

From Germany, freelancer Alexander Hellemans: "I wrote a news article for *Science* about the use of chaos to encrypt messages, an experiment performed in France. A few days later I got a phone call from a researcher at Georgia Tech who worked in the same area, and he said 'I really liked your article; I'm going to call the guy you wrote about.' A few months later he called again and told me that Georgia Tech and the [French lab] had decided to set up a joint laboratory."

Brighton, Mass., freelancer Noelle Swan: "I'm just starting out, so I'm still celebrating small triumphs. A major milestone was sitting on the train and looking up to see that the woman sitting across the aisle from me was reading an article I had written."

MIT science writer David Chandler: "A former editor of mine was riding the elevator in a downtown office building, and overheard two janitors, in their coveralls and carrying their mops and buckets, having an animated conversation about a quite arcane story of mine, about black holes, that had run in that day's paper."

From Norway, freelancer and former newspaper reporter Nancy Bazilchuk: "I had written a five-part series on a Superfund site in Burlington, Vt. ... The most gratifying aspect was perhaps when the acting administrator for Region 1, Paul Keough, came to my newspaper to meet with our editorial board ... When he met me, Keough pulled me aside for a quick chat. His face went red and the veins in his neck popped out as said to me through clenched teeth, 'Will you PLEASE tell your READERS to STOP faxing me copies of your articles!'"

For more, read the "Best moment as a writer" thread in the NASW-Freelance archives: [bit.ly/K7qXXz](http://bit.ly/K7qXXz).

## NASW-PIO

Does a big ugly grant number belong in a press release? The National Institutes of Health apparently thinks so, according to an April NASW-PIO thread started by Pacific Northwest National Laboratory PIO Mary Beckman.

"So I just got an interesting note from someone at NIH," Beckman wrote, "who tells me NIH wants PIOs to put the grant numbers in press releases they put out. I have no idea how they plan on enforcing this—blacklisting entire institutions?—but moreover I don't understand why."

The list mostly recoiled at the idea. Typical was this reaction from Penn State PIO A'ndrea Elyse Messer: "I've never seen a newspaper story with the grant numbers in it. This is absurd."

Maybe, but then Doug Levy, public affairs director at Columbia University Medical Center, tried to convey NIH's thinking.

"NIH's new and very robust online grants index ([report.nih.gov/](http://report.nih.gov/)) searches the Internet for any mentions of NIH grants. If a news release has the NIH grant number referenced, then it will show up whenever a person looks for that research or something related. We've been including the NIH grant numbers for several months here at Columbia University Medical Center, and I've seen only positive results from doing so."

Beckman followed up by querying the NIH system for one project and was surprised by what she found: Not just details on the project, but a link to a press release about it and a "similar projects" tab.

"You know, it's only a matter of time before NIH will want to include real news stories in their database. They should call the

'news' tab something other than 'news,' since it will only be populated by releases, since those writers are the only ones they'll convince to include the grant number. I wonder if this system would work if the grant number was provided in meta-data. It would make NIH look more mysterious!"

Messer again: "Mary, that's exactly what I was thinking. We could put it in metadata, but because of the way we publish, it will never get into the actual story."

For more, including a related discussion about quoting NIH officials in press releases, see the NASW-PIO thread "NIH grants" at [bit.ly/Lnc1GS](http://bit.ly/Lnc1GS). ■



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## News From Afar

WITH 670 PARTICIPANTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD AND OVER 450 SPEAKERS, PANELISTS, AND VARIOUS PERFORMERS USING DIFFERENT PRESENTATION FORMATS, THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (PCST) TOOK PLACE IN FLORENCE, ITALY, IN APRIL, AND WAS HAILED AS A SUCCESS.

The 12th of a series of biennial meetings organized since 1989 by an international network of academics, science communicators, and science journalists, this year's conference was dedicated to "quality, honesty, and beauty in science and technology communication."

Following the opening speech by the popular icon of Italian TV science journalism Piero Angela, the presentations offered a range of questions and discussion about the basics of science communication:

- "Pus, Pest, PCST, Plus: Will our models be complementary, in competition...or simply irrelevant?" (asked Cornell University's Bruce Lewenstein)
- Historical accounts of the birth of the first hoax about the life on Mars (presented by space scientist and popularizer Giovanni Bignami, who currently heads the Italian National Institute of Astrophysics)
- The use of images for conveying complex scientific concepts in an immediate way, without distortions (presented by photographer and visual artist Felice Frankel at MIT)
- Several panels discussed issues related to the revolution underway in the field of open-access publishing, including the implications for the use of embargoed press releases.

