

Community is Key

Jonathan Schultz

As the Director of Journals at the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), a society that publishes some of the top cancer research journals, Emilie Gunn is used to dealing with challenges. That experience will serve her well as the new President of the Council of Science Editors (CSE), as the organization and its members deal with political upheaval and an uncertain future for U.S. research funding. In this conversation from earlier this year, Emilie spoke with *Science Editor* Editor-in-Chief, Jonathan Schultz, about her path to scientific publishing and the importance of community.

Science Editor: How did you get involved in scientific editing and publishing, and what career path led to your position?

Emilie Gunn: I came into it by accident, as I think a lot of us did. I didn't know this job existed until I applied for it. In college, I was an English major, and I didn't really know what I wanted to do with that after I graduated. I liked the idea of teaching, but I didn't think that would be my career, necessarily. When I told my dad that I was going to major in English, he was a little disappointed at first, and then he said, "that's fine for now because you can always go back later and major in something useful". I ended up teaching middle school for a few years after college. It was a job I loved, and I still feel passionately about education, but after a few years it felt like it was time to move on. I looked in the newspaper, like the actual print newspaper, looking for anything in the world of publishing, whether that meant magazines or journals or books. I saw this job [editorial assistant at ASCO] and thought, well, that sounds interesting. I've been here ever since. That was 2005, so it'll be 20 years in May that I've been at ASCO.

SE: We have basically an identical career. I started at the American Heart Association in 2005 as an editorial assistant and now I'm a Sr Director.

Emilie Gunn: That's so funny. I started as an editorial assistant and was very lucky that I had a great supervisor

who gave me interesting things to work on and challenged me consistently and was very supportive of me trying to learn new things and take on greater responsibility. And he really encouraged me throughout my career. So I was very lucky to have that.

SE: What do you enjoy most about your career?

Emilie Gunn: There are so many things, but I really like working for a nonprofit. When I think about what ASCO does and how my work feeds into that, it's a great reason to get out of bed in the morning. ASCO, as an organization, has a mission to conquer cancer through education and research, and who can't get behind that? The field of publishing is interesting because it's so collaborative. We don't hesitate to call up one of our colleagues in publishing and say, "Hey, I'm having this issue: how did you deal with that? What did you do when this came up?" People just share, "This is how we did it," and we think nothing of it. I really love that nature of publishing in general. Even though it doesn't sound like much, I really love the fact that we produce a tangible product every 10 days. Copies of the journals show up on my desk, and I can say that I had a hand in bringing that about. It's this big goal to find the cure for cancer, and I like being able to play a role in that through publishing research and educating clinicians who are treating patients with cancer.

SE: Pivoting to CSE, this May, you start your term as CSE President. Can you talk a little bit about what CSE has meant to you and what you are looking forward to doing as president.



Emilie Gunn

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Emilie Gunn: I first got involved with CSE when I was still an editorial assistant. My supervisor encouraged me to join and said, it's not worth joining unless you're going to be active and he recommended the Education Committee. So that's what I did and jumped in right away. We were evaluating applications for annual meeting scholarships and my first task was to help with that. I stayed on the education committee for a long time, and I've also been involved with some of the short courses. CSE has kind of always been my go-to place to learn something new and to expand my network of other publishing professionals. It's just such a great way to get to know other people and to be current in what's going on in the field of publishing. As president, I am really excited and so grateful to be able to give back to an organization that's given so much to me.

I think one of the big things I'd like to do is pull in more volunteers from all different walks of life. To get people who are early career and late career people who are involved with production and with editorial, to tap into this big group of diverse experiences and opinions. I also think it would be interesting to work with some of our sister societies like SSP [Society for Scholarly Publishing] and ISMTE [International Society of Managing and Technical Editors] that do work similar to ours, especially in the current political climate. I think CSE has an opportunity to make a name for itself as a place that is open and welcome to everybody, and I think working with other societies is a good way to get that done.

SE: Looming over everything are the actions of the current U.S. administration, with regard to diversity initiatives, research funding, and more. How do you see CSE's role during this time?

Emilie Gunn: CSE has always had a commitment to diversity as long as I've been a member. We offer a lot of resources around diversity. We have the DEIA committee where people can be involved with different initiatives. We offer a page of resources about DEIA and how to apply them at your own publications. I don't see any of that ending. In fact, if anything, I would think that this is the time to double down on those efforts and for CSE to show that diversity is important to us and, despite the political climate, we're not going to leave our focus on it.

It can be a little scary to do that, especially with the current political climate. I do think it's important for CSE to remain fully committed to it.

SE: That's great to hear. What are some of the biggest changes you've seen occurring in the industry and where do you see science editing and publishing going in the future?

Emilie Gunn: I'm going to date myself. I know I already did with the newspaper, but I'll do it again. When I started

at ASCO, we had just launched our first online manuscript submission system. We were on BenchPress and were in this weird in-between stage where we still had a bunch of paper files and then we had some that were online. Putting together an issue literally meant making a stack of file folders. We had one file folder for each manuscript, and then you would walk it down the hall to production and say, here's the issue. I'd say we've come a long way just in terms of efficiency and the online tools that we can use for authors and reviewers. Think of the money we spent FedExing manuscripts out to editors or the time we spent sending faxes: The whole of manuscript submission and peer review has changed.

Open access obviously is a big thing that has come along just in the past 10 years or so. I think we're only going to continue to see more of that. I would be fairly surprised to see a journal launch these days that's not open access. I think we're going to also see a big emphasis on sharing data sets and more transparency into the research that took place and how it took place, which hopefully will lead to more collaboration among researchers. We'll see. Everything is going to become more and more open as we go.

SE: What skills, abilities, and personal attributes have you found to be essential to success in our field?

Emilie Gunn: I definitely think flexibility is key. Publishing is always changing. There's always some new standard that we have to pay attention to or some new process that is going to change how we do our work. Being open to just change is really important and being able to go with the flow. Collaboration as well, there are so many different aspects to producing a journal, you need to have a big team and you need to be able to work together well. Flexibility and collaboration are the two key things to work in publishing and to get along well.

SE: Building on that last point, can you talk a little bit more about the importance of community?

Emilie Gunn: Community is key. Within CSE, there's definitely a community of publishers and of publishing professionals, which is how we learn from each other. As I was preparing for this interview, I literally got an email saying, "I'm having this issue at my journal. Do you think we can set aside some time to talk?" Having those people that you can reach out to makes you better at what you do because you're not just relying on yourself, and you've got everybody's input. Even with our own publishing team here at ASCO, we still have to work well with the marketing team and the team that produces our guidelines. Being willing to understand that you're a member of a larger community is so important.

SE: What do you think you'd be doing if you weren't in scientific publishing? Teaching obviously, but anything else?

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Emilie Gunn: I don't know. I don't think I would be a classroom teacher necessarily, but I would probably have some sort of role in education, like curriculum design or a librarian. When I was in college, I worked at the library on campus in the reference section. Students doing research would come in and ask for help, and I loved that. If I wasn't in publishing, I would probably be in library science.

SE: Is there anything that you could tell our readers that might surprise them about yourself?

Emilie Gunn: It's not very surprising, but I like to read a lot. I love to knit and crochet. I am kind of an old soul, I think.

SE: What do you read?

Emilie Gunn: Mostly just contemporary literature and I try to read a few classics every year. Right now I'm going back to read *The Scarlet Letter*, which I haven't read since high school.

SE: Are you liking *The Scarlet Letter*? I feel like that's one that's kind of ruined by high school.

Emilie Gunn: I loved *The Scarlet Letter* in high school, and I'm actually excited to read it as an adult with a different perspective.