

BIOMEDICAL POST-DOCTORAL COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

Editor-in-Chief: Tim Connelly (connelly.tim@gmail.com)
Co-Editors: Ken Wannemacher, Allison Beal

Visit our [blog](#) to view old issues and articles as well as to comment on articles <http://bpcnewsletter.wordpress.com/>

Post-Doc Happy Hour
Friday, July 6th
City Tap House
3925 Walnut St.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Ken Wannemacher on American Journal Experts	1
Bethany Brookshire on PhDs and Welfare	2
Morgan Reuter on Science Education Academy	3
Tim Connelly on great dive bars	4

Gaining editing experience with American Journal Experts

By Ken Wannemacher
Ken.wannemacher@gmail.com

I was aimlessly exploring on LinkedIn earlier this year when I saw that a connection of a connection was a contract editor for American Journal Experts (AJE). As I am interested in careers in writing and editing, I did a quick Google search and learned that [AJE](#) is a company that specializes in helping non-native English speakers prepare their manuscripts for publication by providing editorial services and peer-reviewed comments. While AJE is based in Durham, NC, much of their work is done by remote contract editors/reviewers located throughout the U.S. All contract employees are working towards or have an advanced degree and have an affiliation (past or present) with an elite research institution; Penn is one of the top 25 universities specified by AJE. I have been a contract editor for the past 3 months and it has been a great experience thus far.

In my opinion, the best part about being an editor at AJE is the flexibility. Editors are able to choose their areas of study (i.e., biochemistry, cardiovascular biology, etc.) and set their own workload, which is defined as the number of 6000-word manuscripts you are willing to edit per week (minimum of 1). In addition, editors are able to make themselves unavailable to receive any assignments if they are particularly busy and can change their status back to "available" when their schedule permits. When an editor is available and is assigned a document, they must accept or reject the assignment within 12 hours. However, AJE expects that if an editor is available and their workload has not been met, they will accept any assignments given to them within their specified area(s) of study, although exceptions can be made for extenuating circumstances. If the editor accepts the assignment, they download the manuscript as a Word document, make changes using track changes and upload the file back to AJE. The turnaround time for a manuscript is usually 72 hours from the time it is assigned. All submitted edits are reviewed by a managing editor prior to delivery to the author. Managing editors provide feedback to the editors to help them improve their editing skills. Editors are paid

a flat rate based on the length of the assigned manuscript (i.e., 1501-3500 words pay \$30, 3501-6000 words pay \$40, etc.)

While my experience with AJE has been positive overall, there are aspects of the job that are challenging. Because the manuscripts are written by non-native English speakers, they can often be very difficult to decipher, which makes it even more arduous to meet the 72 hour deadline. As a new editor, it takes me a relatively long time (about 6-8 hours for a 6000-word manuscript) to edit a manuscript to be in accordance with the AJE style guide (a document that clearly defines what an editor should and should not edit); as a result, the compensation, if considered on an hourly rate, is not very competitive. However, I joined AJE to improve my editing and my writing skills; therefore, money is not my prime motivation and is simply icing on the cake.

In addition to the benefits that I've outlined above, working at AJE can show potential future employers that you are interested in careers in writing and editing. When transitioning to a career outside of the lab, you will undoubtedly be asked why you want to leave the bench. By taking the initiative to seek out opportunities to improve your skills as a writer/editor, employers will be convinced that you are sincerely interested in a career in writing and editing and that you are not simply seeking any alternative because the academic job market is dismal (See Bethany Brookshire's article in this issue). Working at AJE can also highlight the ability to meet deadlines, a skill that is highly coveted by employers in many professions (especially in medical writing). Tangible evidence for such ability may be lacking for postdocs in an academic setting where many deadlines are flexible.

If you are interested in journal editing or medical and/or technical writing, working for AJE is a great opportunity to build valuable experience. According to their website, [AJE is currently looking for additional contract editors \(<https://careers.journalexperts.com>\)](#).

