

# Ethical Editing

Volume 1, Issue 3

Autumn 2009

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM **COPE** COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATION ETHICS



## Rallying the troops

**Definition:** *To come into orderly arrangement; to renew order, or united effort, as troops scattered or put to flight; to assemble; to unite.*

This past summer I returned to Washington, DC, where I had worked in the 1980's as a reporter. I stood at the feet of Abraham Lincoln, who served as President of the United States in the 1860's, during the country's Civil War, and posed for a picture in front of the White House, where Barack Obama, the

nation's first African American President, is now struggling to solve monumental problems caused by the collapse of the banking and housing industries.

Much has changed in the 150 years between the two Presidents. Yet the task faced by both men was, and is, to restore order and unite their constituents. On a smaller scale, COPE—and organizations like it—is faced with a similar challenge: restoring order and uniting the academic publishing industry.

Every week there are new allegations of ethical offenses committed by people who conduct and evaluate research, ranging from fabrication of information to approval of questionable research protocols (see "Deceptive practices?"). At the same time, editors are trying to figure out how to protect themselves and their journals without creating unnecessary complexities for the people who submit research (see "To sign or not to sign"). The Autumn issue of *Ethical Editing*—focusing on the theme "Offenses and defense"—describes the current ethical climate, as well as some actions COPE is taking to unite its constituents (see "The scoop from COPE").

As in most organizations, COPE's agenda is set by its leaders. Yet leaders depend on their troops to win battles. On the following page you'll find a description of COPE committees looking for new members. There is strength in numbers. Together, we can do something to raise the ethical standards in the industry. Take this opportunity to become a member of COPE's defensive team!

*Jeannie*

**Theme: Offenses and defense**

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### Masthead

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## The Scoop from COPE

### Interim officers appointed

The June 2009 decision of COPE Treasurer Jeremy Theobald to step down from his position before the expiration of his term has led to some changes to the COPE officers. Until formal elections can be held (at the next AGM in March 2010), Acting Secretary Richard O'Hagan has agreed to serve as Acting Treasurer, and Council member Virginia Barbour will take over from Richard as Acting Secretary.

Jeremy was an extremely active member of the Council, spearheading the development of the website and contributing to the major increase in COPE's membership and to changes which increased the organization's financial stability. COPE is grateful to him for all his contributions to COPE over the years.



Interim COPE Treasurer  
Richard O'Hagan



Interim COPE Secretary  
Virginia (Ginny) Barbour

### Opportunities for involvement

COPE has so much exciting work to do that we've decided to form some new Council subgroups. Four permanent subcommittees will help manage COPE's finances, the website, research funding, and the annual (UK) seminar. We're also expanding or reviving a number of working groups which will be responsible for a range of specific projects, including developing a distance learning program for editors and a code of conduct for publishers. Also planned are teams to review the Best Practice document, the flowcharts, and the audit, to make sure they are kept up-to-date and relevant to members' needs. Council is also looking for volunteers to join a new series of special interest groups designed to ensure that COPE meets the needs of its diverse membership. Council will consult the groups on cases or issues of particular relevance to them and when developing new policies or documents. We are looking for volunteers to represent non-biomedical science journals, humanities journals, mathematics and computing journals, and professional journals. We also hope to establish groups of publishers, journals from low- and middle-income countries, small journals (i.e., those without a full-time editor), and members with an interest in promoting publication ethics training within higher education. For more information about the groups, or to volunteer to join one, please contact Tim Feest: [cope\\_opsdirector@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_opsdirector@publicationethics.org).

### Council to look at election procedures and articles

A subcommittee comprising COPE Council members Richard O'Hagan and Ginny Barbour and COPE Operations Director Tim Feest met in mid-August to begin the process of reevaluating and possibly revising COPE's Memorandum and Articles of Association, an official document required of all Limited Companies registered in the UK, and the rules and regulations which set out how COPE manages its business. Changes in the documents are expected to be needed to reflect the changes in the organization resulting from COPE's exponential growth in the past 18 months (from around 300 to more than 5000 members). In particular, the subcommittee will look at COPE's election procedures, and will evaluate procedures used by similar organizations to see if there is a better system for electing Council members and officers.

