



Something Special

A good fraction of the papers submitted to *Optical Engineering* are published as part of a special section. This is a collection of papers on a specific topic published together in one issue of the journal. Usually a special section is published for one of two reasons:

To highlight a hot topic that deserves a collection of papers at that time;

To introduce readers of *Optical Engineering* to areas of optical science and engineering from which there are currently few or no submissions.

Papers submitted for special sections are treated differently in that they are submitted to a guest editor (or editors) chosen from the field. The editor assigns the reviewers of the papers and decides which papers to accept. There is usually an overview of the papers provided by the editor in his or her guest editorial. A list of upcoming specials appears on page 579 of this journal.

This approach has been useful in expanding the coverage of OE. For example, there was a time when the editors of OE encouraged contributions from various countries. This gave our readers an insight into the efforts being made in other parts of the world and research groups with which they may not have been familiar. There were drawbacks, however. Some editors, having assembled a big, fat, successful issue, felt that they should continue to do so on an annual basis. In fact, as the special sections began to dominate the schedule, some members felt that the journal was not as useful as it had been in its slimmer form.

Based on conversations with my predecessor, Brian Thompson, and comments from these members, it was clear that there could be too many special sections. To combat this I have restricted special sections to one every other month. This should provide sufficient variety and still assure that regular submissions are published in a timely manner. It also permits, should the number of papers accepted for special sections take up the entire issue, the contents to be split and published in two successive issues.

So the opportunities to create special sections remain: but they will be carefully controlled. If you are interested in editing a special section, get in touch with me. Describe the topic you think would benefit from a special section and some reasons that a special section might bring at least 10 papers on the topic. You will also need to provide a CV for yourself and any co-editors.

Guest Editors are responsible for handling the manuscripts, assigning reviewers, and deciding to accept or decline the reviewed papers. Usually an editor has four months after the submission date to complete the reviews and any revisions. Five months before the publication date the guest editor turns the accepted manuscripts over to the OE office for copy editing and typesetting. Two months before publication the guest editor provides an overview, which is published as the guest editorial that introduces the special section.

We are also going to change the listing of upcoming special sections by reducing the length of the listings. The space gained from this contraction will be used to publish a short call for papers for those special sections whose submission dates have not passed. This will provide an additional notice of an opportunity for readers to contribute to a special section.

One direction that I intend to explore is rapid publication in one or two fields each year. The fields will be chosen from a set of conferences at one of the SPIE Symposia. Notices of the special section along with submission guidelines will be provided to conference authors. The revised papers, drawn from the best in the conference, will be due within two to three months of the conference for publication about ten months later. We will try this for the first time this year. Richard Scheps of the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center has agreed to edit a special section on Solid State Lasers. The papers will be published as part of the November 1999 issue, a little over nine months after the initial presentation in San Jose.

Another initiative involving special sections will be an attempt to increase the basic engineering content of OE. One method is to encourage special sections on topics that do not draw many papers. Granted many engineers do not have the inclination, or are not given the rewards, to publish. Still, there are some enterprising souls that want to

share what they do with others. I would like to encourage them as much as I can.

Our first attempt is a special section, "Pushing the Envelope in Optical Design Software," that will be edited by Mary Turner of Focusoft. This special grew out of a conversation we had at Photonics West in January. After a chance observation about how lens design programs are used, Mary remarked that 90% of most of the features in most computer programs are never used. So we decided it would be interesting to see what people could do, or are doing and never describe, using these "unused" features. In contrast to the design problems that are a feature of the International Optical Design Conference, whose problems are intended to be as impractical as possible, the subjects

of these papers may be applicable to real situations. We hope people will explore through a set of design studies some of the more esoteric approaches to current problems.

I hope that with these efforts we can make this journal interesting and relevant to our members and readers. I welcome any suggestions or comments on special sections. After all, the purpose of this journal is to provide optical engineers with authoritative, interesting papers that are relevant to their work.

Donald C. O'Shea
Editor