Public Relations Committee

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The primary mission of the Public Relations Committee is to facilitate the purpose of the Acoustical Society of America with regard to disseminating and promoting acoustics to the general public.

Introduction

The purpose of the Acoustical Society of America (ASA), as stated in the 2015 ASA Strategic Plan,[1] is "to generate, disseminate, and promote the knowledge and practical applications of acoustics." This purpose is well served with regard to dissemination among ASA members through the Society's biannual meetings and its publications such as *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* (*JASA*) and *Acoustics Today*. The primary mission of the Public Relations Committee (PRC), however, is to facilitate the Society's purpose with regard to disseminating and promoting acoustics to the general public. Specifically, the PRC is charged with (1) recommending to the Executive Council (EC) and implementing actions that are intended to increase awareness of and interest in acoustics among the general public and policy makers; (2) cooperating with other responsible committees in promoting membership growth and retention; (3) increasing the awareness of Society activities among its members; and (4) selecting and recommending to the EC candidates for the Science Communication Awards (formerly Science Writing Awards).

These charges closely align with three of the four goals articulated in ASA's new Strategic Plan: (1) awareness of acoustics, (2) member engagement and diversity, and (3) dissemination of information and knowledge.

The PRC meets twice per year and currently consists of 21 members representing a broad spectrum of technical areas who serve three-year terms. Some activities of the PRC, such as coordinating media coverage of ASA meetings, have a long history. The recent rapid evolution of the media landscape, however, has presented the committee with both challenges and opportunities in the fulfillment of its mission.

Media Coverage of Acoustical Society of America Meetings and Publications

The ASA contracts with the Media Services arm of the American Institute for Physics (AIP) to promote the work being presented at biannual meetings. This work includes drafting and disseminating press releases that highlight specific talks; working with authors of selected abstracts to prepare lay-language papers that are made available to journalists on acoustics.org; attending each meeting and organizing on-site virtual press rooms; and coordinating media interview requests with ASA members during meetings. The selection of abstracts for press releases, lay-language papers, and the virtual press room is done in consultation with the PRC chair and the ASA chief executive. AIP media professionals involved with ASA meetings receive a standing invitation to attend PRC meetings to provide a summary of their activities and to discuss strategies for upcoming meetings.

[1]*Report of Strategic Leadership for the Future Initiative (2015) is available at acousticalsociety.org.*

The objective of publicizing ASA meetings and disseminating exciting results is a traditional one. The process by which ASA, like other scientific societies, interfaced with the media to accomplish this objective changed little throughout the latter half of the 20th century. For example, a consistent feature of ASA meetings was the press room, where journalists covering the meeting could congregate, interview ASA members, and work on stories. Until 2004, journalists were also invited to a press luncheon, where synopses of three or four highlighted papers from the meeting were presented. With the advent of the internet and the decline of local or regional newspapers with dedicated science writers, however, press room attendance dwindled. A web-based "worldwide press room" was created to host lay-language papers and other information useful to journalists (acoustics.org/world-wide-press-room) in 1995. The last ASA meeting to feature an actual room for the press to gather in was in Portland in 2009. Beginning with the 2011 meeting in San Diego, ASA meetings have featured a webcast press conference, where brief presentations of selected talks are live streamed to journalists around the world, effectively replacing the press luncheon. The webcasts typically feature between 3 and 6 presenters, with 15 to 40 journalists registered online.

Science Communication Award

The ASA has offered an award to recognize "excellence in the presentation of acoustics for a popular audience" since 1995. Separate awards are given to professional writers and to professional acousticians. The latter category is intended to encourage Society members to engage in communicating their work to the public. Entries are judged according to their general accessibility, relevance to acoustics, accuracy, and quality of presentation. The awards were given annually until 2008, when, in response to declining numbers of nominations, the PRC decided to double the award amount and to offer the award every two years. A list of award winners is posted at acoustics.org/science-writing-awards/.

Acceptable formats for nominations originally included printed media, such as newspapers, magazines, and books, as well as radio and television broadcasts. In response to the shifting media landscape, the PRC expanded the types of publication formats that are eligible for the award to include blogs, videos, and other content posted on the internet. This past year, in recognition that print or even text is no longer the dominant format for journalism or, more broadly, for communicating to the general public, the award name was changed from "Science Writing Award" to "Science Communication Award."

At first glance, it might seem that the variety of formats would pose a challenge to the judging panel. Can a magazine be meaningfully compared with a YouTube video or a multimedia story accessible on the internet? Fortunately, the judging criteria described above make this possible. More challenging, however, is judging the respective merits of a long work, such as a book or full-length documentary, against a two- or three-page magazine article or a five-minute video.

To address this challenge, a new category of long-format entries was created in 2015; no distinction is made between professional journalists or professional acousticians for this category.

The 2015-2016 awards were presented at the New Orleans meeting. The winning entry for media professionals was a video titled *Singing Ice: A Star Wars Story,* produced by Ryan Kellman and narrated by Adam Cole for National Public Radio (acousticstoday.org/aboutasa). In the acoustics professionals category, the award was shared by Tyler Adams for his book *Sound Materials: A Compendium of Sound Absorbing Materials for Architects* and David Bradley, Erica Ryherd, and Lauren Ronsse for their book *Worship Space Acoustics: 3 Decades of Design*.