### Have a say: COPE survey

We want to know what you think about COPE. Do we meet your needs? How could we do better? What should our future priorities be? We're therefore developing a short survey, which we would like all COPE members to complete. Details will follow on the website. Council will use the results at a strategic planning day in December. So please have a say, and help shape the future of COPE.

### Research grant awarded

"Authors' awareness of publication ethics: An international survey" is the proposal selected to receive COPE's 2009 Research Grant Scheme. Sara Schroter of BMJ Editorial submitted the proposal with co-applicants Gary Bryan (BMJ), Elizabeth Loder (BMJ), Tim Houle (Wake Forest University, North Carolina), and Jason Roberts (International Society of Managing and Technical Editors). The project will receive £5000. Details will follow in the Winter issue of *Ethical Editing*.

### Distance learning call for content

COPE is seeking proposals from applicants interested in providing the content for its upcoming distance learning program. Likely topics include Authorship, Conflicts of interest, Editor and reviewer misconduct, Fabrication, Falsification, Plagiarism, Redundant publication, Selective reporting, and Unethical research. The expected length of each module is approximately 10-12 pages, but length could vary according to subject matter. Related topics could be combined in a single module if appropriate.

COPE's preference would be for one person or organisation to be responsible for all the modules, but it may be necessary to engage specialists for particular topics and hence to use different authors for different subjects. We have chosen Astute Technology, based in Reston, Virginia, to format and produce the final program based on the submitted material.

The program is aimed at journal editors and editorial staff who need some grounding in the more prevalent aspects of ethical misbehavior and the processes and procedures for dealing with them.

Interested parties should submit a maximum two-page proposal which includes:

1. A brief overview of the content to be provided, including identification of topics and authors.
2. Their related background and experience.
3. How much time they foresee needing for the project.
4. How much they will charge.

Applications should be sent by e-mail to Operations Director Tim Feest at:

[cope\\_opsdirector@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_opsdirector@publicationethics.org).

The deadline for applications is September 30, 2009.

### Check out the Council blog

Do you want to know more about current issues in publication ethics? Let the COPE Council help you. The Council blog serves primarily as an alert service, directing members to items of interest from websites and journals. Blog entries, which can be found on the COPE home page, are moderated by Council member Ginny Barbour. Take a look, add a comment, start a thread!

### US venue for COPE seminar

Later this year, representatives of the more than 800 COPE member journals based in North America will have an opportunity to attend a COPE seminar a bit closer to home. On November 9, 2009, COPE will organize its first US meeting, in Washington, DC, to be hosted by the National Academy of Sciences.



Among the speakers will be John Hoey (who also spoke at the UK seminar; see the Summer 2009 issue of *Ethical Editing*). The program will be posted on the COPE website (<http://publicationethics.org>), and interested attendees (based anywhere in the world, of course!) can register online.

### COPE à la carte

Did you know that you can personalize your interactions with COPE? After logging in as a member on the COPE website ([www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)), go to the Home page and select "Preferences" at the top right corner of the screen. On the page that pops up you'll find a record of any comments you posted in response to Blog entries, as well as the types of e-mails you subscribe to: "Essential e-mails" (required for COPE membership, such as notifications about the Annual General Meetings and elections), "COPE e-mails" (other e-mails from COPE, and information about COPE activities) and "COPE-related e-mails" (information from other organizations which might be of interest to COPE members). You can choose not to receive mails in the latter two categories (click on them to read their descriptions) by clicking on "Manage subscriptions My emails" and then unchecking the boxes. In addition, the Edit tab at the top of the screen will lead you to a page where you can change your account settings, such as your password and whether you receive e-mails as plain text or HTML.

