Magdalena Skipper: The not-so-alternative career of a journal editor

November 29, 2016

WiGS hosted a career talk by Dr. Magdalena Skipper on her experiences as an editor at Nature. Everyone learned a lot!

Her trajectory:

* From Poland originally, PhD in genetics and short postdoc in the UK
* Wanted to stay in science but questioning role in research
* Took an associate editor job with Nature Reviews Genetics
  + Worked on developing content/inviting reviews, layout, writing Research Highlights
  + Worked briefly on the business side of publishing NRG, but wasn’t a good fit
  + Eventually became chief editor
* Then became senior editor for genetics and genomics at Nature
  + Different role from a reviews journal: major tasks are reading manuscripts, selecting peer reviewers, and making publication decisions
  + Important requirement: reading a lot, knowing the field
  + A good editor champions their manuscripts, has specific reasons for every decision. Have to be open to the possibility of being wrong.
  + Also involved in coordinating consortium publications, organizing conferences
  + Total separation at general science journals between “front half” (science journalists covering research highlights and science news items) and “back half” (original research)
  + Science journalism is a very different, separate career path, typically requires more writing experience and training
  + Side note: Nature Publishing Group and Springer Journals merged recently
  + Challenges navigating differences in publishing practices between different fields, handling data availability issues
* Now still working on facilitating dissemination of scientific research, but in a more focused way as director of scientific communication and publishing for Altius Institute

Pros and cons of an editing career:

* No specific training required (although PhD generally required, postdoc preferred)
* At the cusp of research
* No role in scientific discovery
* Tight deadlines, unpredictable schedule
* Secure employment

Tips for getting in to the field:

* Positions usually openly advertised on journal job listings
* Academic editor positions often advertised there as well
* One good starting point/trial run: a temporary position filling in for someone on parental leave
* Has seen job applications involving a dry run of suggesting a review topic, authors, reviewers