



1999 in Review

In keeping with an *Optical Engineering* tradition, I want to report on the state of the journal at the end of 1999. The most remarkable aspect of this year's production was probably noticed by most readers—it's thinner...a lot thinner. The number of pages and papers has dropped by a third (see Table 1).

In an era of ever-increasing numbers—at least if you listen to the financial news these days—this result would be announced in the gravest tones. Down is bad. For *Optical Engineering*, I believe that the reduced page and paper counts were the result of a change in approach to editing the journal.

Most of the drop occurred because the number of special sections and special papers decreased. This had been anticipated because the time between initiation of a special section and publication is approximately one year and I approved fewer special sections last year. It was a conscious choice based on maintaining a high editorial standard. A special section just for the sake of additional pages is not a good idea.

I will continue to look for opportunities to present well-defined areas of optical engineering that would benefit from publication of a collection of papers as a special section. I intend to encourage special section editors to enlist a colleague to prepare a review paper so that those

Table 1 Major statistics for 1999 and percentage changes from 1998.

	Number	1999 vs 1998	
Number of journal pages	2212	-33.7%	
Number of technical pages	2045	-35.4%	
Number of papers published	273	-33.9%	
	Number	%	1999 vs 1998
Regular papers published	209	76.6%	-24.0%
Special papers published	64	23.4%	-53.6%
Regular papers received	518		+6.8%
Special papers received	78		-17.0%

of us outside the field can gain an appreciation of the current state of the topic and gain insight into the special section papers.

The rest of the drop was due to a decrease in the number of regular papers published. Some of this was caused by a lower acceptance rate during the past two years (see Table 2); the rest is probably due to a longer review process during the changeover to a full editorial board and the shift of the editorial offices to SPIE headquarters.

In contrast to the drop in publication statistics, there has been an increase in papers submitted to *Optical Engineering*. Last year the number of papers received increased by 4% over the year before. This year it increased another 6.8% (second part of Table 1). So we are continuing to grow in terms of regular submissions, while the number of special section papers declines. Overall, *Optical Engineering* continues to be a journal that attracts submissions from a wide variety of researchers across the globe, as Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate.

Although the papers of some authors take much longer to be evaluated than others, a collective measure of the review process, based on the number of papers that complete the decision process as a fraction of those submitted, has increased. This indicates that the overall evaluation process is getting better. But it can still be improved.

What are we going to do about it? Well, we are learning how to manage manuscripts in an electronic age and taking advantage of technology. Back in March *Optical Engineering* began to accept electronic submission of manuscripts. You can find the necessary details in the

Table 2 Outcomes of papers acted on in 1999 (regular papers only).

Accepted	284	59.54%
Declined	116	24.32%
Closed	70	14.68%
Withdrawn	5	1.05%
Transferred	2	0.42%
Total	477	100%

Table 3 Number of papers published by region of first author in 1999.

Region	Number
Asia	77
Australia	8
Eastern Europe	13
Middle East	10
North America	108
South/Central America	6
Western Europe	51

Information for Contributors section of this issue or on our Web site (http://www.spie.org/web/journals/oe_info-contrib.html). Recently, in place of our standard procedure of requesting reviews by mailing copies of the paper to reviewers, waiting for it to be delivered and getting a response from them, we are now e-mailing a request with the title pages attached as an Adobe Acrobat document. This permits the reviewers to respond to our request quickly and eliminates lost manuscripts and responses.

To further decrease the turnaround time between submission and decision, we are going a step further. Manuscripts that are not submitted electronically are being scanned and converted to Adobe Portable Document Format (.pdf) files and sent to the reviewers as e-mail attachments, providing their servers will accept these large files. Lately the average turnaround time has been about 100 days. There are, however, a fair number of papers that for various reasons seem to drag on forever. We work at closing these files, but in every distribution of human activities, there is always a tail. We're trying to keep the tail as short as possible, but it's a continual struggle.

Table 4 Number of papers published from the U.S. in 1999 by state of first author.

State	Number
California	12
New York	9
Ohio, Virginia	8
Maryland	7
Alabama, Pennsylvania, Texas	5
Arizona, Colorado, Washington DC, Delaware, New Jersey, Tennessee	4
Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, New Mexico	2
Connecticut, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, North Dakota, Wisconsin	1

Table 5 Activity of the editorial office in 1999 (regular papers only).

	Number	% change vs 1998
Reviewers selected	1368	+15.05%
Reviews received	944	+51.77%
Revised manuscripts received	313	+23.72%
Papers returned to authors for revision	417	+66.14%
Communication papers received	17	+70.00%

Again, I thank the reviewers who have given their time and expertise during the past year. We have extended and improved our database of reviewers and that is evidenced by the increase in the number of reviewers (Table 5). Note that there has been a large increase in the number of papers returned for revision. This would tend to indicate that the papers are receiving a critical reading and a high standard is being maintained.

I want to thank the members of the Board of Editors for their contributions toward maintaining these standards. I want to thank Bob Lieberman and Bob Parks for their work during the first two years of the Board's tenure. Bill Spillman of Virginia Tech will take over for Bob Lieberman and Chris Koliopoulos of ADE Phase Shift will replace Bob Parks. I also thank Jim Breckinridge and Iraj Najafi for their efforts in this changeover to a Board of Editors. Jannick Rolland of CREOL has taken Jim's place on the Board and Giancarlo Righini of the Italian National Research Council is replacing Professor Najafi. Because of John Greivenkamp's duties at SPIE and OSA, he will be rotating off the Board to be replaced by Groot Gregory of Lambda Research Corporation. I appreciate the substantial effort that he has contributed as Associate Editor.

Finally, I must express my admiration for the journal staff. They have not only handled papers efficiently but also provided much of the impetus for the continued conversion to electronic transmission of journal communications and documents. I thank Roger Lessard for taking over the editor's chair during my year as SPIE president. During that time we will continue to improve the review process and...we've got a few surprises up our sleeve!

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