ACE Quarterly Makes Changes

by LaRae M. Donnellan

This issue of ACE Quarterly marks a significant change for our professional communicators' organization. At the 1987 annual meeting in Baton Rouge, the ACE Board asked David King (Oregon) and the author to formulate a new review process. Exactly how the reviews should be made and who should make them were discussed by members of the ACE Research Special Interest Group (SIG) and by other interested ACE members.

This article will explain the review process approved by the ACE Board at its November 1987 meeting. Also presented is a proposed philosophy or mission statement for the Quarterly, and a description of tentative "instructions for authors," which can be found on the final page of this issue. ACE members, in an upcoming membership survey, will be asked for input on the Quarterly. Please share your thoughts with members of the Board.

Some ACE members have urged that we improve the editorial standards and content of the Quarterly. They suggest, for example, that we not publish unrevised speeches that begin with such lines as, "I'm happy to be here with you this morning...."; opinion pieces with unsubstantiated claims; or research papers on topics of marginal interest to ACE members.

In the past, articles could be published without peer review at the author's request or editor's discretion. If there was room in the publication and if the subject matter was pertinent, the article frequently was printed. As a result, for some authors, publishing in the Quarterly carried little status.

The ACE Board agreed that if all articles were reviewed, the quality of manuscripts likely would improve, as would the status given to them. And not just research articles needed to be reviewed it was felt; opinion pieces, how-to articles, or reviews could benefit from collegial critique, as well.

The author is research publications editor, University of Vermont, and director, Northeast Region, Agricultural Communicators in Education, as well as editorial director, manuscript reviews for the *Quarterly*.

The review process we adopted resembles that used by other professional journals. At the meeting in Baton Rouge, we solicited and received about a dozen volunteers willing to review manuscripts. Each reviewer was assigned a number; thus, the authors would not know who had reviewed their manuscripts. Similarly, authors' names were removed from their manuscripts so that reviewers had no idea whose manuscript they were reviewing. This anonymity was intended to foster frankness and to avoid bias.

One person (in this case, me) oversaw the distribution, return, analysis, and author-contact for all submitted manuscripts. I sent each manuscript to two reviewers who had expertise in the author's subject matter. Based on the reviewers' advice, the manuscript was accepted, accepted with modification, or rejected. Each author was sent a letter, informing them of our decision and including comments from the reviewers so that authors would understand what changes had to be made or why the manuscript was rejected.

To guide reviewers in their task, I prepared a critique sheet modeled after those used by other journals. Reviewers were asked to answer "yes," "no," "in part," or "not applicable" to such questions as:

- Is the article appropriate to ACE members?
- Does it discuss current knowledge?
- Does it use appropriate methodology?
- Is it well organized and written?
- Is it the appropriate length?
- Does it contain sound conclusions and interpretations?

Reviewers were encouraged to write comments directly onto the manuscript.

Of the first 10 articles reviewed, six were accepted. Of the four rejected, the authors of two of them were invited to resubmit manuscripts after extensive revision. (Only reviewed articles are included in this issue.)

The Editorial Board

The structure for handling *Quarterly* manuscripts in the past included a set of regional editors—one person from each region who was responsible for soliciting manuscripts and forwarding them to the *Quarterly* editor. The ACE board is considering the possibility of restructuring the editorial board to include, perhaps, a representative from each SIG or a set of people with special interest in the *Quarterly*.

Other journals take a variety of editorial board approaches. Some include all of their manuscript reviewers on the board, while others have an editorial board of recognized scholars (membership rotates from within the organization) plus a larger set of reviewers who are chosen for expertise in specific areas.

How do you think the editorial board should be structured for the Quarterly? Please let us know on the upcoming membership survey; or write to me, the ACE president, or coordinator.

What The *Quarterly* Should Look Like

The current publishing policy for the *Quarterly* includes the following statement of purpose:

> The editors welcome articles reporting communication research, theoretical considerations, and philosophical or historical concepts and experiences involved in reaching audiences of ACE members. Stories of practical application are especially desired on media results, communication management, campaign efforts, and design and visual innovations.

Meg Ashman, head of the Office of Information in Vermont, and I decided to review several back issues of the *Quarterly* to discover what types of articles had been printed. Once we created this typology, we discussed what we felt made a particular article "good" and "appropriate" for the *Quarterly*, and which types of articles we thought were less appropriate or valuable. See if you agree with us.

Here are the types of articles which Meg and I think are appropriate to the Quarterly. Obviously, the categories are not mutually exclusive.