The well-tested model of the Science Media Centers (SMC)—already operating in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, and the United Kingdom and is in various stages of development in countries such as Denmark, Italy, and the United States—was described and discussed in a very lively panel that

# NASW Members Invited to Take International Survey

by Fabio Turone

What do you have in common with your colleagues in your country and abroad? Are there differences between a science writer and a science journalist? And between each of them and a science communicator? Are there ways for sharing ideas and resources globally, maybe in search of the “kick-ass science journalism” invoked by former President of the World Federation of Science Journalists and BBC science correspondent Pallab Ghosh?

The online survey “Know Thyself Science Writer,” recently launched by the Association of Science Writers in Italy, is trying to provide answers to a few basic questions that will hopefully help better understand the needs of a profession that has been depicted as “under threat,” and needs to adapt to a changing professional landscape, and needs to resist many kinds of outside pressure.

The online questionnaire is composed by some 20 questions that explore several areas, from basic demographics to the degree of specialization, from a description of daily work to education and lifelong learning, and includes a few questions on the use of social media and online presence.

The survey was preceded and inspired by the unexpected success of a similar questionnaire aimed at science journalists and writers from Italy: it was maybe with the ancient “Gnothi seautòn” in mind that 318 Italian professionals completed the online survey. An analysis of the first 250 responses was published, in Italian, in the magazine of the Order of Professional Journalists of Lombardy, that supported the survey.



The new survey in English is still open, and aims at collecting as many responses as possible.

**NASW members are invited to take the survey at  
[tinyurl.com/sciencejourn](http://tinyurl.com/sciencejourn)**

Analysis of the final results will be publicly available.

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put together Fiona Fox, from the UK SMC (the first such center), and Morten Busch, from the Danish Experimentarium, in Copenhagen (the latest SMC), who discussed the model with Scottish microbiologist Anne Glover, the newly appointed chief scientific adviser to the European Commission (the EU’s governing body).

Fox described the way the UK SMC works—in cooperation with the international network—and recalled the recent experiences of controversial science topics hitting the headlines; scares that just a few years ago risked to spreading unscientific fears capable of surfing the front-pages for weeks are nowadays covered in a more complete and balanced way by most media, basically thanks to a better cooperation among scientists and media professionals.

The debate started to heat up after Fox stated that, thanks to the SMC, scientists are becoming more able of “setting the agenda.”

Critical questions from the audience about “scientists setting the agenda for the media” were debated at length, echoing an equally heated discussion that took place at last year’s World Conference of Science Journalists, in Doha (Qatar). There, in a panel discussion about the experience of international teamwork in the days after the Fukushima accident, the president of the Association of British Science Writers, Connie St. Louis, objected vehemently that the work of the Science Media Centers is making science journalists lazy, and even more prone to press-release-based “churnalism.”

In response, Fox explained that from her point of view this is just one way of looking at a phenomenon that existed before the SMCs and is due to the pressure for producing copy at a faster and faster pace with fewer and fewer staff and economic resources. And many in the audience agreed that even when you start from a press release you can do good science journalism, and even when it is mediated by a third party, a good relationship with trusted sources can add a lot of value. (Full disclosure by the author: I produced and moderated the panel on the SMCs, and am taking part in the exploratory effort to establish one such center in Italy).

The next PCST conference will take place in May 2014 in Salvador de Bahia,



Brazil, and will explore “Science Communication for Social Inclusion.”

## LINKS

The full program can be downloaded from:

- [pcst2014.org](http://pcst2014.org)
- [storify.com/ehauke/pcst-2012-florence](http://storify.com/ehauke/pcst-2012-florence)
- [pcst2012.org/images/BookofAbstracts.pdf](http://pcst2012.org/images/BookofAbstracts.pdf)
- [pcst2012.org/photogallery.php](http://pcst2012.org/photogallery.php)
- [pcst2012.org/podcast.php](http://pcst2012.org/podcast.php)
- [sciencemediacenter.org](http://sciencemediacenter.org) ■



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## Our Gang

NASW members made a strong showing at this year's American Society of Journalists and Authors awards, in New York City, in April. **John Moir** received the Outstanding Profile Article award for “The Chameleon,” which appeared in the *Washington Post's* Sunday magazine. **Laura Beil** received the June Roth award for Medical Journalism for her *Men's Health* piece, “Who's Spiking Your Supplements?” **Holly Tucker** won an Outstanding Book Award honorable mention in the general nonfiction category for *Blood Work: A Tale of Medicine and Murder in the Scientific Revolution*. In the awards for Reporting on a Significant Topic, **Michelle Nijhuis** won for “Crisis in the Caves,” which appeared in *Smithsonian*, and **Brendan Borrell** took an honorable mention for “The Gloucester Fish War,” which ran in *Bloomberg Business Week*. Borrell also captured the Lifestyle Narrative award for “The Great Pumpkin,” published in *Smithsonian*. Send congratulations to [john@jmoir.com](mailto:john@jmoir.com), [laura@laurabeil.com](mailto:laura@laurabeil.com), [holly.tucker@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:holly.tucker@vanderbilt.edu), [michelle@nasw.org](mailto:michelle@nasw.org), and [bborrell@nasw.org](mailto:bborrell@nasw.org).

