

CommonHealth Student Member Highlight: Ann Marie Finley and Maura O'Fallon

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Introduction and Commentary

In the almost three years I've been with the CommonHealth journal, I have had the pleasure of working with several capable mentors who have helped me find my path at Temple. When I applied to be on the board, I expected to do my work, get it approved, see it published, and move on to the work for the next edition. People come and go, so when Ann Marie Finley and Maura O'Fallon were announced as the new student editors, I didn't think much of it. Although I didn't know it at the time I first started, these two women would help progress not only my experience at CommonHealth, but my path towards my career greatly. I am the only undergraduate student to serve on our board at this moment in time. As a STEM student, working toward my Bachelor's of Science in Health Information Management and my minor in Public Health, I have struggled to find other women to look up to and learn from.

I have studied in great depth the effect that lack of recognition within your field can have, especially on women. In recent years, we have been seeing a steady decline of women entering the STEM field, which can be attributed to various factors: lack of exposure, education, stereotypes, culture, and more. In science, there is a tendency to overlook people and their achievements, especially if it is comparatively like another person's work, which

has almost manifested itself into a widely accepted culture. This all goes to show that for a very long time, men have been—and continue to be—praised for the credit their female counterparts should've received, proving the existence of gender discrimination within science. When you're 20 years old and working towards your degree, this is a hard truth to face. I have often thought of switching my major, just to avoid the known difficulties I will face in my future career—it is hard to find purpose in such a distinguished field overpowered by the male perspective. However, it is women like Ann Marie and Maura that give me faith that soon, science will take a turn for the better.

In working with these women, I have been shown that the undergraduate perspective holds value, and that you are never too young to innovate and offer creative solutions. Ann Marie and Maura have brought a new life to our journal, and in doing so, became role models for me. These two females are the living proof that science is in capable hands.

Before they leave our board and move on to bigger and better opportunities, I wanted the chance to interview them. I hope the following provides our readers with an inside look into our journal, and the relationship between these two women that CommonHealth has helped to foster.

Q&A With Our Co-Editors in Chief

Tell us a bit about yourself. What graduate program are you in, and what do you plan to do after graduating?

Finley: I am a doctoral student in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, where I study the cognitive processes underlying differences in spoken versus written language production. After I graduate, I plan to explore opportunities for postdoctoral appointments to expand my skills in computational analyses for clinically relevant language sampling and measurement. I am a big believer in inter-professional collaboration and enjoy working with students, so I hope to end up in a long-term position that affords me the opportunity for both things as I conduct my research!

O’Fallon: I’m a third (going on fourth) year student in the communication sciences and disorders doctoral program. I work with Dr. Rebecca Alper in the Language, Literacy, and Learning Lab and am broadly interested in early language development for children with high risk for adverse language outcomes. After graduating I hope to find a faculty position where I can continue pursuing my research interests, ideally someplace where I would be able to collaborate with practicing speech-language pathologists or other stakeholders in my projects.

What is one piece of advice you'd like to share with fellow graduate students, or those thinking of going into a graduate program?

Finley: When you explore or interview with a program, you are assessing the program just as much as the program is assessing you. Finding the right fit is critical to your future professional success. I recommend asking not only about academic opportunities and support, such as conference funding and coursework options, but also that you inquire about other aspects of the program. For example – how often does the entire department get together for work-related or social events? How would the interviewer describe the collegiality and overall atmosphere of the department or college? Small details like these can often be overlooked, but I have found that asking these sorts of “soft” questions gives great insight into the overall quality and dynamics of a program or

department. Finally, I cannot emphasize enough the value of speaking to current and former students about their experiences both “in the field” and during their time in your program of interest!

O’Fallon: To focus on the small steps and celebrate EVERY accomplishment or milestone. Thinking about the big picture can be daunting for me, so it helps to focus on one piece at a time. Whether it’s finishing a draft of a manuscript, submitting a project proposal, turning in a class assignment, or even just sending that one email you’ve been putting off for weeks—celebrating these small steps helps me maintain momentum and stay positive.

What has your experience writing academic projects and papers been like? Did that experience help you in your position at CommonHealth?

Finley: After working both as a team lead and as a supporting team member, one of the most important lessons I have learned in designing projects and writing papers is the importance of clear communication. If you are the project

coordinator or the first author on the paper, be sure that everyone’s ideas are heard and that there is a clear path for next steps to move a project or paper along. As a supporting team member, be sure that you know what the

expectations and deadlines are for your particular duties. Keeping a clear set of goals broken down into incremental steps is very helpful for me, both mentally and in allocating my time management! While it might involve sending an extra email every now and then to make sure everyone is on the same page, it is far better to clarify questions and ambiguities ahead of time rather than move forward with uncertainty. This has been very helpful for me over the past year as I worked with the *CommonHealth* editorial team and our reviewers and authors.

