

The Story of the JU Fanny Pack Trilogy: The Last Rodeo

Jennifer Regala

“Why can’t we get all the people together in the world that we really like and then just stay together? I guess that wouldn’t work. Someone would leave. Someone always leaves. Then we would have to say goodbye. I hate goodbyes. I know what I need. I need more hellos.”

—Charles M Schultz

From May 3 through 6, 2024, I traveled to San Antonio, TX, for the annual meeting of the American Urological Association (AUA). I served as the Director of Publications at the AUA starting in June 2020, during full COVID lockdown. And yes, you read the past tense correctly. I intended to say “served” because my last day at the AUA was May 6, the last day of the meeting itself. I loved every single second of my tenure with the AUA, where I oversaw the publications department, including the peer-reviewed journals, *The Journal of Urology* (JU), *Urology Practice* (JPU), and *JU Open Plus* (JUOP); a print newsmagazine/digital ecosystem, *AUANews*; the production of a CME product, *Update Series*; and multiple annual meeting-related offerings. I am proud of my work at the AUA, most especially the initiatives around DEI and open peer review introduced for JU, getting UPJ indexed, and launching our brand new Gold Open Access journal, JUOP. And it was the amazing *AUANews*, which began as a slim print-only publication and evolved into a robust urological news empire, that led me to my decision to leave the AUA for another opportunity—but more on that in a bit. Always on a quest for personal relevance,¹ I knew the time was right to leave the AUA, but before I did, it was important to me to showcase these beloved publications in epic fashion.

I’ve written articles and spoken at industry events about my passion for social media and journal community engagement, but I am most asked about the JU Fanny Pack

(intentional caps), which debuted at the AUA’s first post-COVID in-person meeting in 2022² and reappeared in 2023 in a shocking pink (for anyone new here, pink is my favorite color). As Dr Siemens said in our recap article from last year³:

In comes the pink fanny pack! No advertisement needed. Three or four strategic handouts, with subsequent tweets, to friendly influencers (aka the popular kids), and the buzz is palpable. Fans of the journal (authors, readers, reviewers, editors) flock to the publication’s booth. Selfies everywhere comparing the coolest way to brand the must-have accessory. It’s not a joke. Everyone knows what this is about. It’s low tech, fun, retro, and with just a tiny bit of anti-establishment rebellion to the theater and seriousness of the meeting itself.

With the successes of 2022 and 2023 fresh in our memories, we set out to make our 2024 publications booth and assorted swag the best we have ever offered. Spoiler alert: We made “it” happen. We connected with our community of readers, authors, editors, and reviewers to make them feel like every single one of them was an important part of the journal community. Legitimate, deep engagement must be the foundation of every journal, and using the annual meeting in-person environment to cultivate that inclusion is a must.

This article is my final take on the fanny pack trilogy, but I am eager to see what my AUA colleagues come up with next year. I know it will be the awesomest.

What Did We Give Away as Pubs SWAG This Year?

The Iconic JU Fanny Pack

In 2022, we started out tentatively, with a black JU fanny pack. Despite the drab color, meeting attendees crowded our booth to get their hands on the limited supply of this questionable fashion accessory. That first year, our selfie station was mobbed with folks having their photos taken wearing it cross-body (the cool kids) or around the waist (the traditionalists). Until the next year, I continued to see tweets and receive messages from fanny pack enthusiasts who wore the bag on rounds, out jogging, to hold doggie bags while walking their pets, you name it. More importantly, though, these individuals remembered the fun editorial

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office employees they met because of the fanny pack, and they felt like they belonged. Presubmission inquiries and reviewer pools increased. We began to get friendly emails with constructive criticism that allowed us to improve our processes. We built trust and connections that were worth the \$3.26 we paid for each individual fanny pack.

In 2023, though, the fanny pack exploded. The bold pink was a sensation. This bag was the thing everyone wanted. And the frenzy over it continues until this day. This fanny pack has been pictured at preschool “pink” days, in Pride month parades, as part of Halloween costumes, and so much more. A week doesn’t go by without me receiving a personal text from a physician sharing a whimsical pink fanny pic photo with me. Silly, yes, but essential to the community that must serve as the foundation for any successful publishing program.

We debuted a “JU Red” fanny pack in 2024. More conservative in nature, the fanny pack was still fun and sought-after, but the fervor had definitely died down in comparison with the pink 2023 offering. That was okay, though, because we had something new...

Taylor Swift-Style Friendship Bracelets

These bracelets were undoubtedly a hit (Figure 1, online). Branded in each publication’s colors, with four different varieties available, attendees swarmed the booth to get their hands on these bracelets. Social media teemed with photos of the bracelet stacks. I am hoping to see pictures of these out and about at the Taylor Swift Eras Tour this summer (hint hint urological community, don’t let me down).

The JU Pet of the Month Calendar

The pet calendar was back with a vengeance. One photo showed two Nashville pups dressed up for a bachelorette party. Dr Stacy Tanaka was quick to show everyone who came to the booth her January calendar dog, Chase.

The UPJ Conference Drawstring Bag

This item maybe is not the most exciting—but it’s the most visible. I highly recommend ordering enough of these for the entire expected attendance because you’ll see it on everyone’s back. Plus, it’s great to bring home for a gym bag, for a kid to use for a slumber party, or for a shopping trip.

The JUOP Chip Clip

Who doesn’t need a good, quality chip clip? Enough said. Buy the best clips that your budget can afford, and your authors will think about you every time they reach for their favorite snack.

The AUNews Global Focus Issue

AUNews has multiple focus issues each year. In March 2023, we published an article focusing on the global state

of urology. Although it was an online-only edition, we bundled those articles into a print feature to distribute at the meeting. Our attendees loved these.