From Grad School to Welfare?

By Bethany Brookshire
bbroo@mail.med.upenn.edu

“The Ph.D now comes with food stamps”, the title of a recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, seems to speak to the worst fears of those of us about to head out on the job market. The article talks to several PhDs, mostly in the humanities, who have been forced onto food stamps and welfare, unable to get by and support their families as they struggle onward in adjunct positions. While the current number of PhDs receiving public assistance is relatively low at 360,000 (1.6% of people with a masters degree or higher), it’s still a sobering thought. Many of us face piles of student loans from our undergraduate education, and/or further debt in the form of cost-of-living loans required to help our families make it on small grad student or post-doc salaries. The worries lurk in the back of our minds: What if we can’t get a position? What if we take post-doc after post-doc? What if, some day, that’s us?

The piece itself created a surge of commentary in academic circles. Several [blogs](#) have begun hosting personal accounts of academics living on the edge. The stories are harrowing, full of people who do good work and have a deep desire to work in their field, but who are stuck in adjunct positions, unable to find full time, tenure-track jobs, and unable to find work outside of academia. The [Chronicle forums](#) are filled with potential fixes, from cutting grad programs to training grad students to teach high school.

While none of us were naïve or egotistical enough to believe that a PhD assured us a place in academia, most of us at least thought there’d be a decent paying job at the end of the line. Some people blame the supposed “glut” of PhDs competing for a dwindling number of tenure-track faculty positions. But in biomedical science, this does not appear to be the case. Yes, there are more PhDs than faculty positions, but there are employment opportunities outside of academia. Most of the worries about underemployment of PhDs appear to be concentrated in teaching rather than research, where full time tenure-track positions get phased out in favor of adjuncts who are paid by the class at very low rates and receive no benefits. Universities have realized that money can be saved by hiring faculty to adjunct as opposed to full time positions; this results in PhDs who end up teaching at several institutions at once merely to make a living wage.

In a time of increased budget cuts, adjuncts are becoming the standard, rather than the exception. And while departmental faculty may wish to hire more full-time tenure-track faculty, they are often hamstrung by administrators who are looking to save money wherever possible. Ironically, universities are unwilling to cut their graduate enrollments. Graduate students are essential for

Upcoming Events:

Saturday, June 18, 2012-Hike the Wissahickon Valley with the BPC, Meet at Wissahickon Transfer Center, Ridge Ave, Roxborough/Manayunk
Thursday, July 12, 2012-Project Management Seminar, BRB 0251
Tuesday, July 24, 2012-BPC Vendor Fair, BRB Auditorium and Lobby

the function of research labs and are often needed to TA courses. Furthermore, the number of PhD degrees granted gives a university both prestige and years of tuition revenue. But more graduate students mean more young PhDs entering the market, trained only in academia and unprepared for life outside the ivory tower. The increasing competitiveness of tenure-track positions then results in young PhDs pursuing extra post-docs, adding up to many extra years in limbo trying to qualify for a tenure-track position.

But what can be done? Some suggest cutting graduate programs, and others suggest forcing universities to increase full-time faculty positions. But it appears that these may not be enough and that the best options may be outside of academia all together. This makes programs offering training for “alternative” careers essential. When the majority of PhDs are not able to find an academic position, “alternative” careers become mainstream. But while some training can be administered through workshops, other issues remain. Many professors are reluctant to train graduate students or post-docs who do not seem inclined to pursue academic careers, and those that are more open-minded often lack the skills needed to mentor these students effectively. Most professors in academia have never had to work outside of it, and may not know the first thing about helping a student succeed in the job market. Universities may have to make a concerted effort to train graduate students and post-docs in transferable job skills; the programs offered by the Biomedical Postdoctoral Programs are a good start.

Regardless of the approach, it’s clear that things have to change. The numbers of PhDs on public assistance is still small, but with increased reliance on adjunct positions, the ever-higher bar for the dwindling faculty jobs, and ballooning student loans, the numbers will only increase. Developing the skills to pursue a job outside of academia may be our saving grace.

