



2002 in Review

Each February I report on the state of *Optical Engineering* for the previous year. I am beginning to suspect that we are in some type of oscillatory process with a period of two years. Looking at the size of the journal over the past four years you see a change in journal pages and papers published of about 15%. After a large drop in size three years ago, the number of pages and papers bounced back strongly in 2000 and then last year the paper count dropped again. And this year it rebounded back to the 2000 figure (see Table 1). But I doubt there will be another drop to keep the oscillation going...as you will see.

The wild cards in the size of this journal are the number and size of the special sections that are published each year. Each special section is treated in much the same way as an SPIE conference. A call for papers is published and the editors of the special section, in much the same way that conference chairs troll for contributions to a conference, solicit papers. Sometimes the section is timed so that the call for papers overlaps the submission of papers for a conference, whose chairs wish to highlight an aspect of their field through a special section. The big distinction between the conference submission and that for a special section is a full peer review of the paper. As can be seen in Table 2, the number of special section papers published this year represents about 15% of the papers in the journal. This is down from 17% two years ago. Because it takes at least a year from the time the decision is made to run a special section, changes in the segment of *OE* publication will always be erratic. Special sections are not done for the sake of increasing the size of the journal. They are intended to highlight newly emerging fields and

Table 1 Major statistics for 2000–2002 and percentage changes from 2001.

	2000	2001	2002	2002 vs 2001
Number of journal pages	3360	2924	3360	+ 14.9%
Number of technical pages	3220	2776	3210	+ 15.6%
Number of papers published	412	385	420	+ 9.1%

Table 2 Regular vs special section papers for 2001–2002 and percentage changes from 2001.

	2001	2002	2002 ratio	2002 vs 2001
Regular papers published	319	359	85.5%	+ 12.5%
Special papers published	66	61	14.5%	– 7.6%
Regular papers received	549	643		+ 17.1%
Special papers received	73	44		– 39.7%

new directions in optical engineering. Proposals for such special sections are always welcomed.

The reason I am encouraged that there will not be another repeat in the oscillation is that the number of regular papers and *OE Letters* submissions increased by 17% this year (Table 2). This strong submission rate to the journal would seem to indicate that authors regard *OE* as a forum for information in their field. We appreciate the confidence they have shown by submitting to *OE*.

The number of papers that we declined to publish remained about the same, but the number of acceptances was substantially greater (Table 3). The acceptance quotient is up from last year, but I think that may be a reflection of the quality of papers that we are attracting.

We now have two years of experience with *OE Letters*. It was instituted in mid-2000 and submissions began to arrive late that year. As can be seen from Table 4, the number of papers published and the number of submis-

Table 3 Outcomes of papers acted on in 2001 and 2002 (regular papers only; *OE Letters* not included).

	2001		2002	
Accepted	317	60.04%	445	65.35%
Declined	146	27.65%	173	25.40%
Closed	57	10.80%	51	7.49%
Withdrawn	4	0.76%	4	0.59%
Transferred	4	0.76%	8	1.17%
Total	528	100%	681	100%

Table 4 *OE Letters* statistics for 2001 vs 2002.

	2001	2002	%
Letters published	20	27	
Letters received	61	80	
Accepted	25	26	35.14%
Declined	50	48	64.86%

sions continue to increase. Our standards for rapid publication have remained high since a little over one-third of the papers that are submitted are published, as is shown in Table 4. This ratio rose a little now that authors begin to understand our standards and expectations.

One aspect we have not checked out is how many people access the page on SPIE Web where *OE Letters* are posted once they have been accepted. The papers can be easily accessed by going to the SPIE home page (www.spie.org), clicking on "SPIE Journals" on the right hand side under "Resources," then clicking on "OE Letters" on the right side of the Journals page.

In order to show what appears to be a trend, I have included the data for the past four years in Table 5, which gives the geographical distribution of first authors. There is a definite increase in the number of papers from Asia over this time. And for the second time there are more papers from Asia than any other region. The contributions from other regions have changed little.

California continues to be the largest source of papers within the United States. The numbers in parentheses in Table 6 are the number of papers for the previous year.

