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Annual highlights

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Annual highlights

If you are a reader who still receives printed issues of *Optical Engineering*, you may have noticed that the volumes were a little thicker over the past year. The number of papers published increased about 25% in 2016, back to the level of 2014, largely due to a restoration in special sections to almost a monthly rate. I have been more proactive in lining up guest editors to coordinate special sections, as they appear to generate high interest in terms of downloads and citations.

A review of the top downloaded papers published in 2016 provides a good perspective on topics of high interest in the optical engineering field. The top ten downloaded papers addressed laser space debris removal,[1] hyperspectral camera design,[2] satellite optical downlinks,[3] freeform optics,[4] ultrasonic nondestructive evaluation,[5,6] microwave photonics,[7] optical-wireless networking,[8] and telescope mirror metrology.[9] The tenth on the list was actually my July editorial on performing excellent peer reviews. I am still not certain anyone actually reads my editorials, but this confirms that at least some are downloaded.

Of the nine scientific papers in the top-ten list, all but one were published in special sections. Two of the papers were part of the Special Section on Structural Health Monitoring: Use of Guided Waves and/or Nonlinear Acoustic Techniques. This topic is a bit peripheral to the *Optical Engineering* journal scope, but I included it because it was tightly coupled with an SPIE conference in this technical area. Interestingly, the review paper on ultrasonic nondestructive evaluation was also our top-cited paper in 2016,[5] so I feel good about this decision. Our top 2016 downloaded paper on laser space debris removal was actually published in advance online as part of our Special Section on Laser Damage III, which appears in the January 2017 volume. When I review download and citation statistics next year, I expect to see this as one of our most successful special sections.

There were actually ten *Optical Engineering* papers from prior years that exhibited higher download rates than any 2016 paper, indicating that the journal continues to serve as an archival resource for the optical engineering community. One of these is a tutorial on compressed optical sensing,[10] and five are review papers on laser-induced damage,[11] snapshot spectral imaging,[12] wavelength division multiplexing,[13] single-photon sources and detectors,[14] and laser development.[15] I provided references for all of these papers and recommend adding them to your reading list for 2017 if you have not had the opportunity to read them already. Also, if you are interested in writing a review paper on an optical engineering topic of current interest, I encourage you to submit it to *Optical Engineering*; you may well end up on this list of top downloads next year.

From a statistical standpoint, *Optical Engineering* appears to be in solid shape. In addition to the increase in published papers, our two-year impact factor increased to a 15-year high of 0.98. I believe there is room for improvement by recruiting high-impact papers and maintaining high standards for manuscript quality, perhaps even being a bit more selective. I intend to continue to use special sections as an avenue for high-quality paper recruitment. I welcome your suggestions for topics, and am always looking for good guest editors.

In terms of the review process, we accepted 548 of the 1618 papers submitted manuscripts in 2016, an overall acceptance rate just under 40%. Our average time from submission to first decision remained under our goal of 40 days, which means that we are still achieving timely publication of accepted papers. Unfortunately, some outlier cases remain due to difficulties in finding responsive reviewers. If you happen to be an author whose paper has fallen into this outlier category, please accept my apologies. We are investigating ways to avoid these cases with excessive review times.

In last year's annual review, I promised a renewed emphasis on the foundational attributes that make *Optical Engineering* successful: an emphasis on applied research and engineering; a balanced mix of contributing authors across academia, industry, and government laboratories; balanced geographic diversity; and a tight coupling with SPIE conferences. Targeted special sections are one way we are accomplishing this last goal. I think we have a great slate set up for 2017, and hope that you find them both interesting and educational.

Michael T. Eismann
Editor-in-Chief

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