

The Council from 1957 to 1991: CBE Foundations for CSE

Philip L Altman

When I received a letter recently requesting my “contribution of anecdotes, reminiscences, or thoughts about CSE through the years” for its 50th anniversary celebration, I was hesitant. I had already contributed “The Council of Biology Editors: A 25-Year Chronology of Events”¹ in 1981 and updated it 10 years later as “CBE: A 35-Year Retrospective”.² Having been retired and inactive as a member for the last 16 years, what more information could I possibly provide?

Then I started thinking about all the new CSE members who have no knowledge of CBE ancient history or of the above-mentioned articles. Perhaps, by plagiarizing and revising my own articles, editorials, and news items that appeared in various issues of *CBE Views* [the forerunner of *Science Editor*], I could give them a glimpse of activities, events, and actions taken between 1957 and 1991. So, even though I did not join the organization until 1963, here is my perspective of CBE history.

Formation

In response to a need for a life-sciences editors association, the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) held a preliminary conference in 1955 in Washington, DC, funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). Its purpose was to form a Conference of Biological Editors (CBE) organizing committee.

In the following year, a program-planning group prepared working papers for a conference to be held early in 1957. The first Conference of Biological Editors, attended by 46 editors and 13 observers, adopted a constitution and bylaws and

PHILIP L. ALTMAN was president of the Council of Science Editors in 1972-1973 and executive director of the Council from 1981 to 1991.

appointed a joint committee of CBE and AIBS on form and style (later changed to the Style Manual Committee) to prepare a “standard handbook”. In addition, the group appointed a Membership Committee and a Committee on Editorial Policy. Thus, CBE was born.

Membership

The first constitution, adopted in 1965, restricted membership to those “holding or having held a principal official responsibility for the editorial management of continuing publications in the field of biological science”. As a result, membership growth was slow; for instance, between 1961 and 1966, only 45 new members were added to the rolls.

After 1966, qualifications for membership were ignored, more or less, as diverse editors from copyeditors to executive editors and all those in between, including persons having anything to do with the publication process, were accepted as members. In the next 10 years, membership grew to 350. An effort begun in the late 1970s to officially liberalize the requirements for membership resulted in a change in the bylaws in 1983.

The abolition of restrictive qualifications and the active recruitment during the 1980s by Membership Committee Chair Doug Fisher more than doubled membership, which exceeded 1,100 by 1991.

The elitist nature of CBE in its early years was also reflected in an obvious gender gap. Today, women constitute a majority in CSE, and many have served as officers and in other leadership roles.

Committees

The continuity of CBE activities between meetings was provided by the committees engaged in probing specific problems, conducting work sessions, making recommendations, and preparing publications. Many of the committees, such as the afore-



Philip Altman, CBE executive director, with Steve Geiger, editor, CBE Views, in 1986

mentioned three, have existed since the first conference in 1957, and others have been formed over the years as a need for them became evident.

In 1958, a Nominating Committee was appointed, and committees were formed on Review of the Constitution, Publication Costs (later changed to Economics of Publication), and New Forms of Publication (later changed to the New Media). A committee on cooperative publication was initiated in 1959, and in 1960, committees on journal exchange pool and on redactory service for foreign biologists were formed. Committees on Science Writing in Graduate Training (later changed to Training in Scientific Writing), Review Articles, and Editor Cooperation with Indexing and Abstracting Publications were created in 1961.

After the plethora of new committees, there was a hiatus until the Committee on Meritorious Awards was formed in 1966. Over the years, many more committees were created in response to specific needs. As their mandates were fulfilled, committees were disbanded, but CBE benefited immeasurably from the work performed by those committee members.

International Ramifications

CBE was eager to share its protocols for success with editors in foreign countries. As a result, an invitation was extended to a group of Latin American editors to attend the 1962 CBE annual conference as guests and to remain for a special post-conference meeting of Latin American and North American editors. An outgrowth of that gathering was the formation of the Latin American Association of Editors of Biological Journals (ALERB) in 1963.

A similar invitation to European editors in 1964 resulted in the first conference of the European Association of Editors of Biological Periodicals held at UNESCO House in Paris in 1965. The first general assembly of the group was convened in 1970 and its name changed to European Life Science Editors (ELSE).

The resulting establishment of overseas editors organizations prompted CBE to go outside the biologic-sciences venue to invite a group of American earth-science editors to the 1966 annual meeting. Using the same successful formula of a special postconference gathering of biologists and geologists was sufficient inspiration for the latter to form the Association of Earth Science Editors (AESE) in 1967.

Although CBE was not directly involved in its formation, the 1968 establishment of the Association of Biological Editors of Japan (ABEJ) was definitely CSE-inspired.

Those were impressive achievements for a young organization, which itself was not incorporated until 7 July 1965, in the District of Columbia, as the Council of Biology Editors.

Periodicals

To keep the members of CBE apprised of events between annual meetings and for those unable to attend meetings, a communication vehicle had to be issued. In 1959, the *Conference of Biology Editors Newsletter* began publication on an irregular basis, with Fred Cagle, a CBE founder, serving as editor. In 1963, the CBE secretary, Bob Gordon, took over as editor and continued

to issue the *Newsletter* for the next 6 years. When Karl Heumann assumed the task, he was determined to have the *Newsletter* published bimonthly and finally achieved this in the early 1970s.

By 1977, however, it became apparent that the contents of the *Newsletter* required the more formal structure of a magazine or journal; Bernie (Bernard) Forscher was appointed editor, and *CBE Views* was created. Over the years, the periodical publication has been blessed with a bevy of efficient editors who have given unstintingly of their time and expertise to improve the journal.

