to publication. These Web-based systems provide a centralized resource for editors and editorial staff to access manuscript information and monitor the status of manuscripts.

The systems are efficient and easy to navigate, and most editors are happy to work with them after they are properly trained; but not all editors are willing to work with an online system. So how do you successfully manage a journal office when you, the reviewers, and the authors are using a Web-based system but the editor prefers to work outside the system through e-mail? Below are a few steps you can take to make the process a little easier.

Use the Manuscript ID Number

Online manuscript submission and peer-review systems assign each newly submitted manuscript a unique identification number. When an author has submitted a new manuscript to the system, send the manuscript to the editor via e-mail and provide him with the identification number. Then refer to each manuscript by its number in all subsequent correspondence and ask the editor to do the same. This is an easy way to promptly identify which manuscript the editor is referring to in correspondence, and vice-versa.

It is also helpful to include the manuscript identification number in the subject line of each e-mail sent between you and the editor. This will allow you to quickly browse through your e-mail to find messages relevant to a specific paper.

Keep Your E-mail

Online manuscript submission and peer-review systems record every action taken on a manuscript in an audit trail. The information found in a manuscript's audit trail can help answer questions of who did what when. It also records e-mail correspondence sent from within the system.

When an editor acts outside of the system you do not have the benefit of having his e-mail saved in this type of automated record. Therefore, it is important to save all e-mail correspondence you receive from him in case any of your actions are later called into question. For example, if an editor does not remember e-mailing you and asking you to take a certain action on a manuscript, you can easily pull up the archived message and remind him of the date it was sent. I recommend keeping at least the last three months' worth of e-mail correspondence in a separate e-mail folder.

It is also helpful to ask the editor to copy you on any correspondence he has with

Offline Editor *continued*

reviewers and authors. This will help you to keep track of the manuscript's status.

Add Notes

The notes function is a useful tool in online manuscript submission and peer-review systems. It allows you to leave notes regarding a manuscript for yourself, editors, or other members of the editorial office staff.

Working with an editor who will not use an online system may require you to create notes more frequently. Though the e-mail you send from within the system will be recorded in the audit trail, you should make note of the dates you send new submissions, revisions, and reviewer comments to the editor in the notes field. This can help bring you up to speed on a manuscript's history without having to read through the entire audit trail.

Send Weekly Reports

Online manuscript submission and peer-review systems make it easy to quickly determine the status of a manuscript. However, having an editor working outside of the system can introduce the possibility of miscommunication or tracking errors because you are not looking at the same record. Sending the editor a weekly status report can help ensure that the editor's personal notes match what you have in the system. You can create the report in Excel and update the information as necessary. Include the manuscript identification number, corresponding author's last name, status (e.g., with authors for revision, with editor for decision, with reviewers), and any additional notes that may be relevant. Send the report to the editor once each week and ask him to look it over and notify you of any discrepancies.

Try to Keep Everyone Else Working Within the System

An editor who is opposed to working with an online manuscript submission and peer-review system may encourage authors or reviewers to also work outside the system. It is important to get as many authors and reviewers to use the system as possible because the more people working within the system, the easier managing the manuscripts will be.

Reviewers who are invited from within the system can receive automatic reminders when their reviews are due. This may help to reduce the likelihood of reviewers returning review comments after the due date. In addition, a reviewer may be more thorough with his comments when he submits them through the system because he will be required to fill in certain fields in the online review form. Similarly, authors may be more likely to provide the necessary information when submitting online because they are prompted to fill in required fields and answer various submission questions.

Be Patient

Although dealing with an editor who won't go online can create a little extra work for editorial office staff, the key is to be organized and thorough with your record keeping. Over time you and the editor will develop a system that both parties are content with.

ISMTE *EON*

EON is the official newsletter of the International Society for Managing and Technical Editors (ISMTE) and is published monthly. The contents and opinions expressed by the authors do not necessarily represent those of the Society, the Board of Directors, or *EON* editors, nor does the publication of an article constitute an endorsement on the part of ISMTE of the authors' organizations or companies. Submissions are welcome and can be sent to the editor at the address below. Submissions may be edited for style and format without the author's permission. Authors must seek permission to reprint any copyrighted material and provide this permission to the editor. *EON's* content belongs to the members of ISMTE. Users may view and download *EON* articles for personal, non-commercial use. Use beyond that allowed by the "Fair Use" limitations (sections 107 and 108) of the U.S. Copyright law require written permission from the *EON* editor.