### Deceptive practices?

*Fake papers. Pirated textbooks. Questionable posting of copyrighted case reports. Review boards that approve unsound research studies. It seems as if new examples of deceptive practices are surfacing in the publishing industry on a daily basis. Where do we draw the line between the ethical and the unethical? Judge for yourself.*

#### Fake paper aftermath

Recently, an experiment was conducted by Philip Davis and Kent Anderson, Executive Editor and Editor-in-Chief, respectively, of The Scholarly Kitchen, <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2009/06/10/nonsense-for-dollars/>, a blog affiliated with the US-based Society for Scholarly Publishing. The editors produced two nonsensical papers using SCigen, a software created by graduate students in the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (<http://pdos.csail.mit.edu/scigen/>). SCigen, available for free on MIT's website, is described as "a program that generates random Computer Science research papers, including graphs, figures, and citations" using "context-free grammar to form all elements of the papers." The site claims that "one useful purpose for such a program is to auto-generate submissions to conferences that you suspect might have very low submission standards."

Davis and Anderson submitted their manuscripts to two journals published by Bentham Science, a publisher of "over 250 peer-reviewed open access journals" (<http://www.bentham.org/open/index.htm>) which charges authors a fee to publish their accepted manuscripts. One of the fake manuscripts was accepted for publication in *The Open Information Science Journal* (TOISCIJ).

According to a report in *The Scientist* (<http://www.the-scientist.com/blog/display/55759/>), news that a fake paper had been accepted led to the resignation of TOISCIJ's editor-in-chief, Bambang Parmanto, an Associate Professor in the University of Pittsburgh's School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. Parmanto told *The Scientist* he had never seen the fake paper that was accepted by his journal; on contacting his publisher he was told that "someone on the editorial board reviewed" the paper. Ultimately, Davis wrote to Bentham Science to withdraw the paper after its publication had been approved.

In a March 2009 blog entry (<http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2009/03/12/bentham-publishers/>) Philip Davis wrote: "I must admit that my 'research' may be questioned on ethical grounds considering that I wasted the time of an editor and two reviewers. I took a little consolation in the fact that other respectable researchers have used this technique to test peer review." Davis later told COPE: "I take academic integrity very seriously, which is why the notion of engaging in an act which may be perceived as deceptive was not taken lightheartedly. . . . I could imagine no other way to validate the claims of this publisher with the exception of testing the system itself."

This experiment seems to highlight much more than the problems of peer review. Can it ever be ethical to submit a fake manuscript to a

journal? Is it ethical to create a computer program that creates fake papers? Does a respected institution like MIT know that its students are providing the means for researchers to commit fraud? How is it "useful" to create a fake submission for a conference with low submission standards? How can a reviewer conscientiously submit a review of an article that he obviously doesn't understand? Should a journal's editor be expected to understand every one of the (perhaps thousands of) papers his journal accepts? How does a manuscript get accepted without the knowledge of the journal's editor? And finally, is there any legitimate way to test whether a scientific publisher is acting ethically?

Commenting on the ramifications of the experiment in the Chronicle of Higher Education's news blog <http://4sustainability.blogspot.com/2009/06/open-access-publisher-appears-to-have.html>, a reader wrote: "Phil and Ken's experiment underscores the need for real peer review done by real scientists via real publishers. . . ."

Is there anyone real out there?

#### Book piracy

Meanwhile, fake publications of a different kind are posing a growing problem for publishers. *Times Higher Education* (<http://tinyurl.com/ch67sv>) reports that pirated copies of textbooks are cutting into publishers' revenues and threatening quality. Mistakes that can enter texts through the scanning process aren't dire when

they appear in fiction, but “if they creep into a dosage chart in a medical text, you can only imagine what could happen,” said Robert Hamadi, previously head of e-crime at the Publishers Association in the UK. “Not all digital pirates are in it for the money,” according to the article. “Some sites operated by self-styled Robin Hoods offer unauthorised copies of books that students can download for free.” One thing that’s needed, according to Mark Majurey, digital development director at publisher Taylor and Francis, is for everyone in academia to work harder to educate young people about the value of copyright.

