

MAY MEETING

Somebody Writes Public Policy Papers & Research Reports – Why Not You?

BY DAVID EPSTEIN

The academic and public policy community—research institutes, think tanks, foundations, state and federal agencies—is a vast and constantly humming word factory. These institutions pour out policy papers, issue-briefs, research reports, and position papers on scores of vital social and economic issues. Policymakers, decision makers, and other stakeholders demand this information whether the economy is strong or weak—sometimes especially when it is weak.

Have you as a professional writer ever considered tapping this market?

At Tuesday's meeting Barbara Ray, owner of Hiredpen, inc., will describe opportunities in research-based policy writing and editing and explain how freelancers can get into this market.

The work is rewarding in many ways. If you enjoy research-based writing and are comfortable dealing with complex issues, you can get opportunities to write about social issues that are

interesting and important to you. You may be working with leading researchers at organizations such as the MacArthur Foundation, the Brookings Institution, the American Economic Association, the Juvenile Justice Network, and major universities.

**Not Work for Novices**

This work demands skilled writers who can express complex issues concisely and precisely in prose as clear as a just-washed windowpane. It requires meticulous editors who can spot jargon and clean it up without losing the writer's voice or distorting meaning—and can do it fast, even sometimes overnight.

According to Ray, the overall "goal is to help policymakers and others better understand the issues and make better use of research in their policy and program decisions. We get research into the hands of policymakers and other stakeholders in forms that will be read and acted on." These audiences have limited time to read reports, no matter how important the issue. Today's publishers don't maintain

the in-house resources needed to for full development of academic and other specialized publications. Scholars and social scientists are great researchers. But they need writers and editors to translate their research into publications that are read and acted on.

Building a Network of Subcontractors

Ray will also explain how she expanded her individual writing business into a full-range writing, editing, and project management service by developing a prescreened network of qualified writers, editors, and designers. Starting as a sole proprietor in the late 1990s, Ray launched Hiredpen, inc. in 2004. She and her associates now help researchers and nonprofit organizations convey their work to broad audiences that can help them achieve their policy and social welfare goals.

Ray has held positions as the communications director for the MacArthur Foundation's Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood, a senior writer at the Joint Center for Poverty Research, and as a managing editor at the University of Chicago Press, journals division. She also won awards

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

The Court of Freelancer Opinion

This column is an apology of sorts. I say "of sorts" for two reasons. One, because the offense for which I'm apologizing is relatively minor (though not unimportant). And two, because my excuse for committing the offense is one with which any freelancer can easily sympathize. The offense: Neglecting to write and submit my President's Column for the April issue *Stet* newsletter.

My plea: Guilty as charged.

My excuse: A sudden influx of billable work.

If the case were judged by a jury of my fellow IWOCers, and if their deliberations were dramatized in the form of a theatrical work, its title might well be, "Twelve Men and Women Who Are Not So Much Angry As They Are Completely Understanding and Maybe Just a Tad Envious." And when I use the word "Envious" in this title, I do not mean to imbue it with even the tiniest shred of reasonability—that is, the suggestion that the jury members might be justified in their envy. I mean only that, due to the very nature of independent writing, the news to a freelancer that anyone, no matter how dear, is drowning in billable work tends to invoke two simultaneous gut responses—genuine empathetic joy for the person who finds himself/herself suddenly inundated

and a moment of at-least-mild jealousy along the lines of "Why can't that be I?" ... which, if left unchecked and unexamined, can fester into its completely unjustifiable counterpart, "What's wrong with me?"

This business is, as anyone who has been involved



in the attempt to make it work for any length of time knows well, one of "feast or famine." Of course, there are steps one can take to invite the gods to send in the Peapod trucks with ingredients for the feast—for example, joining IWOC to get oneself listed on the IWOC website Find-a-Writer page, attend the meetings, and fellowship with other freelancers who can pass along tips for making the freelance life work. But sometimes, the gods seem preoccupied elsewhere, blind to the sackcloth, ashes, self-flagellations, and animal sacrifices meant to invoke their favor.

