

More to Come: The Next Generation of Science Editors

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Science editor.

The phrase may conjure an image of a person well established in his or her career—fastidious, prim, and proper. Surely not a suitable career for a “kid”. But in organizations like the Council of Science Editors, there are no “kids”, only professionals of different ages. Let this article serve as a short introduction to some of the younger members of CSE: Heather Babiar (formerly Vosdoganes), Andrew Harmon, Melissa Roy, Heather Shebel, and Robert (Gabe) Waggoner.

Hardly anyone who becomes a science editor has gone to school for that sole purpose. Babiar attended Northwestern University, where she earned a degree in music with an English minor in 1999; she played the oboe from age 12 until 22, performing small gigs during college, but then quit to begin her career. Shebel received a BA in mathematics from the University of Chicago in 1996 and planned to become a physician. Roy graduated from the University of North Florida with a BA in English language and literature with a philosophy minor in 2002. Waggoner earned a BA with a double major in English and geology with a minor in journalism from Hardin-Simmons University in 1998 and then attended Texas A&M University, where he earned an MS in science and technology journalism in 2001. And Harmon earned a BA in journalism from New York University in 1994 and an MS in journalism from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in 1996.

How did each of them end up in science editing? In Harmon’s case, it was “sort of by accident. . . . I had a job I didn’t like and found an opening for a peer-review editorial assistant”, he says. “I took the job only

JOSHUA HARRIS wrote this article while a Science Editor intern.

as a temporary solution. I figured I’d go to school, get more education, and take on a more exciting job. Who knew I’d stick around this long?” Harmon has been with *Blood*, a journal of the American Society of Hematology, for 6 years and is now the online-systems manager for the journal.

Babiar’s and Shebel’s interests led them to their careers. “I started out in children’s magazines and was looking for a new opportunity for growth”, says Babiar. “A position in science editing presented itself, and I took it—it’s turned out to be a great fit for me! I have been a science editor for 3½ years now, and I’m constantly learning new things.” Babiar is now a manuscript editor for the journal *Radiology*, a publication of the Radiological Society of North America.

Shebel’s desire to become a physician “led me to a premedical education during college”, she says, “which then led me to medical research, writing, publishing, and ultimately medical editing.” Today, Shebel is a senior manuscript editor for *JAMA*.

Roy and Waggoner took more direct approaches. After graduating from college, Roy found an opportunity to become the managing editor of the *American Journal of Ophthalmology*. “The journal’s office was moving from Los Angeles, California, to Jacksonville, Florida, because of the appointment of a new editor-in-chief”, she says, “and the previous staff was not traveling with the office.” She still holds the position of managing editor.

Waggoner began doing freelance editing while still in graduate school. His first full-time job was as a copyeditor for the American Society for Microbiology (ASM). “A few months after graduating . . . I found an ad online”, he says. “[ASM] sent me a test, and they deemed me worthy of an interview. They hired me, and I began working through their editor-training program.” In March 2004, Waggoner became a production editor at Oxford

University Press, working on the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

Every job comes with its own challenges and satisfactions; the positions held by these five editors are no different. “I think that many older people believe that because they are older and have more experience, they are ‘better’ at what they do”, says Babiar. “I find that younger employees bring a fresh perspective to the table. . . . Many people believe that to be younger is to be green or less proficient at what you do. I disagree.”

Roy says the greatest challenge in her position is making sure that all those involved with an article—readers, authors, editors, reviewers, and publishers—are pleased with the work done by her office. Shebel says it’s tracking down physicians for approval of edited manuscripts and page proofs and editing articles to *JAMA* style under strict deadlines. Harmon finds a substantial challenge in keeping a consistent message concerning journal policy while answering an author’s specific questions. “I have a lot of interaction with authors on matters from manuscript-submission policy to understanding and repairing technical problems related to submitting a manuscript for review”, he says.

But great challenges can yield great rewards, whether it’s promoting the fight against blood diseases, learning more about a particular science, or simply being complimented on a job well done. “The material I edit is difficult and deals with high-tech, cutting-edge concepts that I don’t always fully understand”, says Babiar. “So when authors thank me for my editing and tell me that I’ve improved the quality of their work, I’m on a high for the rest of the week!” 🍷