O’Fallon: That’s tough. At this point, I’d say that my experience writing academic projects and papers has been humbling. Previously, I’ve struggled with receiving edits or feedback on my work. It would make me feel defensive or insecure. That has changed since starting my doctoral program and gaining more experience with academic publishing. Now, I understand that reviewer feedback not only strengthens a particular manuscript, but it also helps you improve your writing. I think that reframing my perspective on the peer review process, to see it as helpful and a chance to grow, has helped me not only in my own academic writing but also in working with authors in my position at *CommonHealth*.

What has been your favorite part of working with CommonHealth?

Finley: I have really enjoyed the opportunity to familiarize myself with the broader research community at Temple, both within and outside the College of Public Health. I find that it is all too easy to get wrapped up in highly specific research “worlds” focused on a specific field or sub-field. For me, that world is language and semantic processing. However, by working with *CommonHealth*, I have learned about so much exciting and important research happening right under my nose! Did you know that the College of Engineering published a [paper on using facemasks to counter bioterrorism](#)? Or that within a month of the spring 2020 COVID shutdown in Philadelphia, a team from the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Sciences [collected, delivered, and studied the impact of a large donation of books, games, and iPads to patients hospitalized with COVID-19](#)? Me neither – until I got involved with *CommonHealth*. I am

so inspired by the grit and determination that shine through as I read through submitted manuscripts and work with reviewers and authors to refine and prepare submissions for publication. It has been a privilege to be involved on the editorial board and to work with my wonderful counterpart, Maura O’Fallon, faculty advisors Dr. Sarwer and Dr. Ibrahim, and managing editor Jacque Spitzer. They are the definition of a dream team!

O’Fallon: The people! Through my position at *CommonHealth*, I’ve had the opportunity to get to know so many amazing individuals within the College of Public Health...many of whom are outside of my department. From editorial board members, to reviewers, to authors, to podcast guests, I have really enjoyed my time getting to know so many amazing individuals.

Over the course of this year, you two have led our board side by side. What quality in each other do you admire most?

Finley: Limiting me to just one favorite Maura quality is so difficult, it is almost unfair! In addition to being a kind and genuinely fun person to work with, Maura is one of the most meticulous and hard-working researchers I

have ever met. She has had a steady publication record since her first year at Temple – and take it from me, that is no easy feat for a new PhD student working in a pandemic! I admire Maura for many reasons, but one of my favorites is

the way that she balances her own workload with service to Temple and the broader Philadelphia community. While managing her NIH grant, taking classes, and attending conferences, Maura has somehow found the time to serve on the *CommonHealth* board, coordinate Coffee Talks, and volunteer her time at local charities every weekend. I sometimes struggle to find a balance among my own obligations, and Maura is my real-life inspiration as an early-career woman in science, dedicated to excellence in research and willing to put in the work to support others on their own research paths. Maura is a stellar all-around person, and I am looking forward to seeing the impact she makes on the world!

If you could talk to the upcoming Editor(s), what would you say to them?

Finley: First, congratulations and welcome to the best editorial board on campus! Don't forget to have fun (the team makes it easy) and enjoy the learning experience. While some growing pains are to be expected as you transition into your new role, you are not alone. In addition to Drs. Sarwer and Ibrahim, Jacques, and your new co-Editor-in-Chief, you have an entire network of us "retired" board members that you can reach out to for advice and support. This applies not only to journal-specific items, but to your own research and career path. Time on the journal is not just a one-and-done commitment – it brings you into a network of like-minded, hardworking individuals that can expand your professional horizons during and beyond your time at

O'Fallon: I admire so many things about Ann Marie! She's the best. But, if I had to pick one quality, I admire more than any others, it would be that she's a big thinker. This was honestly my first impression of Ann Marie, when we met at new-student orientation back in 2019. She was describing her master's thesis, and I was just in awe of the scope of the project and how confidently she spoke about it. Since then, I've gotten to know Ann Marie more, and I've seen her talent for big-picture thinking shine in other ways. She has a clear vision for what she wants, and she goes for it. Combine that with her top-notch technical skills in project design, writing, and data analysis...and she's just a total rockstar. I am so happy that we've had this experience together and can't wait to see all the amazing things she does in her career.

Temple. I am so grateful I had this experience and excited to see where you take the journal next!

O'Fallon: To really sink your teeth in to the experience and take advantage of the opportunities that the position affords. Having the chance to gain this type of editorial experience at such an early stage in your training is a huge gift. Get to know the faculty editors (shout out to Drs. Ibrahim and Sarwer!) and other members of the editorial board. I have learned so much about publishing (and life as an academic) from my conversations with others and am so grateful for those experiences.