Against the Grain

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ATG Interviews Jennifer Pesanelli, Past President of the Society for Scholarly Publishing and Deputy Executive Director for Operations at the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB)

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Past President of the Society for Scholarly Publishing and Deputy Executive Director for Operations at the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB)

by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

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ATG: Jennifer, what led you to a career in scholarly publishing? Were there key challenges that had particular appeal?

JP: After working for a small newspaper publisher, I took a job at **Allen Press** as an advertising sales representative for scholarly journals. It was my first real exposure to scholarly societies, and I worked on their journals covering subjects from veterinary pathology, to cosmetic surgery, to cactus and succulents. I was enamored with the idea that there seemed to be a society and a publication for anything and everything. My office was at the same location as the printing plant, so I had the opportunity to explore hundreds of titles.

ATG: In late 2016, you were promoted to become Deputy Executive Director for Operations at the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB). What are your responsibilities, exactly? In particular, what does the Deputy Executive Director of Operations do at FASEB?

JP: As the Deputy Executive Director for Operations at FASEB, I oversee multiple programs/departments including FASEB's Society Management Services program, Campus Operations, the Science Research Conferences, and our Office of Publications. I served as the Director of Publications for 12 years as my role expanded to include other areas. **Cody Mooneyhan** is now the Director of Publications at FASEB, but I work with **Cody** and his team to publish our flagship journal, *The FASEB Journal*, and support our client societies with their publishing programs. In addition, **Cody** and I have been working on the launch of a new journal for FASEB, and we are very excited about this initiative.

ATG: Obviously, as the current President, you are also heavily involved in the Society for Scholarly Publishing. What made you seek such a prominent leadership role? What do you see as SSP's core mission?

JP: I became involved with SSP more than 15 years ago and found tremendous value in the learning and networking opportunities afforded to me through SSP. I became involved with the Education Committee and found that topics I personally wanted, needed, to know more about were of interest to others as well, and being on the Education Committee, I could help pick topics and recruit speakers for areas of interest. When I was invited to run for a seat on the Board, I was excited to be involved with the strategic aspects of the society. Being approached to run for President was an honor and the ultimate opportunity to serve the organization that had become so important to me.

SSP's core mission really is about developing members through education, collaboration,

and networking to advance scholarly publishing and communication. We have some really strong programming that supports member education, and there is currently a task force exploring additional opportunities for SSP to provide training.

ATG: What do you tell those new to scholarly publishing about SSP and why they should become involved? How have you benefitted from your membership? Has it helped your career directly?

JP: Scholarly publishing can be extremely interesting and exciting. As noted previously, SSP has been a very valuable educational and networking resource for me. The things I've learned and the connections I've made have greatly impacted my career and allowed me to climb the ladder at FASEB as I've taken on new challenges and new roles in support of a successful publications program.

ATG: What key initiatives did you hope to pursue and implement as President of SSP?

JP: My term as SSP President is wrapping up, but I ran for the position with several intentions. My overall goals were to help ensure a resilient, viable SSP that would enable members to leverage SSP to learn about every aspect of scholarly publishing from evolving technologies to shifting business models; to engage with the SSP community to have a forum to cultivate, exchange, and challenge ideas; and to belong to an organization that respects and values diversity and individual contributions. Looking back on the past 11 months, I think we've made some good progress, and our strategic plan will ensure continued development in these areas.

ATG: What would you like librarians to know about the challenges those in the world of scholarly publishing face?

JP: Librarians are very much a part of this world. They are curators, educators, consum-

ers, providers, communicators, publishers, and so much more. We are facing these challenges together.

ATG: And what should librarians know about SSP? Should they think about joining and becoming involved?

JP: SSP deals with the full scope of scholarly communications of which librarians are a critical stakeholder. Their voices are not only welcome but a necessary part of the conversation. Our immediate past president, **Rick Anderson** is Associate Dean for Collections & Scholarly Communication in the **J. Willard Marriott Library** at the **University of Utah**. We also have librarians serving on our Board and Committees. I encourage all librarians to join SSP and be involved.

ATG: On the other hand, what do you think scholarly publishing professionals should know about librarians and the challenges they face?

JP: Scholarly publishing professionals need to know everything they can about librarians and the challenges they face. We all have limited time and resources and understanding as much as possible about each other makes us that much more effective and valuable to each other. As I said previously, we are all part of the same community.

ATG: Are there avenues for fruitful collaboration between the two professions? Is there a place for SSP in fostering such collaborations?

