



2009 in Review

In February, following a tradition set by Brian Thompson and continued by Don O'Shea, I provide a report to SPIE members and readers of this journal on its status. I would like to thank Don for providing the draft of this report. The changes in this report from last year are primarily due to the refinement of our acceptance policies. In March, I will provide a description of a few changes that will occur over the next year.

The number of papers published last year has declined substantially over the previous year. There was a reduction of 19% in the number of papers published in *Optical Engineering* in 2009 after a decline of 14% in 2008, as seen in Table 1. This represents a 30% decrease in the number of papers published from a plateau of about 520 papers in the years from 2005 to 2007. While the number of papers published in that earlier period was at or near the high for this journal, the perception that Don and the other members of the Board of Editors had was that the quality of the papers was diminishing. This led to an effort on the part of the Board to tighten the acceptance standards since then. The results are evident from the data presented in the table.

Despite the reduction in papers published, the number of submissions increased slightly over last year, as indicated in Table 2. (The comparison between number of papers published and papers submitted is not exact, because the majority of the papers published this past year were submitted in the previous year. However, it is useful as a way of discerning trends.)

In 2005 our acceptance rate was 63%, the highest in the past decade. Since then it has fallen to around 40% in the past two years (Table 3). Despite the decrease in the number of published papers, there was no corresponding decrease in the number of submissions. So, the reduction of published papers is due to the tightening of acceptance standards by our editors. We will continue to examine the quality of papers, paying particular attention to those that, while they are not wrong, provide no significant results.

The acceptance rate and publication number for *OE Letters* also dropped a bit this past year (Table 4). Those authors whose papers meet the stricter criteria for *OE Letters* benefit from a publication date that is a month earlier than regular papers (see Table 7 below). In addition, these papers are published as open-access documents, so that anyone visiting the SPIE Digital Library can download them at no charge.

The largest percentage of contributions, which come from Asia, remained at 59% in 2009. There were increases, albeit small, in three regions, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and South America (Table 5). 2009 saw drops in published papers from North America and Western Europe.

Don O'Shea told me that the one thing that made the role of Editor possible while doing research and teaching was the SPIE journals staff. They are a conscientious group of women (you will find their names listed on the masthead of the journal), who with intelligence and a sense of fair play for authors and readers move the manuscripts through the review process in a timely manner. They see that the authors remain informed and they

Table 1 Major statistics for 2004–2009 and percentage changes from 2008.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2009 vs 2008
Number of journal pages	3164	3750	3920	3966	3506	2842	-18.9%
Number of technical pages	3023	3630	3802	3864	3410	2771	-18.7%
Number of papers published	422	515	525	515	442	360	-18.6%

Table 2 Regular papers, received and published, for 2005–2009 and percentage changes from 2008 (including *OE Letters*).

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2009 vs 2008
Regular papers received	912	875	826	879	937	939	+0.21%
Regular papers published	318	478	525	500	442	360	-18.6%

Table 3 Outcomes of regular papers acted on from 2006 through 2009 (*OE Letters* not included).

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Accepted	410 (58.8%)	394 (49.3%)	288 (39.2%)	343 (40.8%)
Declined/ Closed/ Transferred	279 (40.0%)	399 (49.9%)	444 (60.4%)	493 (58.7%)
Withdrawn	8 (1.2%)	6 (0.8%)	3 (0.4%)	4 (0.5%)
Total	697 (100%)	799 (100%)	735 (100%)	840 (100%)

Table 4 *OE Letters* statistics for 2006–2009.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	%
Letters received	131	120	115	97	91	
Letters published	50	50	37	28	23	
Accepted	50	49	33	27	21	23.1%
Declined	80	61	89	71	70	76.9%

Table 5 Number of papers published by region of first author in 2005–2009.

Region	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	% of Total
Africa	5	4	5	4	2	0.5%
Asia	212	283	280	255	211	58.6%
Australia	5	5	5	4	6	1.7%
Eastern Europe	28	12	14	8	11	3.1%
Middle East	10	15	7	10	12	3.3%
North America	152	136	131	106	76	21.1%
South/Central America	3	2	4	5	9	2.5%
Western Europe	100	68	69	50	33	9.2%
Total	2520	2531	2522	2450	360	100%

Table 6 Activity of the editorial office in 2009 (regular papers and *OE Letters*).

	Number	% change vs 2008
Reviewers solicited	4798	+24.7%
Reviews received	1580	+6.3%
Revised manuscripts received	505	+10.5%
Papers returned to authors for revision	486	+3.2%

Table 7 Journal performance.

		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Average time to complete initial review (months)	Regular papers	2.2	2.3	2.0	1.9	1.7
	<i>OE Letters</i>	1.2	1.2	1.0	0.8	0.8
Average time from acceptance to publication (months)	Regular papers	5.8	7.4	6.1	3.3	2.0
	<i>OE Letters</i>	2.3	2.4	2.8	2.1	1.7
Total time in system (months), not including revision	Regular papers	8.0	9.7	8.1	5.2	3.7
	<i>OE Letters</i>	3.5	3.6	3.8	2.9	2.5

chase down delinquent reviews. With a sense of fairness and concern for ethical publishing they serve as frontline detectors of plagiarism and double publication. This is accomplished through their experience handling many papers and from detecting telltale signals that plagiarizers can leave. Table 6 provides an overview of the activity within the journals office for *Optical Engineering*.

With the assistance of new production procedures that the SPIE journals staff has incorporated into the *Optical Engineering* submission and publication processes, the average total time between the submission of an acceptable paper and its publication is now 3.7 months for regular papers and 2.5 months for letters, not including revision time (Table 7). This is a reduction of 4.3 months for papers and one month for letters over the past five years. Because time to publication is so prized by authors, these improvements represent a signal achievement in publishing at SPIE. The online publication of peer-reviewed papers provides our readers with information on optical engineering in less time than it was once possible to get a Proceedings paper in print. Wow!

With the change of editors, the composition of the Board of Editors has changed. During the past year, Tomasz Wolinski and Ralph Tatam, who have overseen papers on fiber optics sensors, have bowed out. Their area will be tended by David Webb of Aston University. Papers on pattern recognition and machine vision for which Don Braggins was responsible will be handled by Sergio Velastin of Kingston University and Andrea Prati of University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. In image processing Reiner Eschbach of Xerox will replace Yu-Jin Zhang. Robert Magnusson ends his service in the area of physical optics and will be replaced by Raymond “Tip” Rumpf of Prime Research. Don and I thank all of those who have served the journal, providing their time and the judgment required to conduct reviews of papers and maintain our standards. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Board of Editors and staff.

Ronald G. Driggers
Editor