Last, But Certainly Not Least: The Light-up Pink Cowboy Hats and Hot Pink Bandanas for the Reviewer Rodeo

This year, we debuted the first-ever AUA Reviewer Rodeo. A cross-departmental effort of the Convention & Meetings, Guidelines, Research, and Publications teams (Erin Kirkby, Katie Phipps, and Kristy Riordan were co-organizers of this event), we had worked together for many months to look at the persistent AUA problem of an overburdened peer review network. Knowing that reviewer training and rewards are important to incentivizing peer review, we decided to host this brand-new event for medical students, residents, fellows, and other early career researchers. But how would we lure attendees to this free event? Enter the promise of secret swag. On social media, we promised that never-seen-before swag would be distributed at the Rodeo, and that was enough for us to get a robust turnout. I truly wish you could have seen the delight on the faces of these potential reviewers when we handed out the most glorious pink sequined cowboy hats with custom bands that read “AUA REVIEWER RODEO 2024.” Things really got lively when they learned the hats lit up with a pulsing hot pink light. The best part of the event was when the most elite editorial leadership in global urological research donned the hat and posed for photos (Figure 2, online). It’s hard to be afraid of peer review when you see the 2 Editors-in-Chief of the most prestigious journals in your field wearing a pink light-up cowboy hat. We capped off the giveaways with hot pink Reviewer Rodeo-branded bandanas.

What Didn’t Make the Cut?

- Temporary tattoos of the faces of Editorial Board members. Note that we had their permission to do it, but the logistical nightmare of wet washcloths to apply the tattoos was a bit daunting.
- Life-sized cardboard cutouts of the Editors-in-Chief to place at the booth. This idea would have been amazing, but we ran short on time and money.
- Bucket hats. Because who doesn’t love a great bucket hat? These are pricey but worth a future look.
- Knee-high socks. My friends at the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB) and I gave *The Plant Cell*-branded socks away at the 2019 ASPB annual meeting. Those beauties had a fanny pack-like reaction from meeting attendees.

Parting Tips and Tricks

1. Go big or go home. If you're in San Antonio, TX, then you need to embrace the location and theme and get pink light-up cowboy hats.
2. Involve your Editorial Board members and do it early. Trust me, they'll enjoy it, and it's a fun break from the daily editorial doldrums to suggest swag and get in on the fun.
3. Align with your doc stars (or your journal community's equivalent). These are the people you need to boost the social media fun around your conference efforts organically. Have them help you boost your efforts via their own networks.
4. Provide an escape. When selecting swag, here's how I like to think through the process: Whether you're a urologist or a plant biologist or work in the humanities, your day-to-day work life is tough stuff. You're saving lives and making tough decisions and clawing for resources. When you show up to an annual meeting, you want to feel part of something. What are the things that can provide a fun escape, if even for a few days?

"A Good Time Was Had by All"

When I worked on the Severna Park High School Talon as the Features Editor my senior year (Class of 1991; go Falcons!), my biggest pet peeve was when a reporter would hand in a story about a school dance and say "A good time was had by all." At the same time, I did want the story to encapsulate the fun and excitement of the event. So with no shame in my game, I am happy to report that, indeed, a good time was had by all at AUA24 in San Antonio, TX.

Community engagement remained a focal point, and it was so satisfying to see the individuals we have worked so hard to build relationships with over the years. We have watched these professionals grow in their careers and couldn't be more proud of the role the AUA publications has played in those stories.

A huge personal surprise of the meeting for me was when our AUA News Editor-in-Chief, Dr Stacy Tanaka, showed up at the meeting with thousands of hot pink badge lanyards for attendee name tags (Figure 3, online). Half of these read "UROLOGISTS LOVE JENNIFER REGALA." The other half read "JENNIFER REGALA IS THE BESTESTESTEST" (I love to tell people they are the bestestestestest). I will never forget this kindness, and I loved Dr Tanaka's delight when she saw her swag go viral. A career highlight for sure.

I ended the conference in a snapshot with Dr Muhammed A Moukhtar Hammad, a fellow at UC-Irvine

Health. This ending was so beautiful and apt because I gave the very first fanny pack to him in 2022, and we shared the very first selfie featuring it. He received the very last fanny pack I will ever distribute, and we shared the last meeting selfie.

What's Next?

I am super excited to share that I started working at Wolters Kluwer Health on May 20, 2024, as an Associate Director, Publishing. I will be working with news platforms similar to AUA News. Stay tuned to this space for my thoughts on how newsmagazines and digital ecosystems are the future of scholarly publishing.

Acknowledgments

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Editors-in-Chief of the AUA's publications (Dr Robert Siemens, *The Journal of Urology*; Dr Stephen Jones, *Urology Practice*; Dr John Davis, *JU Open Plus*; and Dr Stacy Tanaka, AUA News). You all are phenomenal individuals who came together to form the most amazing editorial leadership team I've ever seen. You made remarkable magic happen under the umbrella of "The Voice of Urology," and I will be rooting you on forever and ever.

The most important thank you of all goes to my beloved Martha Keyes, who is the ultimate scholarly publishing professional. She knows peer review, production, analysis, ethics, strategy, and so much more inside and out, but more importantly, she has so much fun and passion while she works relentlessly to get the job done. Martha, you're my permanent partner in crime and dear friend for life even if we don't work side by side every day.

Be sure to check out the #AUA24 hashtag on social media (X, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, and even TikTok) for great science, fun memories, and awesome photos and videos. Major hat tip to the AUA's Communications team, Caitlin Lukacs, Corey Del Bianco, and Travis Smith, who were responsible for the meeting's exceptional vibe and worked tirelessly to elevate all AUA24 programming, including the promotion of the publications programming and lots of showcasing of the fun swag.

References and Links

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