**Beryl Lieff Benderly** reports that she and a whole band of science writers will attend Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF2012) in Dublin, Ireland, in July as Robert Bosch Stiftung (RBS) Journalism Fellows. Among them are NASW members **Steven Ashley, Sid Perkins, Neil Savage, William Schulz, and Erik Vance**. RBS is a German charitable foundation, and ESOF is the biennial pan-European meeting dedicated to scientific research and innovation. Attendees discuss new discoveries and debate the direction that research is taking in the sciences, humanities, and social sciences. Send cheers to [blbink@aol.com](mailto:blbink@aol.com), [ashley@interport.net](mailto:ashley@interport.net), [sperkins@nasw.org](mailto:sperkins@nasw.org), [nsavage@nasw.org](mailto:nsavage@nasw.org), [dcbill07@gmail.com](mailto:dcbill07@gmail.com), and [erik@erikvance.com](mailto:erik@erikvance.com).

A dozen NASW members were among those chosen to attend the inaugural University of California High-Performance AstroComputing Center Science/Engineering Journalism Boot Camp, in June. Called “Computational Astronomy: From Planets

to Cosmos,” it was the very first journalism “boot camp” on astronomy to be held on the West Coast, and focused on pioneering investigations in astronomy with a computational twist. Attendees included **Rebecca Boyle, Camille Carlisle, Charles Day, Pam Frost Gordor** (hey, that's me!), **Heather Marie Goss, Lisa Grossman, Donna Hesterman, Earle Holland, Bruce Lieberman, Angela Posada-Swafford, and Elizabeth Wilson**, with **David Perlman** as a special guest. Write to us at [beckyw31@gmail.com](mailto:beckyw31@gmail.com), [cmcarlisle@nasw.org](mailto:cmcarlisle@nasw.org), [cday@aip.org](mailto:cday@aip.org), [pfrost@nasw.org](mailto:pfrost@nasw.org), [heathergoss@gmail.com](mailto:heathergoss@gmail.com), [ligrossman@gmail.com](mailto:ligrossman@gmail.com), [donna.hesterman@gmail.com](mailto:donna.hesterman@gmail.com), [urd1234@gmail.com](mailto:urd1234@gmail.com), [bruce.lieberman@yahoo.com](mailto:bruce.lieberman@yahoo.com), [aswafford@the-beach.net](mailto:aswafford@the-beach.net), [e\\_wilson@acs.org](mailto:e_wilson@acs.org), and [dperlman@sfchronicle.com](mailto:dperlman@sfchronicle.com).

NASA Goddard Space Flight Center has contracted with **Lisa-Natalie Anjozian** for monthly earth-science features. Her first piece “The Real Story of Precipitation in the Southern Appalachian Mountains” went live in April. In it, she reported scientists' discovery of a surprising water source that maintains life in the Great Smokey Mountains. “Much of the water people counted on falls as light rain, and no one knew about it,” she wrote. Read the story at [nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/smokies.html](http://nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/smokies.html), and write to her at [lisanatalie@gmail.com](mailto:lisanatalie@gmail.com).

**Rick Asa** has taken a new job as associate director for research communications for the Center for Clinical and Translational Research (CCTS) at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine. The NIH-funded center serves as a catalyst to bring clinical research to the bedside and community, and to serve as a two-way pipeline between basic and clinical research. “I will be focusing on communications and content marketing—which used to be called writing,” he says, “to make

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

Sept. 3-6, 2012 • **Kavli Prize Science Forum**, Oslo, Norway.  
[kavlifoundation.org/kavli-prize-science-forum](http://kavlifoundation.org/kavli-prize-science-forum)

Sept. 4-7, 2012 • **International Conference on Science Communication**, Nancy, France.  
[jhc2012.eu](http://jhc2012.eu)

Oct. 3-6, 2012 • “**Crisis or Opportunity? Health in an Age of Austerity**” (European Commission forum on international health policy issues for the next half-century). Gastein, Austria.  
[ehfg.org](http://ehfg.org)

June 24-28, 2013 • **8th World Conference of Science Journalists**, Helsinki, Finland.  
[wcsj2013.org](http://wcsj2013.org)

May 5-8, 2014 • **13th PCST (Public Communication of Science and Technology) Conference**, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.  
[pcst2014.org](http://pcst2014.org)

June 21-26, 2014 • **7th ESOF (EuroScience Open Forum)**, Copenhagen, Denmark.  
[esof.eu](http://esof.eu)