A note on English: ISMTE aims to be a truly international society. English will represent our lingua franca, but we would like to stress that in materials published in EON *or online that variations in idiomatic usage and spelling should reflect the origins of the author. No one version of English is preferred over the other.*

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COLUMN: *Portrait Of An Editorial Office*

The ASPB Editorial Office

by Nancy Winchester, Ash Csikos, Susan Entwistle, Annette Kessler, John Long, and Jon Munn,
American Society of Plant Biologists
nancyw@aspb.org

Welcome! Come inside for a look at the editorial office of the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB)—home of *Plant Physiology* (*PP*) and *The Plant Cell* (*TPC*), two of the world's foremost plant biology research journals. Just as this article is a collaborative effort, so is the publication of *PP* and *TPC:* from submission of manuscripts for peer review through production; from the development of new initiatives and policies to their implementation; from building budgets to writing RFPs, negotiating vendor contracts, and the like; each of us here at ASPB headquarters, along with our telecommuting and freelance front section editors, has a unique and special job to do to make *PP* and *TPC* the premier journals they are today (Fig. 1). We depend greatly on our top-notch teams at Dartmouth Journal Services (DJS) (editing and composition), The Sheridan Press (printing), and HighWire Press (our online services provider) to help us get the job done.

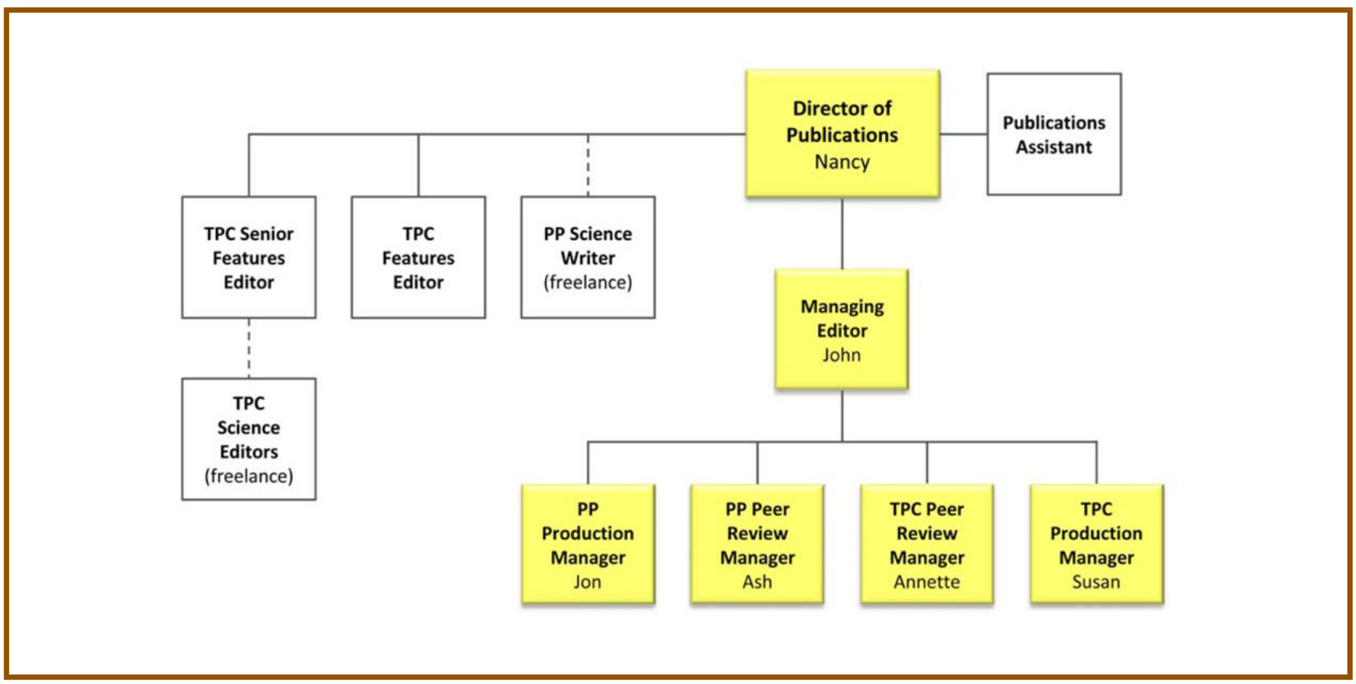


Figure 1. ASPB publications office organizational chart

Let's start with peer review . . . because that is, after all, where the work of the journal editorial office begins.