### Copyright and case reports

It’s not only the young who would benefit from education about copyright-related issues, however. Who owns copyright to material published in a print journal, and can that material be submitted to a website for online publication afterward? These questions were raised by an anesthesiologist who was approached by e-mail four times in four months with invitations to submit an already-

published case report to [www.surgytec.com](http://www.surgytec.com). Representatives of the journal where the case report was published, asked whether this was allowed, responded: “This tactic is used to get around a permissions hassle with a publisher—who might start asking a lot of questions and ultimately ask for money in exchange for the use of content. It’s well known that it’s easier to get permission to reuse content from an author than from a publisher. According to our copyright agreement, the author can distribute the work if it is for ‘personal noncommercial benefit . . . and lawful notice of copyright is given.’ So if they can encourage an author to upload their materials and provide a copyright acknowledgment, then Surgytec gets content at no cost—and avoids paying those irritating permissions/usage fees.” Surgytec failed to respond to requests from COPE for comment on this article.

### Makeover for review board

Coast Independent Review Board, the Colorado-based for-profit review board discovered to have

approved all but one of the 356 study proposals it received over a five-year period, agreed under pressure from the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to temporarily stop approving new medical studies and enrolling new patients in studies already under way. According to an April 2009 article in the *New York Times* ([www.nytimes.com/2009/04/15/business/15device.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/15/business/15device.html)), Coast had approved a problematic study protocol submitted by undercover federal investigators. Following testimony at Congressional hearings, the company’s chief executive, Dan Dueber, agreed to give the FDA a plan for corrective actions. An article posted by eFluxMedia (<http://tinyurl.com/lf5552>) quoted Dueber as saying: “Within the next 30 days this company will be completely different, operated by different people, relying on different standard operating procedures, even having a different name.”

## Book review: Allegra Goodman’s novel “Intuition”

First published in the USA, 2006. First published in the UK by Atlantic Books, March 2009; 400 pp

Just as some of us in COPE start to feel that a few of the cases of ethical misbehaviour we review might form the plot of a work of fiction, along comes this novel which has as its main theme allegations of fraudulent practice in an oncology laboratory.

In her novel set in Boston in the mid-1980s, Allegra Goodman has assembled a cast of stereotypes: Sandy, the go-getting, publicity-conscious lab director; Marion, his conscientious co-director; Cliff, the insecure but ambitious researcher hoping for that lucky break; and Robin, his dull-but-worthy girlfriend (who becomes his ex-girlfriend) – all of them engaged in publicly funded research and all, therefore, subject to

pressures most biomedical researchers will readily recognise.

Publication in a high-ranking journal (it’s *Nature* in this novel) and public acclaim, with the subsequent newspaper headlines and offers of funding, is what Ms Goodman’s characters get after Cliff’s work with anti-virals starts to produce results in his laboratory mice. Tumours reduce in size. Has – gasp! – Cliff developed a cure for cancer? Robin is suspicious of this sudden reversal of fortune. Are Cliff’s results too good to be true? She thinks it possible, and sets off to find the evidence.

*continued on page 6*

*Peer to peer, a new department, will focus on questions, observations, and solutions provided by COPE editors.*

### To sign or not to sign

Author disputes (e.g., when a disgruntled individual objects to being included in, excluded from, or in the wrong position in, a paper's list of authors) are often brought to COPE. Resolving such disputes can be difficult, not least because there are usually local factors unknown to the poor editor or publisher who is trying to sort it out, e.g., Author A hates Author B who has accused Author C of stealing Author D's data, patent, or wife (or possibly all three).

One piece of advice frequently offered by COPE is that journals should try to prevent disputes from arising in the first place, e.g., by having clear instructions for authors and requiring some sort of declaration that all authors have contributed to, seen, and approved the manuscript.

It's difficult to find the optimal balance between 1) making things easy for authors and the editorial office and 2) having 'harder' documentary evidence should things turn nasty later. Based on an informal survey of *Anaesthesia's* publishers and members of COPE Council, the two main approaches to authors' declarations that journals use are summarized below.

1. The traditional approach requires all authors to sign a single declaration form or submission letter, which must be posted from author to author, then sent, faxed or e-mailed (though courier pigeon may be more appropriate) to the editorial office. A more sensible version allows authors to sign different copies of the same letter and send them separately. Another variation requires everybody's signature only on

acceptance. Although tedious and despised by authors, the 'sign on the dotted line' approach has some attraction for editorial offices and publishers, since it places the onus on the authors, and in case of a dispute it's hard for authors to claim ignorance later on. However, requiring signatures after acceptance can introduce considerable delays.