With the increase in papers, it would seem that the volume of work would go up proportionally. But some of the additional effort is alleviated by the increase in electronic submissions. Since spring 1999, the percentage of electronic submissions has grown from 20% in that year to 50% in 2000, and 67% in 2001. This past year the percentage was 81.4%. It would appear that within two years nearly all papers will be submitted electronically. As of today, there are no plans to phase out paper submissions; that may come about naturally. If you are not familiar with the electronic submission procedure, you can find a description on SPIE Web by clicking on the Publications/Author Information tab and then selecting the Journal Guidelines/Optical Engineering tab. (Those

Table 5 Number of papers published by region of first author in 1999 through 2002.

Region	1999	2000	2001	2002
Africa	0	3	2	1
Asia	77	119	145	154
Australia	8	7	2	8
Eastern Europe	13	19	14	17
Middle East	10	18	14	14
North America	108	163	121	139
South/Central America	6	4	8	7
Western Europe	51	79	79	80

Table 6 Number of papers published from the U.S. in 2002 by state of first author. (Numbers in parentheses are the 2001 figures.)

State	Number
California (14)	17
Maryland (3)	11
Massachusetts (8)	10
New York (5)	9
Arizona (6)	8
Texas (10)	7
New Mexico (3)	6
Colorado; Florida; Ohio	5
Alabama; Virginia	4
Connecticut; Delaware; Indiana; New Jersey; Pennsylvania; Tennessee; Washington; Washington, DC; Wisconsin	2
Hawaii; Idaho; Illinois; Michigan; Mississippi; Nebraska; North Carolina; Oregon	1

successfully navigating this Web labyrinth, who are Eagle Scouts, will also be eligible for a Pathfinder badge.)

Through the efforts of the SPIE journal staff, our authors are better served than ever. Table 7 provides an overview of the activity within the journals office for *Optical Engineering*. There were major increases in every aspect except Communications papers. Despite this increased activity, the average review time of 15.2 weeks for *OE* and 5.9 weeks for *OE Letters* in 2001 was reduced dramatically. It is currently 8.9 weeks for *OE* and 3.6 weeks for *OE Letters*. Anyone who has worked on research journals will tell you that this is an incredible feat. And it didn't happen just because our reviewers made New Year's resolutions to evaluate all manuscripts as soon as they arrived. Rather, the rapid transmission of papers by the journal staff and their follow up on reviews are responsible for this achievement. A bit of this advantage was lost in production, the time between acceptance and publication. It was 5.6 months for *OE* and 2.8 months for *OE Letters* in 2001; this past year it increased to 6.4 months and 3.0 months, respectively. We are working to reduce this to our earlier times. The names and titles of the staff may be found on the journal masthead on the page to the left.

Another figure in Table 7 is of note. That is the increase in reviews received. Considering that the number

Table 7 Activity of the editorial office in 2002 (regular papers only, including *OE Letters*).

	Number	% change vs 2001
Reviewers selected	2522	+24.67
Reviews received	1143	+29.74
Revised manuscripts received	478	+42.69
Papers returned to authors for revision	502	+25.81
Communication papers received	2	-60.00
<i>OE Letters</i> received	80	+31.15

of papers received went up about 17% last year, the fact that the number of reviews increased by 30% reflects well on our reviewers and on the staff for their follow up. I thank all of our reviewers for responding so promptly and for maintaining the high standards we have come to expect.

I want to thank the members of the Board of Editors for their contributions toward maintaining these standards. Their names and affiliations are also listed on the masthead. I want to thank Steve Gustafson, who was one of the original members of the editorial board, for his assistance over the years. Also, John Neff who stepped down at the end of last year. He will be replaced by Jurgen Jahns from Fern Universitaet in Hagen, Germany.

Also joining the editorial board is Ray Kostuk from Arizona, who will take over for Steve. I also thank Frank Wyrowski for serving as Associate Editor in the field of physics optics. His work is taken over by Dennis Prather from Delaware. Tomasz Wolinski of the Warsaw Institute of Technology is now responsible for optical fiber sensors and liquid crystals. The attention to detail and dedication of these Associate Editors are the qualities that help to determine the character of this journal. I feel lucky to be able to work with such a great group of people. Thank you all.

Donald C. O'Shea
Editor