

ISMTE Past President Reflections



By Glenn Collins  
ISMTE Past President (2012-2013)

I was the first ISMTE President who wasn't a founder, and so in that sense I was perhaps more important than I realized at the time. Founding something is the first challenge, and it is a big one. Sustaining it was the next, and that's where ISMTE was when I joined. I actually do not recall the exact details, but someone pointed me to that website Elizabeth spoke about in her article, and timing, as they say, is everything. I had been the managing editor of a journal for about five to six years. We had also recently launched two new journals and with well over 6,000 submissions per year, one weekly and two monthly production schedules and all the work that entails, I was both simultaneously drowning in work while looking for something more. Perhaps that is exactly how you feel when you answer your 150th email of the day.

No sooner did I contact ISMTE than I received a message back—we hear you are interested in volunteering. Would you like to help plan our annual conference? And that was one of the best things I ever said yes to in my life. The first conference I attended was in Baltimore, and as I recall, the meeting space went around a corner so that there was a big mirror angled so people could see the speaker up front! I have to give thanks to Kent Anderson and Peter Binfield for being two of our main speakers and bringing their considerable experience and expertise to the conference. The meeting was still small but the seeds were there and starting to grow. I co-chaired this conference and then chaired the conference the following year. Thanks to some generous support from the American College of Cardiology, we were able to use their conference center in Washington, D.C. The professional setting was yet another step in the right direction.

I approached the ISMTE conferences with the basic premise that I wanted to take root in the organization as a whole—this is YOUR meeting. By the time of my first ISMTE meeting, I had been in science publishing for close to 15 years.

In that time, I had attended numerous conferences ranging from food science to microbiology to chemistry to cardiology (a lot of cardiology), and I was often struck by the same thing. I was a guest but rarely a participant. I was not the target audience. I did not attend the sessions revealing some new research or discussing some important topic. I was often there to report on a journal or journals in one or two meetings (sometimes stretched out over four days!) that represented a miniscule fraction of what the conference was for so many others. There was a lot of sitting in my hotel room or in a staff office and getting my work in.

ISMTE changed that for me. Here, finally, was a conference where every session was for me. As one of our early attendees famously said (and I paraphrase here)—I've never seen so many people like me in one place! And that was the whole point and still is. We know you are out there. Many of you run journals and work for a publisher with all the support that entails, but we know that many, many of you do not. You work out of your home, out of the EICs university office, or whatever combination works best for you. You work for an institution, but your salary is covered by an editorial stipend granted to the society that owns the journal who then . . . You get the idea. In his kickoff to this series, Jason Roberts went into this in a lot more detail than I will now. Suffice it to say, our goal with the conference was to get down to the nuts and bolts of running an editorial office and provide you with the practical hands-on information that will help you when you get home. We wanted to make it so the next time you were at an editorial board meeting or publications committee meeting and the group was stumped by some thorny publication issue you could speak up and say well I attended a conference where the speaker made this really good suggestion.

I hope ISMTE has been that resource for the members, the attendees, and anyone else who has come into our circle.

Without going into too much detail, my Presidency was dominated by what I bluntly put as M&M—membership and money. We wanted to keep growing our membership, and we needed strong support in the way of sponsorships and conference registrations to keep the ship afloat. We explored outside management firms to help us with these things and kept “growing up” into the robust society it is today. More non-founders kept coming on board, all of them Do-ers as Elizabeth noted in her piece, and every aspect of running the society became more and more professionalized.

For me my Presidency, my career, my life, all hit a crossroads on a truly memorable road trip from Paris to Blankenberge for the September 2013 ISMTE/EASE meeting. From the very beginning, ISMTE never wanted to ignore the “I” for International. With so many of us from North America, it could have been easy to just focus on that side of the ocean, but our founder Jason Roberts and our Board member and future President Michael Willis among others always made sure we kept our focus on developing our European meeting as well. Today, we have three conferences on three continents, but that’s a story for another President.

So it came to pass that in 2013 instead of having the meeting in the UK, ISMTE partnered with EASE and held the meeting in Blankenberge on the Belgian coast. There were four of us flying into Paris, three of us past or future Presidents, and one long-time Board member. We had decided to do a day or so of sightseeing in Paris and Versailles and then drive on to the meeting, participate in that, and drive back. It was during this same trip that my time at the journal I had been running for 12 years was coming to an end. To aid with the transition to the new editorial office, I had to take one long conference call from Bruges, wandering the streets listening to people several thousand miles away as my

colleagues took in the scenery. It was a very difficult time as I knew my position was likely moving to the east coast, and I would need to decide if I should move my family. At the same time, the new EiC was radically changing everyone’s roles on the journal and even if I did move, it would be to a very uncertain future. To top it all off, this was taking up the precious few hours I had in Bruges, a city I had never been to and was unlikely to visit in the future! After the conference, it was a long night of driving back to the airport in Paris. I was behind the wheel being fed a steady stream of M&Ms while someone checked the directions. There were one or two wrong turns but we made it, drove through what seemed to me as the largest airport parking garage in the world, and finally checked into tiny airport hotel rooms. The early morning flights the next day were anticlimactic. The driving, the camaraderie, the meeting up with colleagues new and old to talk all facets of our profession—that’s when ISMTE truly felt like a home to me. The sort of place that could help you navigate the turbulent changes that always come your way.

Next year will mark my 25th year in science publishing. As I write this, I am looking across the lobby at the ISMTE table in the main hall of the SSP Conference in San Diego. It’s a little slice of home in this incredibly diverse and challenging profession. I have an urge to go get some M&Ms.

30th Annual SfEP Conference: Discount for ISMTE Members

The 30th annual SfEP conference will be held at Aston University in Birmingham, England, September 14-16, 2019. The SfEP is pleased to invite ISMTE members to join us at a special discounted rate.

The theme for this year’s conference is “**In the beginning was the word.**” As well as sessions on the core skills editorial professionals need to do their jobs effectively, the programme will also go back to basics, looking at the words we work with and where they come from. This will include sessions on linguistic bias, the use of English as a lingua franca by non-native speakers, how Hansard editors deal with the spoken word in the House of Lords, and a panel of writers discussing their experiences of being edited. Full summaries of these and other sessions will be released in July.

ISMTE members are eligible for a £50 discount (**discount code: ismtebhmr19**) on the resident non-member rate of £525, or a £20 discount (**discount code: ismtebhmr19**) on the non-resident non-member rate of £210 (per day). To book, go to <https://www.sfep.org.uk/networking/conferences/> and follow the links to find the provisional programme, pre-booking information, and booking form.