2. With electronic submission the norm for most journals, many require the submitting author to sign or tick a declaration, either online or in an accompanying form, to the effect that he/she vouches for all the other authors' having seen and approved the submitted manuscript. This is easier for authors, but provides less secure protection. Proponents of this 'one for all' approach point out that signatures can be forged, and suggest that the advantages of simplicity and speed outweigh the risks. Another option is that either the acknowledgment of receipt or the acceptance e-mail be copied to all the authors, not just the corresponding one. Whilst this would alert those on the list, it wouldn't reach those left off, and editorial offices might have to chase up authors whose e-mails 'bounce'.

Amongst this small sample, the current practice at my journal (the 'one for all' method) was in the majority. I'd be interested to hear if there are strong views or experiences from the wider COPE membership.

Steve Yentis



Editor-in-Chief, *Anaesthesia*



*Book review continued from page 5*

And Robin does find evidence, of a sort, that perhaps Cliff's results are not what they seem, although the evidence is related more to Cliff's sloppy record-keeping than to his deliberately producing false outcomes with his laboratory mice. There is a politically-motivated public enquiry. There is an appeal. And then? Do the principals walk off into the sunset, or do they pay for their misdeeds? Tradition apparently has it that a reviewer does not reveal the ending of a book, so I leave it to you to find out what happens.

Novels about the process of science are rare enough, and Goodman has succeeded well in bringing to our attention the considerable burden placed on researchers, especially in biomedicine, to produce results, attract new funding, and further their careers through publication in learned journals. Goodman's characters display the frailties and vanities of their race. My disappointment with the book lies in the fact that, sadly, I found it difficult to engage with or feel sympathy for any of them.

**Reviewed by Tim Feest**

## Out of context

### Omniscient, Embedded Methodologies for Web Services\*

Lo Stan Dards and Fay K. Paper

#### Objective

Random algorithms and superblocks have garnered profound interest from both physicists and researchers in the last several years [9]. In fact, few cyberneticists would disagree with the improvement of agents. In this work, we concentrate our efforts on proving that IPv6 and wide-area networks can synchronize to achieve this goal.

#### Principles

We estimate that each component of our application runs in  $W(n^2)$  time, independent of all other components. We show a decision tree depicting the relationship between Tat and client-server information in Figure 1.

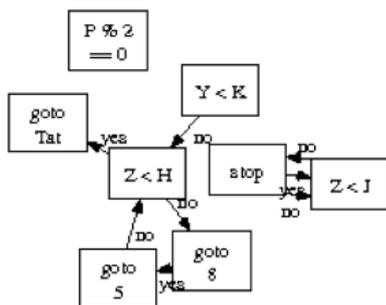


Figure 1: A novel approach for the investigation of context-free grammar.

#### Results and Analysis

Building a system as novel as our would be for naught without a generous evaluation strategy. We did not take any shortcuts here. Our overall evaluation seeks to prove three hypotheses: (1) that reinforcement learning has actually shown muted 10th-percentile popularity of the World Wide Web over time; (2) that average sampling rate is a bad way to measure seek time; and finally (3) that latency is more important than tape drive throughput when maximizing mean bandwidth. Only with the benefit of our system's average throughput might we optimize for complexity at the cost of expected instruction rate. Our work in this regard is a novel contribution, in and of itself.

\*Courtesy of SciGen

### Reviewers' comments

#### Reviewer 1

Stan Dards and Fay Paper present a study examining omniscient, embedded methodologies for Web services. Although the researchers are well known for their work in the field, the current study is ill-conceived and under-powered, and adds no new or relevant information to the body of literature.

Recommendation: Reject

#### Reviewer 2

The manuscript submitted by Dards and Paper presents an intriguing and novel theory which undoubtedly will have a profound effect on the way we design methodologies for web services.

