

EDITORIAL

Hypertension Section Editors Series: Early Career Introduction and Update

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Peer review is a central tenet of the scientific process to ensure the highest quality science is published. As pointed out in a recent edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*,¹ there is a paucity of peer review training being taught either formally or informally by mentors, threatening a critical component of the scientific process. Further exacerbating the demand for peer review in academic publishing was the COVID-19 pandemic, as many researchers dusted off old data for publication or analyzed existing datasets as their laboratories and patient-oriented research programs were restricted or shut down. This led to an avalanche of articles in the review system. To help with this impending crisis, some publishers developed peer review training courses. Elsevier, for example, has a Certified Peer Reviewer Course,² the content for which is delivered in a self-taught manner through webinars, podcasts, and questionnaires. Nature³ and Wiley⁴ have launched similar programs. While these self-paced/taught programs are informative and helpful, there remains a pressing need to complement that information with mentored peer review training to provide feedback and support to the next generation of scientists.

In response to the critical need for mentored article review training, *Hypertension* recently implemented the Early Career Assistant Program, facilitated by us, the Early Career Editors. Among the first for American Heart Association journals, this program does not endeavor to replace existing self-paced resources or someone's peer review training with their mentor. Rather, we envision it will help complement these existing resources for early career trainees who may need additional mentoring in this area, or who may

have limited or no access to such mentoring. Rather than implement a self-learning program, the Early Career Editors will take a hands-on collaborative approach by walking through the process together with participants, writing simultaneous reviews on real articles (for the Reviewer Assistant Program), and making decisions on real articles (for the Editor Assistant Program). This process will provide real-time and real-world experience in peer reviewing for those who may not otherwise have that opportunity.

OVERVIEW OF THE EARLY CAREER ASSISTANT PROGRAM

The Hypertension Early Career Assistant Program is a relatively straight forward process as depicted in Figure 1 and as described on the *Hypertension* website dedicated to this program.⁵ Selected applicants are expected to participate for 2 years. The first year is the Assistant Reviewer program, in which participants will be assigned to review at least 3 articles submitted to *Hypertension* and develop critiques together with the assigned Early Career Editor. After the successful completion of the Assistant Reviewer program, participants will graduate to the Assistant Editor program to handle and develop collaborative article decisions with an Associate Editor. By coupling the review and editorial process in 1 mentoring program, participants are provided a more complete picture of the academic publishing process. At the completion of the program, participants will receive a certificate of participation to be issued at the editorial board member reception at the annual Hypertension Scientific Sessions.

The opinions expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the editors nor the American Heart Association.

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For Sources of Funding and Disclosures, see page 496.