Submission

Manuscript Managers

by Ash Csikos, *Plant Physiology,* and Annette Kessler, *The Plant Cell*

As manuscript managers, our primary focus is on the handling and processing of manuscripts through the peer-review process. We are charged with making sure all manuscript submissions go where they need to, and to whom they need to, in a timely manner, as well as ensuring that communication among all parties involved in the review process is as effective and expedient as possible. We are in constant contact with the hundreds of authors, editors, and reviewers who work with our journals every day.

Peer review has been a critical component of scientific discourse for ages, but the methods we use to accomplish it have changed considerably through the years. While we once used 'snail mail,' telephones, and faxes to do our work, we now rely almost exclusively on the Internet. Our days begin with, subsist on, and end in our virtual inboxes, and we are practically wedded to Bench>Press, our online manuscript tracking system. During any given day, we are reviewing new submissions to make sure they meet our formatting requirements, directing submissions to editors, taking reviewer suggestions from editors and using them to secure referees for articles, assisting referees with inputting their reviews, and providing any assistance the authors, editors, and reviewers may need along the way.

Production

If you were an author whose paper had just been accepted, you would receive a letter of congratulations notifying you of the acceptance of

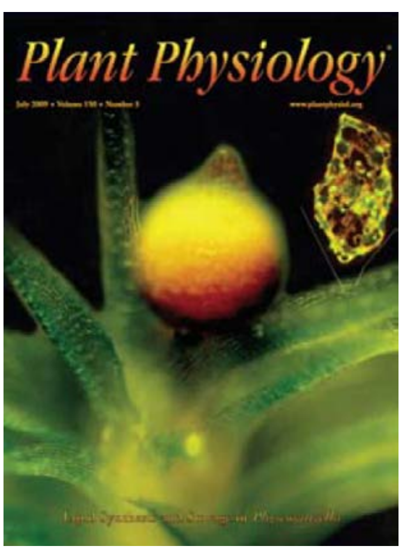
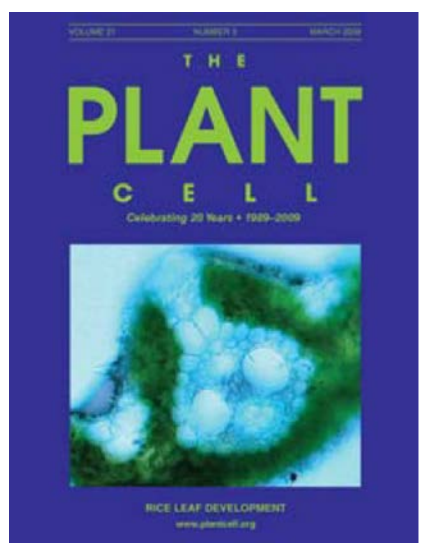


Figure 2: ASPB's beautiful journals!



your article for publication. Then your paper would be in the very capable hands of our . . .

Production Managers

by Jon Munn, *Plant Physiology,* and Susan Entwistle, *The Plant Cell*

As production managers, it is our primary responsibility to ensure that the online and print versions of the journals are published on time and in good shape. We oversee journal manuscripts from acceptance through print publication. Our duties include assuring production schedules are maintained, preparing journal covers (see Fig. 2), conducting quality control for both the print and electronic versions of the journals, maintaining online journal features, and placing advertising. To accomplish these many tasks, we interact daily with journal authors and editors, our copyeditors and composition team at DJS, the printers at Sheridan, and our online production teams at HighWire Press.

In a typical work week, we review the figures and manuscripts of accepted articles and post preview versions of those articles online, along with their supplemental data. We review proofs of articles ready for publication, troubleshoot any issues that arise at the printer or with authors, coordinate ad placement and cover submissions, and update a variety of ongoing production reports.

Editorial Office Coordination

So who ties all these mighty efforts together? Let's hear from our...

Managing Editor

by John Long

As managing editor of ASPB's two monthly journals, I work with several different groups of people to ensure articles make their way smoothly from submission through peer review to distribution, both online and in print. I have a management role in which I supervise the four staff members you have just met who bear collective responsibility for the day-to-day operations of peer review and production. I have a role in which I serve the editors-in-chief and editorial boards of the journals, which includes keeping them apprised of the latest news and statistics about their journals, planning editorial board meetings, and exploring ways to improve our policies and procedures. I have a customer service role in which I assist authors who need special attention. Finally, I coordinate with the different vendors outside our office who provide services such as composition, copyediting, printing, shipping, and online distribution and who are essential to refining our content and distributing it to readers. It can be a challenge to juggle responsibilities spread around so many different areas, but it certainly provides variety in my job!

