

The AAAS Annual Meeting: Some Highlights for Editors

Erin M Loos

Although the 2000 annual meeting and science innovation exposition of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, held 17-22 February in Washington, DC, focused primarily on scientific research, several sessions included information of interest to science editors.

At the session “Amateurs and Professionals: Advancing Science Together”, Richard Tresch Fienberg of Sky Publishing Corporation described the long tradition of professional and amateur partnering in astronomy. The accessibility of the sky and the affordability of good telescopes have allowed many amateur astronomers to discover comets, novae, and supernovae, Fienberg said. Fienberg noted that *Sky and Telescope* magazine publishes images and research submitted by both professional and amateur astronomers.

Other speakers at the session described how amateurs contribute to paleontology (for example, by helping to find fossils, dig them up, and catalog them), to ornithology (for example, by collecting data on birds over vast geographic areas), and to musical acoustics (for example, by participating in the development of new musical instruments). In astronomy and ornithology, it was noted, the Internet has facilitated the sharing of data between amateurs and professionals.

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The session “Internet Bounty: How the Public Harvests Science and Health Information” addressed current trends in obtaining science and health information on the Internet. Ivars Peterson, editor of *Science News Online*, said that many people obtain science and health information from news and journal Web sites. Peterson said that a number of journals offer daily news services on the Web. Jon D Miller, a professor at Northwestern University’s School of Medicine and Medill School of Journalism, added that people who consider themselves science-literate are the primary visitors of science and health Web sites.

During the same session Eve-Marie Lacroix of the National Library of Medicine (NLM) discussed MEDLINE and MEDLINEplus. Lacroix said that over 200 million searches are performed each year on MEDLINE, a database of about 4,000 medical journals. Because of MEDLINE’s popularity, NLM recently developed MEDLINEplus, a Web site that specializes in consumer health information. Lacroix noted that MEDLINEplus provides users with links to several related journal articles in MEDLINE if they are interested in learning about a topic more extensively.

Increasingly journals are placing articles online before they are published in the paper version. The session “How Can Scientists Thrive with Paperless Publishing?” included discussions of the implications of electronic publishing for scientists. Panelists agreed that scientists have responded to electronic publishing in different ways depending on their academic fields. For example, physicists and computer scientists have long circulated papers on the Web, whereas psychologists and chemists often have a bias that work

posted on the Web is not suitable for publication in a journal. Scientists in highly competitive fields are also more likely to send papers to electronic journals, added John P Walsh, a sociologist of science at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Other panelists discussed financial and legal issues that scientists may face if they decide to publish electronically.

Other sessions also included items related to science editing. At the session “The Increasing Cost of (Not) Sharing Scientific Data”, John C Bailar III, a past president of the Council of Biology Editors, discussed the scenario “Ownership of Data and the Freedom of Information Act” from the CBE book *Ethics and Policy in Scientific Publication*. The session “You Can’t Talk About That—New Legal Restrictions on the Use of Published Data” included a presentation in which Peter B Boyce, senior consultant to the American Astronomical Society, summarized the society’s pioneering efforts in electronic publishing and speculated on future trends; Boyce also emphasized the importance of free access to scholarly information. And the session “The Reasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics: Mathematics in Hollywood, Industry, and Daily Life” ended with KC Cole of the *Los Angeles Times* explaining how she gets mathematics stories published in the newspaper. Cole noted that she especially enjoyed writing stories that use mathematics to show how “common sense” can lead one astray.

For further information on the 2000 AAAS annual meeting, please see www.aaas.org/meetings. Audiotapes of sessions can be ordered from AVEN, telephone 206-440-7989 or 800-810-8273, www.aven.com. 