New Horizons 2018: Science Behind the Headlines

This April, after the CASW board completed its annual meeting in Washington, D.C., I headed over to the bustling campus of George Washington University. In October, GW will host ScienceWriters2018, the conference that combines CASW’s New Horizons in Science briefings with the annual workshop program of the National Association of Science Writers.

Collaborating with a host allows CASW to leverage the strengths of a research institution to help science writers discover unexpected stories, drawing on both local experts and speakers invited from elsewhere. At Northern Arizona University, science writers learned how anthropologists study human trafficking through detritus in the Arizona desert. In North Carolina, we closely explored the health impacts of large-scale animal agriculture.

Meeting in the nation’s capital will give this year’s meeting an extra dose of social and political relevance. Here’s a glimpse at a few of the topics that will be discussed by traveling speakers and local faculty:

—**Disruptive Technologies.** Have you noticed that many of 2018’s hot-button public issues have foundations in science or technology? “Bots” made smarter by machine learning can leverage vast troves of human data to influence elections. Self-driving vehicles and genome editing are barreling ahead faster than the social debate about how we will use them. New, possibly revolutionary forms of energy and computing are being realized in the lab. We hope our program will give science writers the tools to help society keep up with rapid change.

—**Slavery, Violence, Society and Health.** Archaeologists and anthropologists are often the
bearers of discomfiting news about our species. At New Horizons researchers will share emerging findings about the social forces that stymie public-health efforts in blighted urban neighborhoods and the role of slavery in shaping the modern world.

—Iissues at the Interface of Science and Science Writing. Each year CASW puts scientists and science writers on stage together for dialogues aimed at improving the quality of science news reaching the public. This year we will reflect on the lessons from the early years of human embryonic stem cell research: Did the media get the story right? Did scientists’ predictions and caveats hit the mark? Other sessions will look at human space exploration since the Apollo program, conflicts over the Amazon, and the special challenges of communicating topics in quantum physics.

Preparation of this year’s briefings is taking place amid a sense of urgency about the public communication of science. Our programs benefit from excellent and committed scientist-presenters. New Horizons in Science 2018: be there!

Gratefully,
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Rosalind Reid
Executive Director
Council for the Advancement of Science Writing

WCSJ2017 partners launch international program fund

The organizers of the 10th World Conference of Science Journalists are pleased to announce plans for a suite of activities to extend the impact of the October 2017 conference in San Francisco by strengthening training, networking, and knowledge-sharing among science journalists worldwide.

A new fund, the WCSJ International Program Fund, has been established by the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing in partnership with the National Association of Science Writers to support these efforts through the use of generous donations from WCSJ2017 conference sponsors. The funds were made available through judicious management of conference costs that resulted in savings of more than 10% of the conference budget. In
keeping with the wishes of WCSJ2017 sponsors and the organizers, these funds will be used to support science journalism through post-conference activities organized by the partners and coordinated with the World Federation of Science Journalists.

Roughly half of these conference proceeds were returned to the WFSJ, CASW and NASW in the form of program support and to recoup costs incurred during the planning and production of WCSJ2017. Each of the three organizations invested significant staff time and other resources to produce the conference. The remaining proceeds will be managed by the organizing partners to support important new initiatives intended to continue building connections between US and international science journalists in the years to come.

“Enormous staff and volunteer effort went into making sure travel, hospitality, logistics and programming for WCSJ2017 were covered largely by sponsorships so that we could enable the broadest possible participation, providing a record number of travel fellowships and keeping registration fees below past conferences,” said Cristine Russell, co-chair of the WCSJ2017 Organizing Committee. “Many of our sponsors did not want to support only the conference; they wanted the conference to have a lasting impact on global science journalism. To our donors we can now say ‘yes, we can do that!’ We are excited to be able to leverage our savings to give WCSJ2017 that extra impact.”

“We met our fundraising goals, and we were thrilled at the support of an array of sponsors who all embraced science journalism as extraordinarily important in the 21st century. In the end, we were able to reduce costs through NASW’s skillful management, the work of a large cadre of volunteers, the funded travelers who shared rooms and found other sources of support, and the donated facilities and support of generous hosts including UC San Francisco and UC Berkeley,” Russell said.