Contract Reminder!

Postdocs are on one-year contracts. Please initiate a conversation with your PI if you're within 3 months of termination about whether your contract will be renewed and under what circumstances.

Calling Volunteers!

I scream, you scream, we all scream for SCIENCE!

By Morgan Reuter
mreuter@mail.med.upenn.edu

Do you love science? I know I do. Yes, I feel burned-out by failed experiments. Yes, I get discouraged when projects don't progress fast enough. But, I still love science. My interest in science started when I was a child. Mr. Wizard's World and Bill Nye the Science Guy were two of my favorite shows; I planned my own "science experiments" in my family's kitchen (much to my mother's dismay); and my school hosted Science Days and took us to museums on field trips. Looking back, I see how fortunate I was that my school district had enough funding for these excellent activities.

Unfortunately, the city of Philadelphia contains many public schools that are underserved. The children that attend these schools are excited to learn, but too many of the schools do not have enough funding to maintain a strong science curriculum or have enough staff to give focused periods of attention to every child. Two members of the University of Pennsylvania community, Danielle Haney and Jay Gardner, founded a fantastic organization called [Science Education Academy \(SEA\)](#) in 2008 to help support the schools' science education and to share their love of science with the local community. SEA is a community partnership between White Rock Baptist Church and Ernest E. Just Biomedical Society at the University of Pennsylvania, and was created to supplement science education for children in Philadelphia's underserved school districts. Since its inception, SEA has grown to an enrollment of 30 children and 25 volunteers.

SEA is held on Saturday mornings from 9:00am-11:30am, October through May, and consists of 7 week modules focused on various aspects of science. Examples of lesson topics include: chemistry, plants and insects, rocks and minerals, and weather. Each week, scientific professionals, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows gather to teach these concepts to second through fifth-grade students. They stimulate students' curiosity using fun, hands-on experiments based on the scientific method. Additionally, SEA helps fourth- through sixth-grade students participate in the George Washington Carver Regional Science Fair. The SEA children have been very successful at this science fair, and many have received awards for their projects. Furthermore, SEA hosts special presentations by science experts from places like the Academy of Natural Sciences and The Franklin Institute, and organizes field trips to local arboretums and museums during the summer months.

This year, SEA is sponsoring its first large-scale summer event, the Community Research Carnival. The Carnival will be held on Saturday, July 21 from 11:30am-3pm at the [White Rock Baptist Church gymnasium](#) at 5240 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA. The Carnival is geared towards children in kindergarten through the sixth grade. Children and their families will be able to participate in scientific experiments and attend scientific presentations from local experts that are geared towards the general public. The Community Research Carnival's goal is to get children interested in, and excited about, science. With an anticipated turnout of 50-100 kids and their families, this event promises to be full of energy and enthusiasm. If you are interested in participating in the Community Research Carnival, SEA is actively recruiting volunteers to give presentations, run experiments, or help with setup/tear down. If you are interested in participating in the Community Research Carnival, or any of these programs, please email SEA at sea.philly2008@gmail.com to volunteer and learn more about how you can help.

Join the Biomedical Postdoctoral Council!

By joining you:

1. Develop initiatives and programs to enhance the postdoctoral experience at Penn.
2. Cultivate leadership skills and "soft skills" that enhance your marketability.
3. Meet and network with other postdocs in different fields throughout the university.

Meetings are held on the first Monday of each month at 5:00 and are open to all postdocs. Please join us! We are currently seeking chairs for:

- 1) [Foreign National Committee](#)
- 2) [Environmental](#)
- 3) [Community Service](#)

Council members will assist chairs in new positions. Participation doesn't require a lot of time and newer postdocs are welcome.

For more information, please visit our website: www.med.upenn.edu/bpc or email us: pcouncil@mail.med.upenn.edu

WRITERS WANTED

Do you want to hone your writing skills? Or do you have something to say that is important to the postdoc experience?

