

Establishing and Maintaining an Editorial Department Servicing Researchers in an Academic Setting

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Maintaining a Tradition

LeAnn M Stee manages perhaps the world's oldest academic editorial department. Mayo Clinic grew from the medical practice of the Mayo family in the 19th century.

Teamwork was a feature from the beginning, and editorial services were part of the team. Maud Mellish, editor and librarian, was appointed in 1907. The doctors did not welcome her interference, but the Mayos insisted that all reports be given to her for correction. Mellish is quoted as saying, "Many men and women who unfortunately do not possess the art of writing and have not acquired its useable substitute, the craft of writing, have yet chosen medicine as a lifework."

A physician (to represent the section's clients) heads the Section of Scientific Publications, part of the education division. Over 80% of the staff use the editorial services. Manuscripts are edited, formatted, proofread, and checked; references are verified and formatted according to journal or publisher style. The section also processes

submissions and revisions.

The progress of the Section of Scientific Publications at Mayo Clinic has not been without hiccups. In 1991, the staff was reduced by 20%, and diverse activities, such as teaching, were stopped. It has since recovered, and a measured approach to teaching is being tried. Recently, a new book-publishing arm has published three books, and more are to come.

Establishing a New Department

The editorial department at Washington University School of Medicine is still being created from the vision of Karen L Dodson. The school is the largest employer in St Louis, most popular for entering students, and highly ranked for medical training, yet until recently there were no editorial services for an organization with over 5000 staff members.

Dodson first determined the needs of faculty for her publishing skills through individual interviews with department heads, administrators, and faculty members. From the interviews, a list of offerings crystallized: help for faculty and staff who were not native English speakers with writing grant proposals and giving oral presentations; writing, editing, and proofreading journal articles and book chapters to be submitted for publication; and managing publishing projects.

At the same time, she sought relationships, within and outside the university, with people and groups that would collaborate in providing the services. The English department could teach writing skills. The medical illustrators offered their expertise with graphics. The business school was the source of a business specialist who put together the business plan and became the coordinator of her program. External relationships remain potential avenues of funding.

Dodson was supported by the medical-school dean and other senior academics who could recognize the potential value of academic publishing services. She used the venerable Mayo Clinic Section of Scientific Publications as an inspiration and a model. She has a team drawn from various parts of her university and an advisory board of senior staff to consult when needed.

From Academic Editor to Publishing Company in 10 Years

Patricia K (Penny) Hodgson started the Duke Clinical Research Institute (DCRI) editorial department in 1992. Her brief was to reduce the list of languishing unsubmitted manuscripts. As those papers came under control, she found herself branching out into unanticipated publishing projects.

DCRI, with a staff that grew from 125 in 1992 to 900 in 2004, is the world's largest academic clinical research organization. In 1993, the editorial team of two (Hodgson and a graphic designer) became the DCRI Communications Department, which has grown to 40 people. Their core activities since the start have been editing academic manuscripts and writing and editing patient newsletters, annual reports, and brochures. However, they have continued to add activities: writing specialized trial documentation, creating multimedia productions, and organizing meetings and training. Since 2001, they have earned income from writing and editing for external clients.

In 1995, the group took on the *American Heart Journal*, which it continues to produce, with increasing efficiency. Recently, it added the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* and published a book.

In spite of all the expansion and diversification, Hodgson cautions against becoming distracted by trying to do everything. 📖