“We all congratulate the executive directors of NASW and CASW, Tinsley Davis and Rosalind Reid respectively, for their extraordinary management, which made the new initiatives possible,” said Ron Winslow, co-chair of the WCSJ2017 Organizing Committee. “And thanks to the generosity and commitment of our sponsors, we have an unprecedented opportunity to build on the spirit, energy and ideas generated in San Francisco. This is a huge benefit for science journalism around the globe.”

Among the activities intended to be supported by the new international fund are: translation of WCSJ2017 session videos to Spanish and French; sustained development of the regional network of Latin American and Caribbean science journalists launched at WCSJ2017; knowledge transfer to future conference hosts; a joint diversity initiative; support for efforts to locate a future conference in a developing country; future conference travel grants; and a networking platform. A steering committee of WCSJ2017 organizers and leaders of partner organizations will provide advice on the management and use of the fund.

The organizers of WCSJ2017 are grateful to WFSJ for its key role in conference fundraising and workshop programming, as well as the hosts and sponsors whose support made possible not only the conference but the follow-on activities, first among them WCSJ2017’s Diamond Sponsor, Johnson & Johnson Innovation, and host universities, UC Berkeley and UC San Francisco. The amount of funds available for programs will be known when the conference books are closed and a final report issued in coming weeks.
In the Spotlight: Taylor/Blakeslee Fellows

Five women with backgrounds ranging from astronomy, mathematics and biology to investigative journalism and film have been awarded the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing's prestigious Taylor/Blakeslee University Fellowships supporting graduate study in science writing.

The Fellows will each receive a $5,000 award for the 2018-19 academic year, bringing to 161 the number of science writers aided by CASW’s graduate fellowships since 1981.

Chosen from a field of 28 outstanding applicants were:

**Erika Carlson** ([@erikakcarlson](https://twitter.com/erikakcarlson)). Carlson, who will finish her master’s degree in astronomy at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in May, earned her bachelor’s degree in physics at Pomona College in 2015. “I want to write compelling, multifaceted feature stories that capture the human aspects of science, that touch my readers and stay with them in some way,” she told the fellowship judges. Interested in writing science news as well as magazine features, Carlson will enter the science communication graduate program at the University of California at Santa Cruz in the fall.

**Susan D’Agostino** ([@susan_dagostino](https://twitter.com/susan_dagostino)) was a mathematics professor at Southern New Hampshire University and has served on the New Hampshire Governor’s STEM Education Task Force. She was motivated to pursue science writing after learning about and managing a medical condition she experienced and is particularly interested in the interplay between medicine and society. “As part of my coursework, I am eager to engage with doctors, biomedical researchers, and medical journalists at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore for a medical writing residency called Medicine in Action,” she said. D’Agostino has a doctorate in mathematics from Dartmouth College, an MFA in nonfiction from Southern New Hampshire University, a master’s in teaching mathematics from Smith College and a bachelor’s in anthropology from Bard College. She begins her medical writing residency this summer and the science writing graduate program at Johns Hopkins University in the fall.
Eva Frederick (@evacharlesanna) graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 2017 with bachelor’s degrees in biology and journalism. As a student she worked in a lab studying the bacteria living in the guts of honeybees and wrote for The Daily Texan, UT’s student newspaper. She also served as The Texan’s science and technology editor and managing editor. Frederick is currently teaching children about native plants at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin. “Through a career as a science journalist I want to encourage scientific literacy in people of all walks of life,” she said. “I want to promote the ability to understand and contextualize science principles and concepts, because this is invaluable to a healthy, informed society.” She plans to enroll in the graduate program in science writing at MIT.

Susie Neilson (@susieneilson). After graduating from Northwestern in 2015, Neilson published stories in Nautilus, Newsweek, and The New Yorker on topics ranging from the psychological impact of wearing a prison uniform to the drug-like benefits of noise. “I aim to be a journalist who uses science to produce impactful, institution-challenging stories,” she said. “In particular I want to document the impact that unbridled growth and consumerism has on the environment and public health.” Currently pursuing a master’s in journalism at UC Berkeley, she will spend the summer completing an internship with the science investigation team at the Center for Investigative Reporting.

Emily Pontecorvo (@emilypont) is a writer and multimedia producer based in New York City. She graduated from Wesleyan University in 2011 with a degree in film and worked in the film industry for five years before deciding to pivot to journalism. As a science writer, she hopes to advance public literacy around environmental issues and climate change. “I believe that narrative is the best tool we have to teach and to learn, to challenge the most firmly held beliefs and inspire change,” she told the judges. She is currently a podcast producer at Gizmodo and begins the graduate program in science writing at MIT this fall.