We're recruiting writers for the newsletter. If interested contact Tim Connelly (connelly.tim@gmail.com).

Are you new to Philadelphia or are you looking for something new to do?

This section is a new addition to the newsletter. In each issue we will highlight various bars, restaurants, and things to do around Philly. This time we are highlighting great dive bars in various areas of the city.

Great Philly Dive Bars

By **Tim Connelly**
connelly.tim@gmail.com

Krupa's (27th and Brown, Fairmount)

I will miss living near Krupa's for its great prices (Yuengling pints \$2.25, well drinks \$2.50. Even a Jack/Captain & Coke is less than \$4), eccentric sports fans, and friendly neighborhood bartenders. It does have drawbacks: it is small (three people is literally a crowd), there is no lock on the bathroom door, and the paper towels sit atop an arcade game. About once per week, though, Krupa's is inexplicably the place to go in Fairmount, complete with young singles dressed to the nines and crowds of 20 or more in a space meant for a small family. Speaking of families, I've seen several people bring their children there on an afternoon. I've also seen a bachelorette party walk in, give a collective "Nope!" and walk out. A crowd usually gathers on Friday, after Art After 5 at the Art Museum lets out, and mingles with the sports fans pounding the bar and shouting at the TV. It is Fairmount's box of chocolates.

Bob and Barbara's (15th and South St, Center City)

This is the Pat's and Geno's of Philly dive bars. They proudly advertise the "City Special," which is a shot of Jim Beam and a PBR can for \$3.50 (apparently there are multiple locations in the city that offer this. I imagine you know immediately when you're in one). This place has live jazz music with no cover most nights, a drag show on Thursdays, and a cocktail-table Ms. Pacman machine in the corner. Everything you need for a good time. Drawbacks: it might be too well-known to still be considered authentic - if you're the type of person that hates bands once they get popular, Bob and Barbara's might not be for you. There are also rumors of poor service, but they were no better or worse than most places while I was there.

Locust Bar (10th and Locust, Center City)

As post-docs, you've probably at some point been forced to listen to a low hum for so long you can't even hear it anymore. Then suddenly the hum stops, and you're both relieved but also kind of miss it. This is the same feeling I get after spending a couple hours in the dark, gritty Locust Bar, and then stepping out into bright fresh air. People here seem very friendly, like they're constantly poised to blurt out to you anything

from the circumstances of their sister's recent surgery to that thing the neighbor did. \$10 pitchers of Yuengling and some good specials help the conversations. Drawbacks: these days it's jarring when I walk into a bar and somebody is smoking. Every single one of the booths had pretty large slashes in the upholstery. And if it has air conditioning, they've been stingy with it while I've been there. Come to think of it, when considering dive bars, these are all probably pluses.

Brownie's Irish Pub (2nd and Chestnut, Old City)

OK. This one doesn't qualify as "great." But they actually have a few decent beers on tap, and a surprisingly well-felted, level pool table upstairs. A few regulars followed us up for a sporting match (we didn't even rate as good enough to play for drinks). Drawbacks: again, smoking in bars has become a bit jarring. Also, there were hints that certain tabs may have been padded, which for me is red flag (hence the downgrade from great). However, their "classic dive bar" atmosphere is bona-fide.

Free Editing Services for the Penn Community

Penn Post-doc Editors' Association
http://www.med.upenn.edu/bpc/editors_club.shtml

- **Who are we?**
The Penn Postdoc Editors Association is a volunteer group of postdocs who are interested in the editing/writing career path and are dedicated to helping the Penn community.
- **How can we help you?**
We provide editing of a variety of different types of documents, including manuscripts, abstracts, grant proposals, and slides/posters for meetings.
- **How much does the service cost?**
Absolutely nothing. Our services are completely free.

Questions?

Please visit our website for more information:
www.med.upenn.edu/bpc/editors_club.shtml

Or email the editor-in-chief to discuss your needs:
editor@mail.med.upenn.edu