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Hypertension

ROADMAP OF THE EARLY CAREER ASSISTANT PROGRAM IN HYPERTENSION

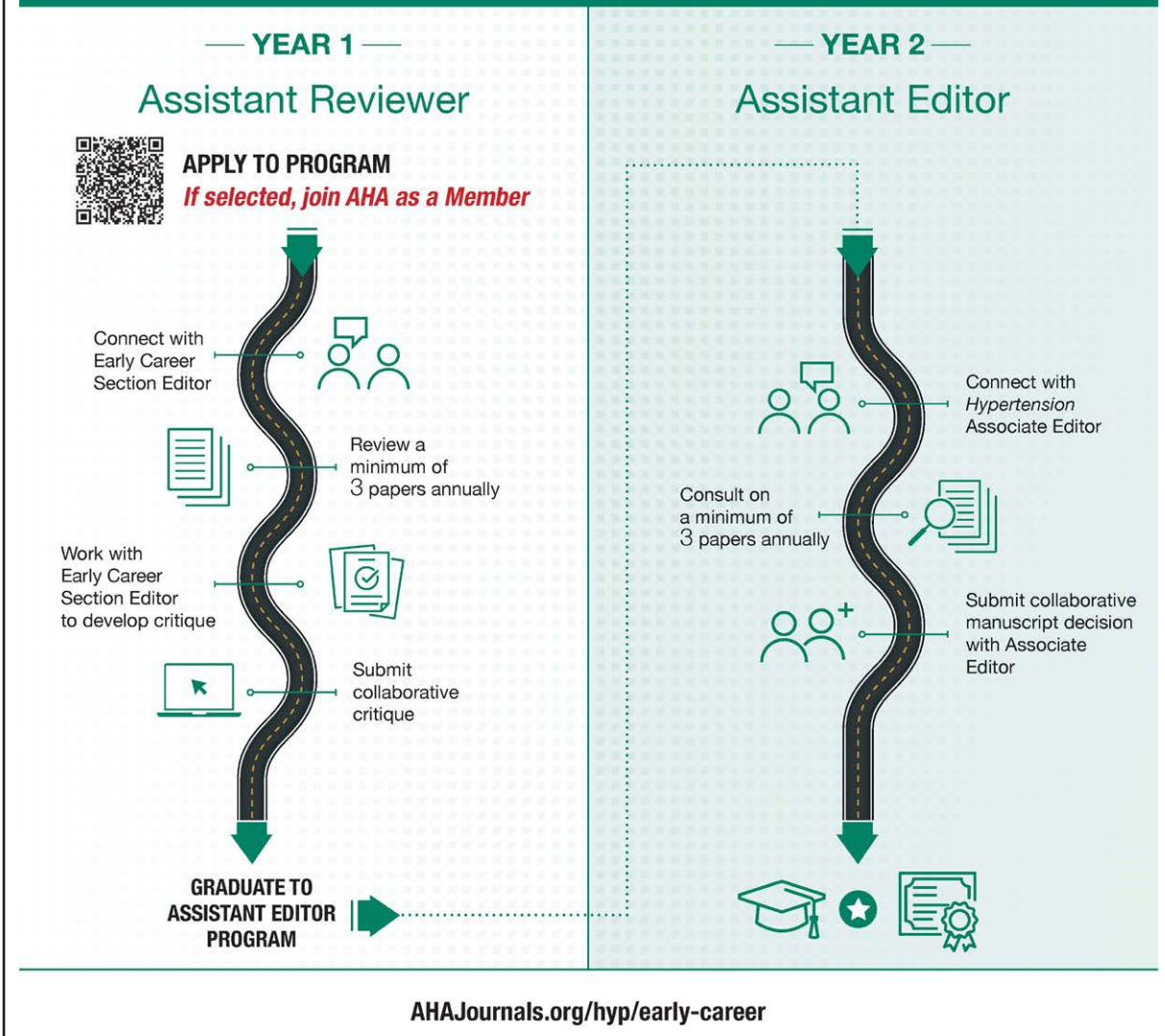


Figure 1. A graphic of the *Hypertension* Early Career Assistant Program.

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THE SELECTION PROCESS

The first application cycle for this program, in the Fall of 2022, garnered a significant number of applications that exceeded our expectations (n=72). With resources currently only available for 5 participants

per yearly cycle, this instantly became more competitive than we originally envisioned and underscored the clear need for this type of mentoring program. The applicants were from 20 different countries (Figure 2) and were from all early career stages (Figure 3A). While 76% of applicants reported having access to a