Sometimes the freelancer finds himself/herself standing alone in the garden, beneath an undecorated arbor, staring at an empty fold-out table the underside



of which is a study in the history of leftover chewing gum and the sides of which are surrounded by a few ratty weatherworn chairs, sniffing the air for the slightest hint of spring, listening for sounds of activity inside the house—and hearing only crickets.

And then a deafening crash resounds from the street beyond the backyard fence, where a grocery truck and party-supply van have suffered a minor three-way collision with a bus full of top-drawer chefs on their way to a cooking competition. And an entire classroom of table-waiting students from the local hospital-ity college has rushed out to view the damage.

And while they all wait for the police and tow trucks to arrive, they decide to pass the time at your house.

Welcome to my March and April. One phone call... received while I was shopping with my wife and my son and his girlfriend. Unexpected projects (two) from Europe, in addition to an ongoing European project that was just then opening its eyes to wake from a winter slumber. A lunchtime phone call from a client I hadn't heard from since August. A short-term project from another client I had last worked with in December. All underlain by a huge pro bono project I had been working on for months—the building of a new (soon-to-launched) website for Chicago Dramatists.

Suddenly, the arbor was

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Stellar Panel of IWOC Experts Shares Tips on Surviving — and Thriving — in Today's Market

BY KAREN SCHWARTZ

THE PANEL

Panel moderator MICHELLE BEUSCHER of Beuscher Consulting, who specializes in marketing communications planning and in researching, writing and editing services for organizations; JEFF STEELE, a journalist who has written more than 2,000 articles for newspapers, magazines, and trade journals; BETSY STORM of Top Drawer Communications, a specialist in public relations for healthcare/medical, non-profit, and small business clients; DON TALEND of Write Results Inc., who specializes in B-2-B journalism, public relations, newsletters, copywriting, and industrial/technical manuals; and LAURA STIGLER of Shebang! Writing and Consulting, who works primarily in consumer and B-2-B advertising/marketing for products and services from A to Z.

IWOC's panel of experts told a rapt audience what it takes to survive in the often feast-or-famine world of freelance writing at the April 12 IWOC meeting.

What are some of the ways that you get work?

Steele: Once I got going as a freelancer, I've always been busy. Going to *Writer's Market* and getting leads through people I know have been helpful. About eight to ten years ago, I kept calling an editor at the *Tribune*, and finally got an assignment. I've been writing for this editor ever since.

Stigler: Don't underestimate the IWOC website. I've gotten a lot of business that way. People see my profile and call me. Also, I get work through word of mouth.

Talend: I am constantly trying to generate awareness about what I do. I do cold calling. Make sales a part of your daily activities, because all of a sudden you'll find your pipeline is empty.

Storm: I've called hospitals and medical practices to get work. I pay attention to what's going on in my field.

Steele: If you can weave into the conversation when you're interviewing someone that you're an independent writer, you may get some work.

What are some tips for subcontracting work?

Storm: It doesn't happen that often, but I have two people that I've worked with as subcontractors. The key thing is, it has to be someone you know and believe in. I don't make any money on it; these are almost all nonprofit clients.

Have you tried to promote your business through social media?

Talend: If you're expecting business through social media, you're off your mark. I tweet once a day to demonstrate my capabilities. I'll pass along a short URL when I get an article published, and I'll provide a link to that. That's a good use of Twitter. I recommend that you tweet once a day, and over

time, people will learn what your capabilities are.

How do you respond to a potential client who asks what you charge?

Beuscher: So many factors go into estimating a job. You can look at the IWOC rate survey, and it also depends on the type of work. I'll tell a client what my hourly rate is. My estimate includes things like research, conducting interviews and transcription of interviews.

Steele: I want the other person to tip his/her hat first. I might ask, 'Can you give me an idea of what your budget is?' It's amazing how often a potential client's budget is 50-100 percent higher than what I would have suggested.

The speakers left the audience with a handout that included excellent take-away hints and resources:

Four Great Resources for Freelance Writers to Check Out (Beuscher)

1. *Snoopy's Guide to the Writing Life* (published by Writers Digest Books, 2002; edited by Barnaby Conrad and Monte Schultz). This book pays homage to the Peanuts comic strip creator Charles Schultz and provides his beloved beagle character Snoopy some sage advice from 30 famous writers and entertainers.
2. StoryStudioChicago (www.storystudiochicago.com). Story Studio Chicago is a growing community of Chicago-area writers and a learning center devoted to writing and related arts.
3. Help a Reporter Out (www.helpareporter.com). This brings together nearly 30,000 reporters and bloggers and more than 100,000 news sources and thousands of small businesses.
4. Media Bistro (www.mediabistro.com) and AvantGuild

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membership: Provide freelance writers and others job listings, daily news feeds, and other information.

