

# Two Roads Diverged: Career Paths in Scholarly Publishing

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**SPEAKERS:**
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 New York, New York

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 Medford, Massachusetts

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The purpose of this session was to explore the variety of roles in scholarly publishing and discuss career development. Moderator Emma Shumeyko led a conversation among 4 experienced professionals: Midori Baer, Director of Publishing Operations at PLOS; Jasmine Wallace, Peer Review Manager at the American Society for Microbiology; Michele Springer, Editorial Manager at Caudex; and Brian Coughlin, Publisher at Wiley.

The session began with Shumeyko asking the panel, “How did you find out about scholarly publishing? How did you get here?” The speakers acknowledged that they mostly “fell” into the industry, coming from journalism, freelance editing, teaching, and other types of publishing, searching for a career that aligned with their skills and interests. Those that started out in nonfiction book publishing and newspaper publishing switched to scholarly publishing because of the pace of the environment and the ability to track deliverables. However, it can be difficult to figure out a career path within scholarly publishing without finding a mentor or exploring new opportunities.

Several of the speakers have transitioned from production to editorial roles over the course of their careers. This created valuable discussion, as these different parts of scholarly publishing often function in silos, making such career transitions challenging. Brian Coughlin suggested that to facilitate connections between these silos, publishers can form “journal teams” composed of representatives from each silo. Members of these teams can then get to know each other’s goals for the journal and determine how to work together. Midori Baer mentioned that apps such as Donut,<sup>1</sup> which works through the communication

platform Slack, pair staff members for cross-departmental conversation. It’s important to understand what happens in each space and what skills are desirable for specific roles. An upstream culture shift toward collaborative objectives and cross-functional engagement can help bridge gaps. Personal drive is also needed to create career opportunities. Don’t be afraid to ask someone about their job—people in scholarly publishing usually enjoy talking about what they do—or ask to be included on projects that aren’t necessarily part of your job description.

Another topic touched upon in this session was the ambiguity of job titles in scholarly publishing: the same title at two different organizations can represent two very different roles with unique duties and levels of responsibility. In addition, the industry is constantly changing, which forces roles to evolve quickly. As such, Shumeyko asked the speakers what they *actually* do on a day-to-day basis. Each speaker described a wide variety of tasks from overseeing staff to consulting on workflow efficiency to meeting with societies, as well as other duties that expand their job descriptions. For career advancement, the types of experience and projects that someone has worked on are generally more important than their job title or the number of years they’ve worked in the field. Baer suggested ignoring job titles altogether and focusing on resumes and job descriptions to understand what the experience truly is and find a good fit in a role.

Shumeyko concluded the main session by asking each speaker what aspects of their work surprise them. They discussed that technology seems to develop slower in publishing than in other industries, which sometimes makes it difficult to accomplish things easily. Different publishers have similar challenges, but they can learn from each other, so networking and global collaboration are essential. The panel also agreed that for a process-based industry that relies heavily on workflows and checklists, the work is surprisingly different every day. Michele Springer remarked that many people outside the industry imagine editors with a red pen in hand all day, but she spends only 50% of her day editing, with the remainder spent managing projects, liaising with external clients, and championing best practices. Jasmine Wallace noted that it’s important to be adaptable and gave a personal example of needing to learn data analysis in her position as Peer Review Manager. Appropriately, the image chosen for the 2021 CSE Annual Meeting was a chameleon, symbolizing the adaptability needed for all roles in scholarly publishing.

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Following the session, an audience question and answer period covered other topics related to career advancement. When seeking a new position, it's beneficial to have a variety of skills, but focusing on the area you enjoy the most can help direct your search. When asked whether an advanced degree or certificate is needed, Wallace (who has a Master of Professional Studies in Publishing) explained that a master's degree helped her navigate the space of scholarly publishing, as it provided insight into aspects of the industry that she otherwise hadn't experienced, and it was valuable for networking; however, an advanced degree is not necessary for career progression. The panel agreed that courses in project management are useful, as there is a growing need for effective project managers.

Those interested were referred to the session "Project Management Fundamentals for the Editorial Office" from the 2020 CSE Annual Meeting.<sup>2</sup>

The final advice from the speakers was to give yourself time to learn when moving to a new position or organization—everyone understands what it's like to start in a new environment—and be confident in yourself. Don't be afraid to ask questions and create your own opportunities.

**References and Links**

1. <https://www.donut.com/>
2. Blasco H. Project management fundamentals for the editorial office. *Sci Ed.* 2020;43:91-92. <https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-D-4303-91>