Next chapters

One of the great pleasures of our work at CASW is reading the life stories of early-career science writers—tales that are often poignant and beautifully told—in the many applications we receive for graduate fellowships and the Clark/Payne Award.

We read about what propelled an applicant toward science writing: a childhood mentor, a family or personal health crisis, an encounter with nature, exposure to an environmental horror. We learn of the joy that writers find in sharing science with audiences, and their conviction that they can make a difference in the world.

We are privileged to offer fellowships and awards that help these writers take the next step in their careers.

Often, though, we wish we could give young journalists something more, something like the traditional newsroom that shaped careers a generation ago—a chance to hone one’s skills alongside terrific senior reporters under the eye of fierce and principled editors armed with sharp pencils.

Graduate training in science writing includes important elements of that crucible: high standards and tough editing along with expert training in journalism practice, law and ethics. Our Taylor/Blakeslee fellowships, featured in this issue, help talented students access those programs.

We know we can do more. With support from the Brinson Foundation, we are experimenting with mentored project fellowships, and we recently announced the first two of these. In each case, a former Taylor/Blakeslee Fellow who is a senior science journalist will act as mentor for an independent reporting project proposed by a recent Fellow, providing nuts-and-bolts advice drawn from long experience.

Freelancing and nontraditional working arrangements will continue to be the norm in the online age. As newsrooms continue to shrink and disappear, how will one generation transmit to the next the knowledge and wisdom gained from a career in science journalism? We hope a mentored fellowship is part of the answer for our Fellows.

Hopefully,
Ros
Rosalind Reid
Executive Director
Author, author, CASW board member!

Readers are demanding more intelligent nonfiction books, according to the trade publication The Bookseller. Alex Preston writes in The Guardian, “These uncertain times have seen a renewed interest in serious nonfiction, as people try to make sense of an unstable world.”

Four CASW board members are at the forefront of this shift in the nonfiction book market with newly published titles about science.

We asked Christie Aschwanden, Deborah Blum, Thomas Lin and Betsy Mason what drives their readers’ interest in science and why books by science writers appeal to publishers. All four, who have published books within the last year, responded enthusiastically to our questions.

Showcase: Is there a gender bias in science writing awards?

Shannon Hall responds to this question in a blog post for Showcase, a CASW program and website that highlights award-winning science journalism.

It’s sometimes said that men are more likely than women to win prestigious awards in science writing. So we decided to take a look at the evidence supporting that statement by tallying the last 10 years’ worth of winners of the eight major science journalism awards we consider for Showcase.

We found no clear gender bias — at least not overall. Instead, women received 47 percent of the awards while men received 53 percent.

When you look at individual awards, on the other hand, it’s easy to find differences in gender balance.

In the Spotlight: Taylor/Blakeslee Fellows Two Ways

2019-20 Taylor/Blakeslee Fellows combine passions for science, narrative and a better world

Six talented journalists with experience in research, writing and policy have been awarded prestigious Taylor/Blakeslee University Fellowships from the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing to support graduate training in science writing.
Four Fellows will each receive a $5,000 award for the 2019-20 academic year. Two more will receive one-semester awards of $2,500, bringing to 167 the number of science writers aided by CASW’s graduate fellowships since 1981.

The six Fellows were chosen from the field of 27 outstanding applicants.

Paired Fellows selected for first mentored science journalism project grants

Two recent Taylor/Blakeslee Graduate Fellows have been awarded CASW’s first Taylor/Blakeslee Mentored Science Journalism Project Fellowships, small grants for independent reporting projects that come with the support of a senior journalist—a previous Fellow—as mentor.

The grants are designed to help early-career science journalists gain important experience by organizing and executing freelance projects at a time when publishers are rarely able to cover the full cost of field reporting. The mentoring component is intended to help ensure the success of the project and also to build a cross-generational scaffold of mentoring within the community of Taylor/Blakeslee Fellows.

The project grants are funded by the Chicago-based Brinson Foundation, which provides underwriting for the Taylor/Blakeslee Graduate Fellowships.

The 2019 Taylor/Blakeslee Mentored Science Journalism Project pairs are: Susie Neilson, Fellow and Phil McKenna, mentor; and Joshua Sokol, Fellow and Bryn Nelson, mentor.

ComSciCon at ScienceWriters2019

CASW is excited to partner with the students behind ComSciCon—a workshop focused on communicating science organized by graduate students for graduate students—to bring a ComSciCon workshop to ScienceWriters2019.

ComSciCon-SciWri19 is the second time ComSciCon and CASW will join forces to give students an opportunity to build their experience through writing and interactions with professional science writers.