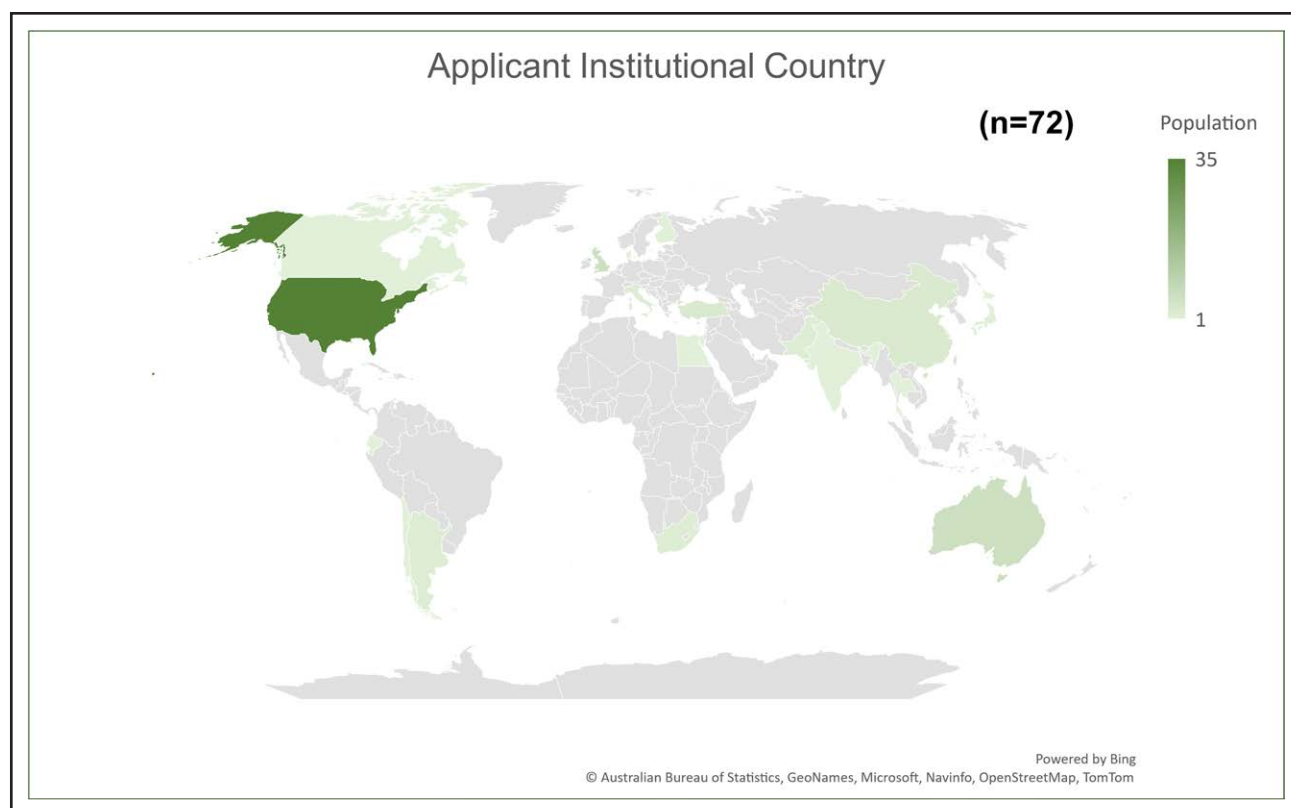


Figure 2. Map of the distribution of applicants by country.

The program received applicants from 20 different countries around the world, and the top 5 of which were as follows: USA, United Kingdom, Australia, Turkey, and China.

mentor in the article peer review capacity, the remaining 24% did not (Figure 3B). The robust response and interest in this program is very encouraging. It is, however, not feasible for our early career editorial team to mentor all applicants at this time. Moving forward, we are discussing ways in which we can reach more applicants such as the following: expanding the number of early career editors both nationally and internationally; implementing a team-based approach where each editor mentors >1 trainee simultaneously; and providing webinar-based training and allowing early career reviewers not selected for the program to enter the *Hypertension* reviewer database to gain some initial experience. As with all new programs, this initiative will likely evolve as we try to find what works best, not unlike the scientific process.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Peer review is a critical part of the backbone of the scientific process, which helps us all better the primary form we use to communicate our experimental findings with one another, the publication. While an imperfect process, it is a critical part of the experimental world. While we, the Early Career Section Editors for *Hypertension*, do not have all of the answers with respect to

