

◆ Hosting Interns in the Editorial Office

Internships have become a prominent way to learn about the communication of science. This InterView features a range of editors whose offices host interns: Marianne Mallia, manager of the Section of Scientific Publications, Texas Heart Institute; Roy Pitkin, editor, Obstetrics & Gynecology; and Julie Ann Miller, editor, and Richard Monastersky, internship coordinator, Science News. The InterView was conducted by Wendy Lawrence, a master's degree student in science and technology journalism at Texas A&M University, where she recently completed a science-writing internship in the Office of University Relations.

Q: Why do you have interns? How do they benefit your office?

Mallia: Education is part of the mission of the Texas Heart Institute. In Scientific Publications, we believe we have an obligation to help educate students interested in pursuing scientific-medical writing as a career. We help our interns learn, and they in turn help us with our workload.

Pitkin: We started this program to provide young people the opportunity to learn the workings of a peer-reviewed journal. Our hope is that, by virtue of this experience, they will be able to plan research and write better, serve as effective reviewers, and perhaps even become interested in being editors. The only benefit they provide to our office is the joy and satisfaction that comes from helping people learn the same sort of thing that drives all good teachers! Against this is a definite increase in workload; every staff member has to put in more time and effort when we have an intern because it inevitably requires more to show someone how to do something or to help someone do it than it does to do it oneself. Nevertheless, we feel the project is worth that extra effort.

Miller and Monastersky: Science News has a long tradition of internships intended to help prospective science writers enter

the field. Because interns at Science News function as staff writers, albeit ones who require a good deal of advice and editing, they supply stories that appear in the magazine. They also bring us a fresh view on science and science writing.

Q: How do you obtain applicants and evaluate candidates?

Mallia: We screen applicants through their résumés first. Then we ask qualified applicants to interview and complete a copyediting test of 20 sentences. Most of our applicants come to us through the career-services program at Rice University. Most are English majors, although we have had several who were premedicine majors with a concentration in English. We have accepted students from all the colleges in Houston. However, we learned rather quickly that not all the students were as well-qualified as those from Rice. Because training an intern is very time-consuming for us, we decided to limit our internship pool to Rice students or to students referred by someone we know.

Pitkin: Applicants have to be junior fellows of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the organization that “owns” our journal and of which it is the official publication. Junior fellows are physicians in training in residency or subspecialty fellowship or within 2 or 3 years of completion of training. The availability of the internship is publicized widely by notices in our journal, articles in the college's newsletter for junior fellows, and special letters to training-program directors. The application consists of a curriculum vitae, a personal statement of up to 500 words indicating why the applicant wants the experience and how he or she proposes to use it, and supporting letters from 2 persons (one of whom must be the training program director). Dossiers containing these materials are sent to a panel of Editorial Board members who are asked to rank the applicants on the basis of their records and plans, weighted equally. There is then a conference call to discuss the appli-

cants and reach a consensus.

Miller and Monastersky: We send posters describing our internship program to journalism schools. Applicants come mostly from master's programs in journalism or science journalism and learn of our internship from their advisers. Others hear of the program from science writers. We evaluate candidates primarily on the basis of the quality of their journalistic writing samples, giving some consideration to their experience.

Q: How long do internships last, and what do interns do?

Mallia: The internships usually last a year; some are only for the summer, and others are for a semester. We assign our interns projects with increasing levels of difficulty as they improve their skills. Our interns do library research, copyediting, rewriting projects—any task that they are able to complete successfully with our supervision. We do not use interns as “gophers” or as typists. Our interns work on assignments according to their level of expertise and their interests. One of our interns drafted an editorial for a major scientific journal, one compiled complicated tables, and another did only research and outlining.

Pitkin: The internship is for a month. We have developed a specific curriculum to ensure that each intern is exposed to all aspects of editorial-office activity. The curriculum is organized into 3 parts. The first is what happens when a manuscript is received: It is classified with respect to several characteristics and entered into the database, it is reviewed preliminarily to see whether it is appropriate to send out for review, and reviewers are selected. The second phase involves what happens when the reviews (including a statistical review if appropriate) are all back: The paper is read carefully, the reviews are studied, the paper is reread against the reviews, a decision is reached as to whether the author should be permitted to submit a revision or the paper should be turned down, and

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a letter describing the decision in some detail (including a detailed editor's critique if revision is invited) is prepared. The third phase involves what happens when a revision is returned: Does the revision satisfy all the points raised by the reviewers and the editor, does the manuscript need to go back to any of the reviewers, and is there a need for further revision? If everything seems satisfactory, the intern prepares the manuscript for presentation in the editors' conference call and then learns how to copyedit a manuscript.

Miller and Monastersky: We have 3 interns each year, and the internships run for 3 months. Working in a cramped office off the back staircase, interns write 1 news story each week and 2 or 3 feature stories during the 3 months. We assign a writer to be responsible for guiding the interns. The interns usually select topics from among several recommended by the staff writers. In reporting the stories they do telephone interviews, read scientific articles, and occasionally attend meetings and press conferences. During the editing process they respond to questions from 3 editors and work with the editors to make their copy lively and accurate. They also find art to illustrate their stories and respond to any reader inquiries that the stories generate.

Q: What kind of payment and other benefits do interns receive?

Mallia: Our interns are paid \$6/hour. They are given a Texas Heart Institute badge, which entitles them to discounts at the cafeteria and pharmacy and to other amenities, such as low-priced movie tickets. We pay for their parking.

Pitkin: Interns receive a stipend of \$4000 plus reimbursement for transportation expenses to Los Angeles and home. We have determined that \$4000 is adequate for housing, meals, and other expenses. No other benefits are provided; it is assumed that an intern's regular employment will provide health insurance and other benefits.

Miller and Monastersky: Interns receive \$1650/month. They also get to know the other science writers and see how a weekly publication functions.

Q: How have some of your interns gone on to use their experience?

Mallia: Some of our interns have become physicians (we hope they will be better writers), lawyers (we hope they will write with clarity), journalists, and scientific editors.

Pitkin: The program was initiated last year, so it is too soon to know the results. We announced the availability of 2 positions, but we took 3 last year because of the close ranking of applicants, and we have appointed 3 for this year (1998-1999). I can say from my experience with the 3 last year that I was surprised by how quickly they caught on. For example, in the case of the initial disposition letter, the intern and I would discuss the paper in fairly general terms, and he or she would then draft the letter; by the end of the internship, I would usually not make a single change in the letter. One of last year's interns was so good that we appointed her to our Editorial Board, and she has taken on the responsibility for our journal Web site.

Miller and Monastersky: Most interns go on to a staff writing job at a publication or to a freelance career. Former interns write for publications ranging from university magazines to The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. Some do television journalism, teach science writing, or are in scientific and medical public relations. Their experience at Science News and their clips from the magazine help them to land writing assignments and jobs.