

Optical Engineering

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2012 in Review

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I really enjoy writing the yearly review because it is always encouraging to see how much *Optical Engineering* has improved over the previous year. It's not that I am surprised that there is an improvement, because the associate editors and staff are gifted, hardworking, and diligent. It's just that the magnitude of the change and what they have accomplished year after year are impressive.

From 2010 to 2011, we had an increase of 45% in the number of papers published. This past year, 2012, we published 681 papers compared to 587 in 2011 for an overall increase of 16%. The number of technical pages and the number of papers published are shown in Table 1. An increase of 16% might not sound like much compared to 45% a year earlier, but this year we adopted a new policy. That policy was intended to keep *Optical Engineering* focused on optics, photonics, engineering, systems, components, techniques, materials, measurements, and processing associated with optical engineering. I felt we were at risk of seeing the equilibrium of

Optical Engineering shift toward signal and image processing, and we were rapidly straying from our core constituency due to the influx of general signal and image processing submissions that we were receiving. The policy, simply stated, is that we will consider signal and image processing papers that have a significant relationship to or impact on optical engineering and associated core subjects. We no longer consider general signal and image processing submissions. See my March 2012 editorial for examples. Making a long story short, the result of this policy was reduced growth in the overall number of papers published. Otherwise, we may have seen another 45% increase in the number of published papers and a further shift away from our optical engineering foundation.

Table 2 shows the number of regular papers received and the number of regular papers published along with the paper counts for special sections. The number of special section papers has almost doubled each year for the past two years. In 2012, special section papers were 18% of all papers published and we intend to continue to increase this number to around 25% of published papers. We continue to strive for special sections on high-interest, high-relevance topics and to publish papers that are significant and original.

Table 3 shows the number of regular papers that were accepted, declined/closed, and withdrawn. As noted, the acceptance rate decreased from 42% in 2011 to 34% in 2012. In other words, *Optical Engineering* has become more selective in what we publish. While this lower acceptance rate may seem dramatic, please remember that the number of published papers was nevertheless up by 16% this year. Also, acceptance rate is the key filter to ensure paper quality. With the steps that we have taken, I think the quality of the papers being published and likelihood they will be cited has improved overall. The acceptance rate for *OE Letters*, which

Table 1 Major statistics for 2006–2012 and percentage changes from 2011.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2012 vs. 2011
Number of technical pages	3802	3864	3410	2771	3097	4548	5422	+19.2%
Number of papers published	525	515	442	360	405	587	681	+16.0%

Table 2 Regular versus special section papers, received and published, for 2006–2012 (including *OE Letters*).

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Regular papers received	826	879	937	939	939	1335	1489
Regular papers published	525	500	442	360	366	516	559
Special section papers received	21	1	0	0	95	145	174
Special section papers published	0	15	0	0	39	71	122

Table 3 Outcomes of regular papers acted on from 2009 through 2012 (*OE Letters* not included).

	2009		2010		2011		2012	
Accepted	343	40.8%	375	46.1%	507	42.0%	488	34.3%
Declined/Closed	493	58.7%	429	52.7%	692	57.2%	920	64.7%
Withdrawn	4	0.5%	10	1.2%	10	0.8%	14	1.0%
Total	840	100%	814	100%	1209	100%	1422	100%

has always applied a higher standard for novelty and citability, also decreased from 28% in 2011 to 24% in 2012.

Also, I want to point out that many authors believe that acceptance is based on whether their paper is original and is determined to be technically correct by peer review. My criterion of acceptance provided to the associate editors is that they believe a paper is likely to be downloaded, read, and cited (in journal terms, this translates to significance). This is, of course, strongly influenced by the evaluation of the reviewers.

Another metric that is becoming more important each year to authors is the time it takes from paper submission to publication (see Table 4). The average review time from submission to initial decision for regular papers improved from 6.5 weeks to 4.8 weeks. Although the average time from acceptance to publication for the year overall improved only slightly from 1.7 months to 1.6 months, I would like to point out that significant improvements in publication speed were achieved in the latter part of the year. For the December 2012 issue, the average time from acceptance to publication was 28 days for regular papers and 21 days for letters. We will continue to work on improving time to publication.

Next, the number of published papers by region is shown in Table 5. It is nice to see an increase in published papers from Africa even though the absolute number is small. Papers from Asia continue to dominate the journal and I expect to see continued growth from this region. One of my high priorities is to ensure that this significant growth is managed with an emphasis on increasing the quality of published papers from Asia. I think that we have made good progress over the past two years. The percentage of papers from North America has increased from 16% in 2011 to 22% last year and this is primarily from special sections. The reduction in published papers from Western Europe following increases in the prior two years concerns me, and we will have to spend some time looking into the reason(s) for this drop. Overall, I'd like to see greater geographic representation and diversity, especially as optical engineering is of such global significance in today's world.

There were a number of changes to the Board of Editors in 2012. We welcome Zhou-Hui Li, Hai-Han Lu, and Craig Olson. We say goodbye and thank you to David Allred and Mark Mirotznik. We really appreciate their service as associate editors for *Optical Engineering*. The associate editor position is nonpay and hard work, with the modest reward being

Table 4 Journal performance.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Average time to complete initial review (weeks)							
Regular papers	9.8	8.7	8.1	7.2	9.2	6.5	4.8
<i>OE Letters</i>	5.1	4.3	3.4	3.4	7.3	4.7	2.6
Average time from acceptance to publication (months)							
Regular papers	7.4	6.1	3.3	2.0	2.0	1.7	1.6
<i>OE Letters</i>	2.4	2.8	2.1	1.7	1.2	1.4	1.4

Table 5 Number of papers published by region of first author in 2006–2012.

Region	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	% of Total
Africa	4	5	4	2	1	6	10	1.5%
Asia	283	280	255	211	230	374	413	60.6%
Australia	5	5	4	6	1	2	1	0.2%
Eastern Europe	12	14	8	11	9	12	16	2.3%
Middle East	15	7	10	12	11	17	15	2.2%
North America	136	131	106	76	98	89	147	21.6%
South/Cent. America	2	4	5	9	1	0	2	0.3%
Western Europe	68	69	50	33	54	87	77	11.3%
Totals	525	515	442	360	405	587	681	100%

the satisfaction of serving colleagues and contributing to SPIE. I thank all my associate editors as well as the numerous volunteers who reviewed papers for us this past year. Finally, the SPIE journals staff deserve acknowledgment for their commitment to making *Optical Engineering* an outstanding

journal. Much of the progress that we have made in the past few years is due to their dedication and efforts.

Ronald G. Driggers
Editor