Five Basic Rules for Achieving Success as a Freelance Writer (Stigler)

1. Be as excited about the client's business as if it were your own.
2. Treat every client as if he/she were the only one.
3. Never talk to your clients about your problems (or successes with other clients.)
4. Give "added value" beyond the particular assignment; in other words, give more than the client bargained for!
5. Really listen to your clients.

Six Must-Read Books for Public Relations People (Storm)

1. *Impact* (Ken McArthur)
2. *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Dale Carnegie)
3. *Can We Do That?!* (Peter Shankman)
4. *The New Rules of Marketing & PR* (David Meerman Scott)
5. *Writing Effective News Releases* (Catherine McIntyre)
6. *Guerrilla PR* (Michael Levine)

Five Keys to Success for Freelance Writers (Talent)

1. Prioritize time management
2. Make selling a part of your daily schedule, no matter how much project work you have at a given time.
3. Take selling seriously and learn a selling system.
4. Make it your goal to diversify your clientele.
5. Approach your job no differently from the way you would if you were working for someone else.

Finally, this sage advice from Steele:

"I sometimes hear writers reporting they will not consider work that's below a certain dollar figure, say four figures. This is very common among writers who sneer they'd never consider writing for a newspaper because they're strictly magazine writers. But missing in that bit of bragging is how long it takes for them to complete a project. Four \$300 jobs that take a couple hours each beat a \$1200 project that takes a week every time. A crucial determinant in assessing whether to accept a project is the "X factor of how long it takes to complete! Sounds simple, but many writers I've talked to fail to take this into account." 🐦

TIPS FROM YOUR STET EDITOR:

1. Always ask the client whether there's an in-house style guide. Their editors *can* put in the serial commas or change "10" to "ten," but they'll like you better if they don't have to.
2. Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand something. You won't look stupid; you'll look like you're trying to do an excellent job.
3. This is a tip about interviewing: If someone has just given you a juicy quote, but it's long, and you need more time to get it down, ask a question you really don't care about. While the interviewee is answering, you can finish writing the original quote that you do want to get down.

Time-Saving Tools on the IWOC Website

BY JOEN KINNAN

Here you are, chomping at the bit to come up with an article you can pitch to someone, somewhere. Or perhaps you've got an assignment, but you need facts, quotes, an authority to check with. We've got sources for all that and much more. And they're right there on the IWOC website. I'm referring, of course, to the General Resources page, a sadly neglected — but extremely useful — feature.

Classified by ten major categories, there are search engines; dictionaries; encyclopedias; thesauri; sources for quotes; fact-checkers; maps; images for newsletters and the like; all sorts of places for breaking news, government info (local, national, and international), statistics, and business info; other websites for writers (including a list of other writers' organizations); and even telephone directories.

In the "government" category, you can go to the White House, either chamber of the congress, the City of Chicago, or the CIA if you're a spook. You'll also find the official sites of foreign governments, though you'll need a translator for some, and others offer sketchy information.

Admittedly, some sites with links are better than others. The "Writer's Guidelines Directory" has fallen on lean times, and today many of the publications don't offer guidelines at all, but you can find out what sorts of material they use and where and how to submit, so I've left it up there. *The Saturday Evening Post*, though — bet you thought it had gone toes-up — tells you everything you need to know.

The best part of the collection on the IWOC site is that many links offer their own links to literally hundreds more useful sites. One of my favorites is the site I call "Names, Places, Quotes, and More." It's got links to place-name spellings, quotations, reference books, and a boatload more.