Among the proficient editors, to whom so many owe so much, are Steve (Stephen) Geiger, who edited the *Views* from 1981 to 1986, Gisella Pollock from 1987 to 1991, and Martha Tacker from 1994 to 1998. Of course, the longest-serving editor of all is the ever-capable Barbara Gastel, who started as *CBE Views* editor in 1998, and continues in this role with the current *Science Editor*.

For a complete list of all the editors of the *Newsletter* and the *Views*, consult Martha Tacker's definitive article "CBE Views: A Look Back".³

Manuals and Guides

From its inception, CBE was concerned with the publication of manuals and guides for the use of editors in producing a modicum of uniformity in the editorial process. *Scientific Writing for Graduate Students* was produced in 1968 and reprinted in 1976, 1981, 1983, and 1986. By 2000, Peter Woodford had completely rewritten the guide and retitled it *How to Teach Scientific Communication*. In 1982, *Economics of Scientific Journals* was printed. Then, in rapid succession, the following books were produced: *Editorial Forms: A Guide to Journal Management*, 1987; *Illustrating Science: Standards for Publication*, 1988; *Financial Management of Scientific Journals*, 1989; *Ethics and Policy in Scientific Publication*, 1990; and *Peer Review in Scientific Publication*, 1991.

Despite the profusion of output, the

bellwether of CBE publication was the *Style Manual*. At the initial meeting 50 years ago, the attendees were perceptive enough to recognize that a standardized guide, designed to meet the requirements of acceptable forms of expression in manuscript preparation and of general technical uniformity, was a necessity. With fiscal support from NSF, work on such a project was begun immediately by a 10-member committee. The first edition of the *Style Manual* appeared in 1960, and editions were produced at various intervals up to the present seventh edition, published in 2006 with the title *Scientific Style and Format*.

Not only was the *Style Manual* CBE's first publication, it was also the most successful in terms of quantity sold (more than 120,000 copies as of 1991) and income produced. For many years, it was the financial mainstay of the organization. Between 1960 and 1968, its sales accounted for 90% to 95% of CBE's income. It has truly been the crowning glory of the Council's publishing program.

Awards and Honors

Although the CBE Meritorious Award, which is in effect a lifetime-achievement award, was instituted in 1966, it was not awarded to anyone until 1969. The first recipient was Fred Cagle, who had been the driving force behind the formation of CBE and also its first chairman (now president). Later recipients of this prestigious award (now called the CSE Award for Meritorious Achievement), too numerous to mention here, constitute a virtual "Who's Who" of luminaries in the field of science editing. [For a list of recipients, please see www.councilscienceeditors.org/about/cseawardsformerit.pdf.]

To honor members who have made outstanding contributions benefiting the organization, the Certificate of Appreciation was created. It was first awarded in 1981 to two deserving recipients recognized for their distinctive accomplishments:

- Karl Heumann, for single-handedly producing the *CBE Newsletter* from

Council continued

1969 to 1974 and putting it on a regular bimonthly basis.

- Ed Huth, for his chairmanship of the Style Manual Committee from 1973 to 1978 and as the organizer of, and principal contributor to, the fourth edition of the *Council of Biology Editors Style Manual*.

During his tenure as president (1979-1980), Erwin Neter suggested that past officers and directors of CBE should be recognized for their contributions to the organization, and so was born the Distinguished Service Award. In 1993, the award was renamed the Lewis I Gidez Distinguished Service Award to honor his commitment as treasurer for more than a decade. (CSE Distinguished Service Awards now recognize excellence in the performance of specific tasks by CSE members. Certificates of Appreciation can recognize a variety of member contributions.)

The Executive Office

Initially, CBE's location was wherever the president of the organization resided. The annual change in address led to problems for members and nonmembers alike. A search committee was formed in 1980 to recruit an executive director, who would assume responsibility for the daily activities of the Council. In January 1981, an executive office was established in Bethesda, Maryland.

For the next 10 years, CBE flourished owing, in part at least, to the advantages of having a permanent home. During that decade, paid memberships increased from 350 to more than 1,100; annual-meeting attendance jumped from 175 to more than 300, and the annual-meeting deficit of \$2,000 in 1980 changed to a \$28,000 asset in 1991; and the organization's cash balance increased by more than \$100,000. In addition to those aspects of growth, other changes were occurring:

- As a result of sustained efforts of President David Frost (1982-1983) and others, the membership rolls were "opened to anyone interested in the purposes of the Council" (see "Membership" above). And sustaining and emeritus memberships were established.
- The Certificate of Appreciation for deserving members was instituted, as well as the Distinguished Service Award for officers and Board members whose terms had been completed (see "Awards and Honors").
- Annual meetings were enhanced by the introduction of seminars and workshops and a course for new journal editors.
- Five new books were published (see "Manuals and Guides"), the fifth edition of the *CBE Style Manual* appeared, *Scientific Writing for Graduate Students* was repeatedly reprinted, and *CBE Views* was reformatted and improved in 1987.

When the executive director retired in 1991, the office was transferred to a professional management association in Chicago. In 1998, a new executive office was opened in Reston, Virginia, where it continues to function for the benefit of CSE and to serve its members.

Epilogue

In 2000, the Council of Biology Editors became the more encompassing Council of Science Editors. Since then, activities of the Council have continued to develop. The growth and expansion over the last 50 years bode well for the "golden" future of the organization. 

References

1. Altman PL. The Council of Biology Editors: a 25-year chronology of events. *CBE Views* 1981;4(2):4-8.
2. Altman PL. CBE: a 35-year retrospective. *CBE Views* 1992;14(2):27-29.
3. Tacker MM. CBE Views: a look back. *Sci Ed* 2000;23(1):3-7.