1. Opinion pieces—An example was an article on television as an emotional medium and how you could make it work for you. Such an article could have literature citations.

2. How-to articles—Two examples include a description of a technique for getting students to understand the concept of "audience," and a description of a writing workshop for faculty. Such articles probably would have literature citations.

3. Research—These would include results of original qualitative or quantitative research specifically related to ACE members in their roles as practitioners, teachers, and researchers of "agricultural" communication. Such research could be formal or informal, use of statistical analyses would be appropriate. An inappropriate research topic for the *Quarterly*, for example, would be an organizational communication analysis of the different definitions of "research productivity" by university administrators, deans, department chairs, and faculty. Although research was done by an ACE member and involved Experiment Station faculty, its primary audience would be organizational communication researchers, not ACE members "in their role as practitioners," and thus would be best submitted to another journal.

Research articles must contain literature citations. They should not overuse statistics; rather, examples or illustrations should be used, when appropriate, to make the discussion less abstract.

4. Reviews—These could be synopses of books, research articles appearing in other journals, or presentations made outside ACE but of particular relevance to ACE members in their roles as communication practitioners. Such articles probably should be shorter than the average *Quarterly* article.

5. Survey articles—These could be reviews of current literature and/or practices relevant to ACE members. Such articles might focus on which states use which video formats and why, or what types of marketing activities are being used in various states.

6. Analyses—These could be think-pieces on such topics as changes in Experiment Station publication style over time, a historical review of radio use by Extension, or a discussion of any trend relevant to ACE members.

7. Texts of important addresses made at meetings of interest to ACE members—These should be properly rewritten to conform to journal format (e.g., subheadings, citations).

What Should Not Be Included?

What distinguishes a "good" piece from a "less good" one for the *Quarterly* is that the former is of particular interest to ACE members in their role as an "agricultural" communication practitioner. We all wear many "hats" on our jobs, but when we wear our ACE bonnets, we focus on specific areas (computers, publications, teaching) defined by specific audiences, such as farmers, consumers, science/agricultural students with specific needs (e.g., how to use interactive video, determination of type legibility for elderly readers, learning to write reader-based prose). It is felt that the "good" articles will be even better if they are peer-reviewed to insure quality scholarship and dialogue.

Graphics And Artwork

In addition to changing the editorial content of the *Quarterly*, efforts are underway to change its format, or appearance. ACE members are encouraged to submit cover art or photographs to chairs of the visuals and graphic design special interest groups (SIG). In addition, the graphics SIG is willing to help redesign the publication. One suggestion is to change it to an 8½" × 11" format. What are your thoughts about this?

Instructions For Authors

As any editor or writer knows, there are numerous style guides on the market. In our information office, for example, the news and radio editors follow the Associated Press style. Others may use United Press International. Extension publications editors use the Government Printing Office style. As research editor, I use that of the Council of Biology Editors. When I write articles for other professional communication journals, however, I might use the Modern Language Association style, the Chicago style manual, or the American Psychological Association (APA) style.

No one particular style inherently is better than others; usually style choice is just that—a matter of choice. For the *Quarterly*, therefore, the corps of reviewers decided to choose the APA style because it is appropriate to a variety of article types.

Authors interested in submitting articles to the *Quarterly* should, therefore, follow the style guidelines in the "Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (3rd edition)". We recommend that each office or agency where ACE members work purchase a copy of this style guide—either for use by potential *Quarterly* authors or by ACE members who serve as reviewers.

The choice of the APA style guide is subject to membership approval, however. If, after a year of using this style, our membership decides to adopt another, the change will be made. *Please share your thoughts on this matter with us on the upcoming membership survey.*

Bear With Us

This is a time of transition, and as such, those of us working to improve your journal may wind up contradicting ourselves—not out of a sense of maliciousness, but rather in an attempt to meet the needs and desires of the ACE membership. We hope you will share our enthusiasm for improving the *Quarterly*. We are interested in your suggestions and reactions.

To understand what is expected of potential authors, read the tentative publishing policy in this issue. If you would like to submit an article to the *Quarterly*, send three copies of it to me at the address listed. Be sure to include a title page, on which you list the authors' names and addresses; do not include any author identification on any of the text pages. If you would like to serve as a manuscript reviewer, please send your name to me as well.

We look forward to hearing your reactions to this effort to adapt an editorial policy for the *Quarterly* that will more adequately suit ACE member needs.