



2008 in Review

Following the practice of my predecessor, Brian Thompson, I wish to review the performance of this journal in 2008. In previous years I have customarily reported increases in the number of papers and the number of pages. However, this past year there was a marked reduction in the number of pages and papers in the 12 issues of *Optical Engineering*. I doubt this is connected to the current decreases in commercial and financial activity in the world at large. Rather, it is product of a conscious effort on the part of the Board of Editors of this journal to make the acceptance standards for this journal more rigorous and thereby reduce the number of marginal papers accepted for publication.

Here are the major statistics for the past year and four previous years. In Table 1, note that there are double-digit percentage decreases in all three measures of journal production.

But the number of submissions did not decrease. As indicated in Table 2, there was 6.6% increase in papers submitted. Granted, there is a time differential between the submission of an acceptable paper and its publication, so the statistics for submitted papers do not refer to exactly the same set of papers that were published in a given year.

Still, on a year-to-year basis, the numbers show that the reduction of published papers cannot be attributed to fewer submissions. Rather, it is due to our editors declin-

ing more papers over the past few years. Table 3 shows accept and decline rates for papers during 2008. The fractions of accepted and declined papers have nearly reversed from three years earlier. The acceptance rate is, I believe, the lowest figure during my tenure as editor.

I think more papers were declined because of a consensus of the members of the Board of Editors that some marginal papers were being accepted. Our approach to remedy this was, first, a tightening of guidelines for papers that received marginal approval by the reviewers. Second, a question in the evaluation criteria was modified to ask the reviewers to rate the potential for the paper under review to be cited in future research.

There are two opposing driving forces in our field, competition and collaboration. Publishing results in journals like *Optical Engineering* provides authors with a measure of authenticity by virtue of peer review and establishes a priority on the work against claims by competitors. At the same time, the publication also provides these competitors with information that permits them to provide corroboration of the results and to extend the published work. Remember, journals, such as this one, are the equivalent of technical newspapers. If a contribution is not news, it doesn't deserve publication and priority. If it isn't relevant to future work, it shouldn't take up the time and attention of our readers.

For *OE Letters*, the acceptance rate remained the same as last year (Table 4), 27%. Those authors whose papers meet the stricter criteria for *OE Letters* benefit from rapid publication (see Table 7 below). Also, their papers are published as open-access documents, so anyone visiting the SPIE Digital Library can download them at no charge.

The contributions from almost every region of the globe decreased last year (Table 5). However, the fraction of papers from Asia has continued to increase to 58%, up from 55% last year.

The journals office at SPIE headquarters supports the Board of Editors and the authors who submit papers. The crucial interface between these two groups is the journals staff. These staff members, whose names are listed on the masthead, handle the submitted manuscripts, perform a quality control check on the papers, move the review process along with gentle reminders, and ready the accepted papers for composition. In addition to this important routine, they inform the members of the Board when charges or evidence of plagiarism are alleged. Table 6 provides an

Table 1 Major statistics for 2004–2008 and percentage changes from 2007.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2008 vs 2007
Number of journal pages	3164	3750	3920	3966	3506	-11.6%
Number of technical pages	3023	3630	3802	3864	3410	-11.7%
Number of papers published	422	515	525	515	442	-14.2%

Table 2 Regular papers, received and published, for 2004–2008 and percentage changes from 2007 (including *OE Letters*; special section papers not included).

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2008 vs 2007
Regular papers received	912	875	826	879	937	+6.6%
Regular papers published	318	478	525	500	442	-11.6%

Table 3 Outcomes of papers acted on from 2005 through 2008 (regular papers only; *OE Letters* not included).

	2005		2006		2007		2008	
Accepted	497	63.0%	410	58.8%	394	49.3%	288	39.2%
Declined/ Closed/ Transferred	287	36.4%	279	40.0%	399	49.9%	444	60.4%
Withdrawn	5	0.6%	8	1.2%	6	0.8%	3	0.4%
Total	789	100%	697	100%	799	100%	735	100%

Table 4 *OE Letters* statistics for 2005–2008.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	%
Letters received	131	120	115	97	
Letters published	50	50	37	28	
Accepted	50	49	33	27	27.6%
Declined	80	61	89	71	72.4%

Table 5 Number of papers published by region of first author in 2004–2008.

Region	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	% of Total
Africa	2	5	4	5	4	1%
Asia	172	212	283	280	255	58%
Australia	3	5	5	5	4	1%
Eastern Europe	13	28	12	14	8	2%
Middle East	14	10	15	7	10	2%
North America	142	152	136	131	106	24%
South/Cent. America	4	3	2	4	5	1%
Western Europe	72	100	68	69	50	11%
Totals	422	515	525	515	442	100%

Table 6 Activity of the editorial office in 2008 (regular papers only, including *OE Letters*).

	Number	% change vs 2007
Reviewers solicited	3848	-3.5%
Reviews received	1487	-8.9%
Revised manuscripts received	457	-14.9%
Papers returned to authors for revision	471	-8.2%

Table 7 Journal performance.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Average time to complete initial review (months)					
Regular papers	2.6	2.2	2.3	2.0	1.9
<i>OE Letters</i>	1.5	1.2	1.2	1.0	0.8
Average time to publication (months)					
Regular papers	5.6	5.8	7.4	6.1	3.3
<i>OE Letters</i>	3.4	2.3	2.4	2.8	2.1
Total time in system (months), not including revision					
Regular papers	8.2	8.0	9.7	8.1	5.2
<i>OE Letters</i>	4.9	3.5	3.6	3.8	2.9

overview of the activity within the journals office for *Optical Engineering*.

The excellent performance of the editorial office can best be illustrated by the consistent reduction in the times to review and publish a paper. This trend can be seen in Table 7. Now, on average, it takes less than a month to review a submission to *OE Letters* and a little more than two months to publish. Thus, a successful paper submitted to *OE Letters* will appear online as an open-access paper less than three months after submission. By far the most dramatic change was a 45% reduction in the time it takes after submission for a regular paper to be published. The average time from submission to publication, not including revision time, dropped from eight months to almost five months! This is a huge benefit for *OE* authors.

I would like to thank the nearly 1,500 reviewers who gave their time and expertise in evaluating the manuscripts we received this past year. Their criticism of the manuscripts and their suggestions for improvement serve the readers of this journal well. Without them we would be dead in the water.

I thank the members of the Board of Editors for their service this year. I also thank them for their efforts to increase the standards by which manuscripts are judged. I thank Giordano Beretta for serving as Associate Editor in the area of image processing. Yu-Jin Zhang of Tsinghua University, Beijing, China, will be replacing him. I am fortunate to be able to work with such a distinguished group of people. Thank you all.

Donald C. O'Shea
Editor