Here's a story: What animal kills far more Americans than any other? No, it's not the grizzly or some big cat. It's the white-tailed deer, the suicide bomber of the animal kingdom, who knocks off 130 drivers and collides with them 1.5 million times per year. I found this tidbit through our "General Resources" page. Try it. 🐦

IWOCer in the News: Jeff Steele



Our own Jeff Steele has made news in the *Wall Street Journal*! He's written a very clever piece called "The Goof's Guide to Money Management." Follow the link below to get to the WSJ site: <http://onespot.wsj.com/personal-finance/2011/04/26/32298/the-goofs-guide-to-money-management>. From there you can get to the whole piece.

It's a hoot. You'll love it. Kudos to Jeff.

May Meeting, Continued from Page 1.

as a travel writer while living for two years on Guam. Her current clients include the Brookings Institution, the National Bureau of Economic Research, the San Francisco Federal Reserve Board, the MacArthur Network on Building Resilient Regions, and others. She also manages the online publication *Spotlight on Digital Media and Learning*, which covers the intersection of digital media and education. She is the author of *Not Quite Adults: Why 20-Somethings Are Choosing a Slower Path to Adulthood and Why It's Good for All of Us* (Random House, 2010). She is now working on a nonfiction book about how the current recession is affecting young adults and the nation's future. She blogs at mybarbararay.com.

The IWOC meeting will take place on Tuesday, April 12th at National-Louis University, Room 4020, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Networking begins at 5 p.m. The main program is at 6 p.m. Admission is free to IWOC members, \$15 to nonmembers (\$10 with preregistration on the IWOC website). Following the meeting, attendees are invited to go to a nearby restaurant for a buy-your-own dinner to further discuss writing-related topics or to continue networking. For more information, call 800-804-IWOC (800-804-4962) or visit www.iwoc.org.

President's Column. Continued from Page 2.

abloom and bus-
air was filled
the clattering
a large white
smoothed
the table, the
were cleaned,
and fitted with
and plates and
set out and shifted

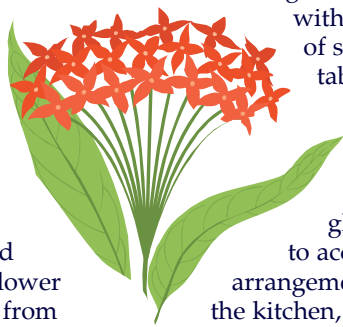
the candles and flower
shouts emanated from
the fragrances of the contest

Then out came the appetiz-
and salads and desserts and wine. The gods offered "Bon
appetit!" and I was off trying to clean every plate.

Which is pretty much how it goes as a freelancer, your
honor. Because the traffic cops and tow trucks and lawyers
are on their way, and the whole thing can be whisked away in
an instant.

So I throw myself on the mercy of the court.

And forgive me, but... while the jury deliberates, I have
another deadline to meet. ♡



ting, and the
with
of silverware as
tablecloth was
across
chairs
repainted,
cushions,
glasses were
to accommodate
arrangements. And
the kitchen, where prac-
tition had ensued, and
filled the air.

Calendar

May 10

IWOC Monthly Meeting. Speaker Barbara Ray will discuss some often-overlooked opportunities for free-lance writers. The meeting will be held at National-Louis University, Room 4020, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Program at 6 p.m. Networking at 5 p.m. IWOC members free. Nonmembers, \$15 at the door, \$10 with online preregistration. Buy-your-own dinner follows. Nonmembers welcome. For more information, call 800/804-4962 or visit www.iwoc.org.

June 14

IWOC Monthly Meeting. This program is scheduled to feature speakers who hire healthcare writers. Details TBA.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted, but call ahead in case of cancellation. The groups welcome nonmembers. If there's no group in your area, why not start one? Contact webmaster@iwoc.org.

May 24 (4th Tuesday)

IWOOP Monthly Lunch. Join near-west suburbanites for a noon lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065. Check before you come. This lunch is monthly only if there are enough people who can attend. Note: The lunch is now on the 4th Tuesday, not the 4th Thursday as it had been in the past.

June 2 (1st Thursday)

IWORP Monthly Breakfast. Join the Rogers Park IWOC contingent for breakfast at 9 AM at the A&T Grill, 7036 N. Clark St., Chicago. For more info, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.

It's Happening on the Web!

Check Out Writers' Line

Browse Resources

See What's Doing in Coming Events

WWW.IWOC.ORG

IWOC Welcomes Returning Member
Rosetta Gervasi