JP: SSP can absolutely foster collaborations. Not only is that another element in our mission, but we share common goals, especially around the dissemination of information and education, and we can work together to achieve those goals.

ATG: Can you think of specific examples of librarian-publisher collaboration? Are there specific collaborative efforts that you'd like to see pursued?

JP: I've experienced publisher-librarian collaboration on many issues including impacts of open access, archiving policies, and text and data mining, to name a few. I've participated in a number of initiatives (Chicago Collaborative, OSI) bringing both groups together to address grand challenges and meeting the needs of our mutual end-users. In terms of specific collaborative efforts I'd like to see pursued, I think it would be great to work together on potential opportunities for and impacts of AI on content delivery and even how AI is likely to redefine content.

ATG: The theme for the 2018 SSP conference is "Scholarly Publishing at the Cross-

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roads: *What's working, what's holding us back, where do we go from here?* If you were making the keynote address at the conference how would you answer those questions?

JP: There is so much to talk about in the context of this theme. What's working? What's holding us back? Where do we go from here? I'll start in the middle and say that, to some degree, we hold ourselves back. It is human nature to stick with what we know and operate where we are comfortable. For those of us who work at scholarly societies, change can be especially challenging and often slow. We can look at what is working for us and others, but scholarly publishing is constantly evolving and there are so many opportunities related to technology, collaboration, business models, etc. A growth mindset is critical for those of us in the scholarly publishing and communication community, and the future I envision is full of possibilities.

ATG: *The value of peer review is hot topic in scholarly publishing today. Does the Society for Scholarly Publishing have an*

official position on peer review? If so what is it? If not, why not? What is your personal view regarding the value of peer review?

JP: SSP does not take official positions on specific subjects, but the idea that peer review is part of what defines scholarly publication is generally accepted. Personally, I think peer review is critical and even more important now than it used to be. There is so much information available on any subject, knowing that it was validated by experts in the field offers a degree of quality and assurance about the information. Peer review is also instrumental in the scientific process itself for indicating importance and veracity as well as ensuring rigor and safeguarding integrity.

ATG: *SSP and the Charleston Conference are collaborating on offering pre-conferences during each other's annual meetings. Can you tell us about that please?*

JP: Yes, the SSP and Charleston Conference collaborations are a great opportunity for both organizations to broaden their exposure to each other and address topics of joint interest to our members. They are another way to strengthen our community.

ATG: *We suspect that as busy as you must be, things can get pretty hectic. What do you do to relax and unwind? Are there hobbies or activities that you particularly enjoy? Are there any good books or recent movies that you can recommend?*

JP: I love to spend time with my family and friends and especially enjoy sharing good meals or playing card games with them. That said, to really relax, I love diving into a good book. I especially enjoy memoirs and am currently reading *Educated* by **Tara Westover** who didn't have any formal education prior to the age of 17 but was somehow driven to earn a PhD from **Cambridge University**. I'm fascinated by what inspires and motivates people to thrive.

ATG: *Jennifer, thank you so much for talking to us today. We really enjoyed it and we definitely learned a lot!*

JP: It has been my pleasure. Thank you for the opportunity. 🌱

Op Ed
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Scholars, scientists, and researchers seem to value:

- Quality editorial processes
- A comprehensible pecking orders of prestige and achievement they can navigate as needed
- Friendly, supportive, knowledgeable staff at the publications they choose to work with
- Rapid decisions or, lacking that, understandable processes with good communication
- Help from experts so they can improve their research reporting
- Help from experts so they can better promote their publication events
- Help with OA mandates, funder policies, data policies, and other complexities of modern publishing
- Trust that they can move on to do other things once they've published, and that their works will be safeguarded

To paraphrase **Warren Buffet**, price is what you pay, value is what you get. Some of us are so focused on price and this year's budget that we lose sight of the value to science education, scholarship, students, future careers, Western cultural norms, innovation and invention, societal and economic progress, inclusion and diversity, and so much more.

If we continue to let short-term temptations to save money drive the conversation around value, nobody will get what they want or need from our market, and the scholarly information economy will ultimately shrink, become less diverse at the organizational and individual levels, become more susceptible to corruption and interference, and become less valued as it deteriorates. Because so many careers, incentives, findings, and insights flow through these outlets — like it or not — the ultimate price will be stunted careers, diminished incentives to do productive science and scholarship, and fewer insights to improve the world.

The race to the bottom has a destination that is all too obvious. 🌱

Endnotes

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