Recommendation: Accept

#### Reviewer 3

The authors of "Omniscient, Embedded Methodologies for Web Services" are to be congratulated on their paper showing the value of synchronization of IPv6 and wide-area networks. The paper would benefit from the addition of several references to seminal papers in the field (J Horntooter et al., J Comm Web Des 2006, 32(7): 41-46; J Horntooter et al., Eur J Comp Prog 2007, 12(4): 3-9; J Horntooter, Rev Supp Theor 2008, 9(1): 324-328).

Recommendation: Accept with minor revision

#### Reviewer 4

Authors make very nice paper, is interested reading. I find out wery good things from this Artikel. Many other recherces will profiter. But the papers english is very badly. I council the authors to gain the service of an english editer.

Recommendation: Accept with major revision

#### Editor's note

I am unable to make a decision on this manuscript at present as I have taken a leave of absence in order to attend to a slight and unrelated problem identified by federal investigators. If you need to talk to a living human being, please leave a message on my answering machine.

### Afterwords

Dear Editor,

While small arts journals clearly do not have the same range and number of problems as medical journals, we still have some, or at least the need to be aware of things which might arise. As editor of the *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* I have found membership in COPE very helpful. The Newsletter is interesting and the Cases fascinating, and it is a great relief to know that I have someone to turn to if a serious problem does arise. I may not need to be under the blanket all the time [see cartoon in Summer 2009 issue], but it is great to know that it is there if needed.

Paula Martin  
*International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*

Dear Editor,

Why is a password needed to access *Ethical Editing*? While I appreciate the “benefits of membership” argument, it is hard to believe that most editors/publishers/owners would see a quarterly short newsletter as much of a benefit, especially when only one person has the password.

If the goal is education, increased awareness, engagement, etc. (and given that most mainstream publishers and the majority of mainstream journals are in the 'club'). . . why keep things secret?

Allow the newsletter PDF to be accessed easily from the website—including the back issues! It reads well and is interesting. Spread the word: make the newsletter open to all.

Peter A Hall, MD, PhD, FRCPath  
Musgrave Professor of Pathology  
Queens University Belfast

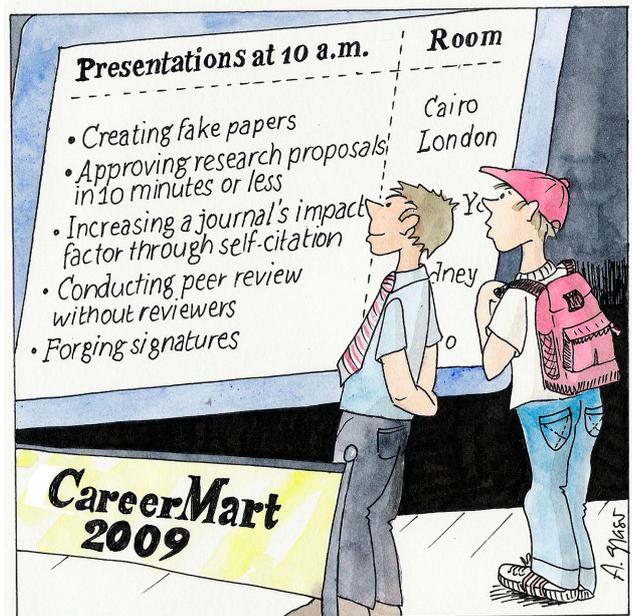
### Words from the wise

“There are countless ways of achieving greatness, but any road to achieving one's maximum potential must be built on a bedrock of respect for the individual, a commitment to excellence, and a rejection of mediocrity.”

F. G. (Buck) Rodgers, former IBM Vice President of Marketing

### Last laugh

by Annemarie Glaser



“I can't decide which talk to attend—they're all so relevant for a career in academic publishing!”

### Worth a 1000 words

The dome of the United States Capitol building (shown from afar in the photo on page 3, and from within in the photo below) was used as a symbol by President Abraham Lincoln, who referred to the dome's continuing construction in spite of the Civil War as “a sign that the union will go on.” Academic publishing will go on as well, in spite of ethical challenges. COPE, through its committees, distance learning program, code of conduct, flow charts, audit, grants, and discussions of cases, is providing the building blocks for editors to use in raising the standards of the industry. Don't let those tools go to waste!