In addition to the different people I work with, there are a few different perspectives from which I do my job. Sometimes I'm just addressing problems as they come up – making sure things are working the way we do them *now*. But ideas always arise for ways we might want – or need – to do things differently. Many of these, of course, are tied to new innovations for distribution and communication on the Internet. The suggestions come from board members, authors, staff, presentations at conferences, or colleagues at other societies. I and my staff spend a good deal of time evaluating new ideas to see if they work, if they would work for us, and if they are feasible – practically and financially – for us to implement. In short, I get to work with a lot of great people to make sure we are publishing the best content in *TPC* and *PP* as efficiently and usefully as possible.

Journal Operations

And at the end of the day, just where does the buck stop? Well, at least at the operational level, it stops in the office of the . . .

Publications Director

by Nancy Winchester

As publications director, I oversee and direct the program's finances, contracts, policies, and staff, including the front section staff. The Society depends greatly on the revenues the journals produce, and it's my job to make certain *PP* and *TPC* generate the money ASPB needs to fund many of its other worthy projects and services while also ensuring our business practices meet the needs of our library subscribers. To aid those efforts, I partner with our marketing department to forge arrangements with marketing, sales, and subscription agents around the globe; but all the business planning in the world won't sell *TPC* and *PP* if they lose their (scientific) luster. So, I, like the rest of the ASPB journals staff, work closely with our editors and editorial boards as they consider new initiatives, drop old ones, draft new policies, and guard the editorial integrity of our research content via ethics policies and procedures and forthcoming features like plagiarism software and image-detection services. I also serve as senior staff liaison to the ASPB Publications Committee, which governs the Society's publishing program. ASPB also uses an extensive network of suppliers from across the country and around the world for online publishing, composition, printing, and mailing and distribution, all of whom require not just the day-to-day caring and feeding of any important relationship, but periodic RFPs, negotiations, contracts, and the like.

Although they were not the focal point of this article, the journals also depend greatly on just a few other folks for the important editorial or administrative contributions they make to each issue. Drs. Nan Eckardt and Mary Williams are *TPC's* senior features editor and features editor, respectively; their work, which I also oversee, is to aggressively expand the front section of that publication. *TPC* also is blessed with four outstanding freelance science editors who polish accepted articles and work with Nan on the front section. Professor Peter Minorsky, of Mercy College, is our longtime freelance science writer who develops various front section features for *PP*. And last, but not least, the publications office is supported by a superb administrative assistant/graphics designer, Diane McCauley.

COLUMN: *Portrait Of An Editorial Office*

ASPB *continued*

Conclusion

I'm sure you can see by now that keeping *PP* and *TPC* hale and hearty is a complex undertaking. Fortunately both journals have the great staff – peer review managers, production managers, managing editor, and more – that it takes to do the job. Please let us know if you have questions about our operation, and thanks for reading.

Have You Fallen Behind?

If you've gotten behind in checking the weekly news items on the ISMTE home page, you can catch up by going to the ISMTE Resources page at http://ismte.org/resources.html. Scroll down to "News from the world of publishing" and click on the "archive" link.

Calendar of Events

EQUATOR Network Workshop
Key Guidelines for Reporting Health Research Studies
9 September 2009
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
www.equator-network.org

2nd EQUATOR Annual Lecture
by Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief of *The Lancet*
9 September 2009
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
www.equator-network.org

6th International Congress on Peer Review & Biomedical Publication
10-12 September 2009
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
www.ama-assn.org/public/peer/peerhome.htm

European Association of Science Editors
10th EASE General Assembly and Conference
16-19 September 2009
Pisa, Italy
www.ease.org.uk/easeconfdocs/1stCircular-2009.pdf

Professional Scholarly Publishing - Journals Boot Camp
ISMTE members get the AAP member rate
23-26 September 2009
Denver, Colorado, USA
www.pspcentral.org/PSPJournalsBootCamp2009.cfm

ALPSP - Project Management for Publishing
6 October 2009
London, UK, www.alpsp.org

ALPSP - Introduction to Journals Publishing
6 November 2009
London, UK, www.alpsp.org

COPE - US Seminar 2009
9 November 2009
Washington DC, USA,
www.publicationethics.org

ALPSP - Commissioning Book and Journal Content
25 November 2009
London, UK, www.alpsp.org