CASW’s graduate fellowships are underwritten by a grant from The Brinson Foundation, a Chicago-based philanthropic organization. They honor the late Rennie Taylor and Alton Blakeslee, science writer and science editor respectively for the Associated Press. More information may be found on this page.
the public through leadership of CASW and decades-long service on its board. Barbara J. Culliton, of Washington, DC, and Joann E. Rodgers, of Owings Mills, Maryland, were named CASW Fellows on April 20 as the 58-year-old organization gathered for its annual business meeting.

Culliton (pictured below) and Rodgers (shown above receiving her certificate from President Alan Boyle) served as back-to-back presidents of the National Association of Science Writers (NASW) and CASW. Culliton retired from the CASW board in 2014 after 38 years as a member and officer; Rodgers stepped down at the 2018 meeting after 41 years on the board, including multiple officer roles.

Culliton has been a writer, editor and teacher throughout her distinguished career, including serving at Science as correspondent at large, news editor, and news and comment editor. She also worked in international science publishing as the deputy editor of Nature, where she launched the journals Nature Genetics, Nature Structural Biology and Nature Medicine. In 1989, Culliton was elected a member of the National Academy of Medicine. She also directed the graduate writing program at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore from 1990 to 1998. Culliton is currently a scholar-in-residence at Florida State University in the College of Communication and Information. She headed NASW in 1981-82, and in 1985 became CASW’s first woman president, serving in that role for four years.

Rodgers, an award-winning science journalist, author, editor and communications consultant, served as NASW president in 1983-84, succeeding Culliton, and succeeded her also as CASW President, serving from 1989 to 1997. Rodgers directed Johns Hopkins Medicine’s science communications, media relations and public affairs division for 25 years, and later served as a faculty scholar and strategic communications adviser to the Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics. Earlier, Rodgers spent nearly two decades as a reporter and columnist for the Hearst newspapers and magazines. She is the author of seven books, including Sex: A Natural History, and has been a contributor to numerous magazines. Rodgers is also a reviewer for healthnewsreview.org, a peer-review service for health-related stories and releases.

“There can never be praise enough for these two remarkable women and their extraordinary contributions and unrelenting labors on behalf of CASW during their decades-long service as board members,” said CASW Executive Director Emeritus Ben Patrusky. “Under their brilliant leadership and sway, CASW continued to make great strides in its never-ending search for new opportunities to address the changing needs of its core constituency, the growing community of science writers and the public it serves.”
“It was a pleasure to work with both Joann and Barbara from early in my science-writing career, as mentors, colleagues and friends,” said Harvard Kennedy School fellow Cristine Russell, also a former president of NASW and CASW. “They helped clear the way for other women in American science writing, which has been more equal than many other fields of journalism.” She noted that Culliton and Rodgers served NASW at a difficult time, helping to pull the dues-based membership organization back from near-bankruptcy and put it on stronger financial footing. “We sat around Joann’s kitchen table, trying to right the ship after belt-tightening and cutting back on staff,” said Russell.

Another memorable moment was when Culliton, on behalf of NASW, and the San Francisco Chronicle’s David Perlman, then president of CASW, led a delegation of U.S. science writers that visited China in 1979 under the aegis of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

With the addition of Culliton and Rodgers, CASW’s distinguished Fellows total only four, including Perlman, “the dean of American science journalism,” and the late Earl Ubell, the first president of CASW.

On the CASW Board

At April’s annual meeting, CASW celebrated the contributions of Joann Rodgers (recognized as a CASW Fellow, see above) and Tom Siegfried as they retired after long service as directors and officers of CASW. Siegfried, who served as both secretary and treasurer during two decades on the board, recently retired from Science News and is at work on a book on multiple universes. We thanked Charlie Petit for six years of service as board secretary (following a similar tenure as vice president) and welcomed Betsy Mason to this role. Bravo!

SAVE THE DATE! October 12-16, Washington, D.C.

Join us in Washington, D.C., for professional development workshops developed by the National Association of Science Writers, the 56th Annual New Horizons in Science briefings on research presented by CASW, and lab tours and science field trips organized by George Washington University and its hosting partners. Registration opens in August 2018.

Science Writers 2018