solving the intricacies of peer review, we have faith that the sum of the parts of this program, from assistant reviewer to assistant editor, will facilitate and improve the peer review process for our journal and the field of cardiovascular research in the long run. According to *The Chronicle* article,¹ ≈40% of peer reviewers have never had any peer review training. Since we can currently mentor only 5 participants per year, we alone cannot tackle this problem nor make a significant dent in the lack of peer review article mentoring. If you are a mentor with significant reviewing experience and expertise, we encourage you to help to mentor trainees not only within your laboratories, but also within your departments/centers and institutions! Mentorship starts at home—your home institution. Anyone who has served as an editor or associate editor knows that reviewers who agree to review articles as a service to our field are difficult to find—good reviewers are even more difficult. It is not uncommon for an editor to invite 10 experts per submission in order to get 2 to agree to review. Our program can help by providing more tools to help participants feel more comfortable in agreeing to review when asked. In summary, we hope that our program will serve as a launch pad for our participants to become stellar reviewers who can actively participate in the peer review process not only for *Hypertension*,

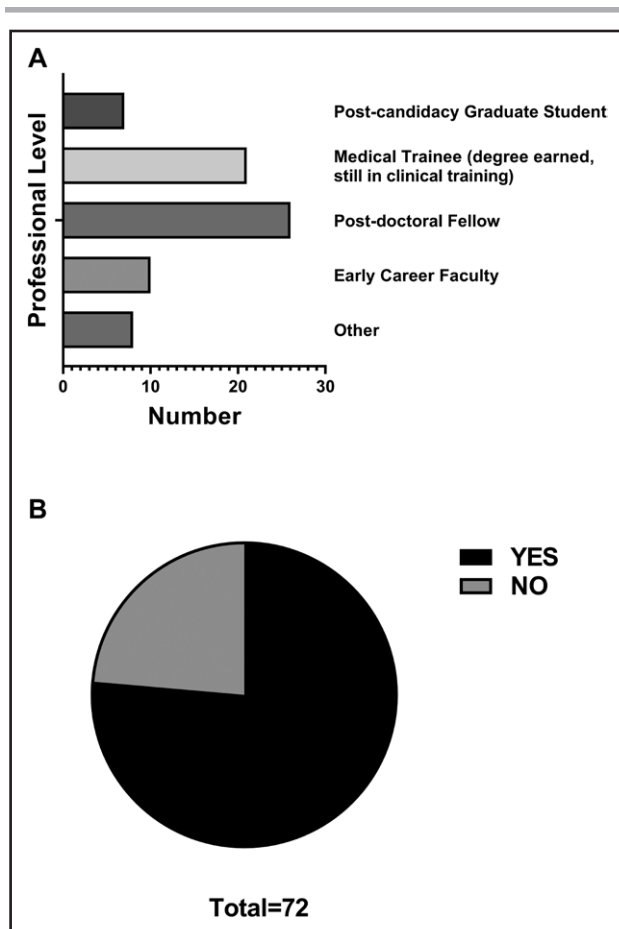


Figure 3. Infographic of the career stages of the applicants and whether or not they have a current mentor to help them with peer review of articles.

The program garnered applications from $n=26$ postdoctoral fellows, $n=21$ early career faculty, $n=10$ medical trainees, $n=8$ postcandidacy graduate students, and $n=7$ in the other category (A). Of these applicants, 76% reported having a current mentor, while the remainder did not (B).

but also for our discipline at large. We hope that it will provide significant value to our early career trainees and flagship journal for years to come.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Acknowledgments

The authors thank our Editor-in-Chief, Dr Rhian Touyz, for entrusting to us the successful launch and implementation of this important program. We hope that it will serve the journal and our field well. The authors also thank Managing Editor, Trudie Meyer, for her help in coordinating this new program.

Sources of Funding

This work was supported by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (R21 EB026518 to A. Trask, K23 HL136853, R01 HL153382, and R01 AG074355 to N. Bello, R01 HL156986 to A. Arnold, and R01 HL151413 and P01 HL152951 to S. Watts), the Italian Ministry of Health (Ricerca Corrente to D. Carnevale), and the Abigail Wexner Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital (to A. Trask).

Disclosures

None.

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