Helping Acoustical Society of America Members Communicate Their Work to the Public

Although conferences and journal publications are effective platforms for communicating research results to peers, ASA members have some level of responsibility to communicate their work to the public and to policy makers as well (Leshner, 2012). However, it seems that relatively few scientists (and ASA members are no exception) are both comfortable with and skilled at engaging with the media or with the public directly. This is not surprising given that the skills needed to communicate science to peers, honed over years of rigorous training, are quite ineffective when the audience is the public and the message is mediated by a journalist. Anecdotes abound of scientific results that were garbled or even misrepresented by the media. Such stories are often accompanied by a vow to never again discuss research with journalists.

In 2009, the PRC began discussing ways to provide ASA members with guidance and assistance in effectively communicating their work to the public. Organizing a Media Training Workshop taught by media professionals was one early idea, but it was tabled due to the prohibitive cost and tepid member interest in such a workshop (assessed by in-

formal polling at technical committee meetings at the 2010 Baltimore meeting). Instead, the committee voted to organize an interdisciplinary session at the 2011 Seattle meeting titled "Effective Communication Between Scientists and the Media," cosponsored with the Education in Acoustics Committee and the Student Council. This session featured talks by three media professionals and three ASA members who had experience "in the limelight." The session also included a mock interview in which Alan Boyle, a Seattle-based writer for MSNBC, asked Steven Garrett about his thermoacoustics research and was followed by a panel discussion. The response to this unusual session was very positive, which motivated the PRC to organize similar sessions in 2014 in Providence and 2017 in Boston, which had over 100 attendees.

The Boston session, titled "Communicating Scientific Results to Non-Scientists," went beyond providing tips for talking to journalists. One theme addressed by many of the speakers was the importance of telling a story. This is crucial to getting and holding the attention of members of society, especially its younger members, who rely on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube for information and entertainment more than newspapers and television. Although science journalism is adapting to the changing media landscape, it is also much easier now for scientists to engage directly with the public. The speakers in Boston, including Soren Wheeler, producer of RadioLab, and Joe McMaster, award-winning producer of *The Elegant Universe*, encouraged ASA members to engage the public by telling their stories.

The PRC, together with the Committee on Education and the Student Council, will continue to organize special sessions relating to science communication and will explore other modes of helping ASA members become more engaged and more effective communicators.

The importance of effective communication has wide recognition among STEM disciplines, especially among early-career STEM professionals. In 2011, a group of graduate students in astronomy started a collaborative project on the web, Astrobites (www.astrobites.org), to practice their science writing skills and to create an educational resource for undergraduates in the field. The popularity of this site (even outside the community of astronomy students) spurred similar efforts in other fields: oceanbites.org, chembites.org, envirobites.org, and geobites.wordpress.co. It also led to the creation of a national workshop called ComSciCon, held annually since 2013, to help graduate students become better science communicators. The mission of ComSciCon (comscicon.com) is to enable "young scientists to become ambassadors for their field, propagating appreciation and understanding of research results to broad and diverse audiences." In 2017, 1,051 graduate students applied to attend the 3-day workshop, with 50 admitted. In the past two years, regional ComSciCon franchises have been established to accommodate the overwhelming interest. With recent funding from the AIP Venture Partnership Fund, ComSciCon is looking to establish franchises within professional societies, such as ASA. Two members of the PRC, Andy Piacsek and Laura Kloepper, were invited to attend the 2017 ComSciCon and meet with organizers to discuss the franchising model. At the Boston ASA meeting, they met with the Student Council to describe the ComSciCon model and discuss possible ways of establishing a workshop in conjunction with ASA meetings. A decision was made by the Student Council to organize a trial science communication workshop at the Spring 2018 meeting in Minneapolis.

Adapting to New Media Platforms

The ASA has been slower than some other scientific societies to embrace and utilize social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Under the recently adopted Strategic Leadership Plan for the Future, Task Force 1 was created to provide leadership on issues relating to awareness of acoustics, which includes developing a strategic presence on social media to benefit members and the public. The PRC is working with Task Force1, along with L. Keeta Jones (Education and Outreach Coordinator) and Daniel Farrell (Web Office Manager), to support this goal.

An example of a contribution made by the PRC to expand awareness of the ASA and acoustics as a career was the oversight it provided in 2016 to the production of a short video by AIP Media Services. This video, which can be viewed at www.exploresound.org or on ASA's YouTube channel (http://acousticstoday.org/aboutasa), features ASA senior members and graduate students describing the research they do, the applications of their work, and what got them interested in acoustics as a career. This is accompanied by footage of acoustics research facilities around the country. The goal is to increase awareness of and interest in acoustics as a field of study among high-school- and college-age students. This video is the first in a series of outreach videos that AIP Media Services will produce for ASA as a benefit for ASA's financial support of the science news service Inside Science (www.insidescience.org). The next video showcases the 2017 ASA meeting in New Orleans, with the goal of helping new

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