

## An Exciting New Addition to Your Journal

In almost every area of life these days we take in enormous amounts of information, some of which we would just as soon not have. But there are times when only the latest information will serve our purposes. A case in point is our own field of optical engineering. It is growing at an incredible rate, yet much of what we read in journals, even in *Optical Engineering*, can be more than a year old by the time it is published, despite our best efforts to reduce publication time. Of course, there are some journals, usually referred to as "Letters," that work on a shorter time scale. But there is nothing that quite fits the field of optical engineering. We considered whether it would be worthwhile to start a new publication that would address this need, but decided to try a different, innovative approach that we think will be an exciting addition to this journal.

We are introducing a new feature as part of *Optical Engineering (OE)* called *Optical Engineering Letters (OEL)*. It will be a means of rapid communication within our community that takes advantage of current communications and publishing technology. Some of this effort is built on the concepts and procedures that are already currently used for manuscript submission to *OE*. But we have added several things to the mix.

Currently an author can submit a paper to this journal in hard copy via mail or electronically by attaching a PostScript or PDF file to an e-mail. About one-third of our authors use this second method. For submissions to *OEL*, only electronic submissions will be accepted, as this method will be used to accelerate the review and publication of *OEL* submissions. These rapid communications, as with other letters formats, must be timely, significant, and succinctly written (maximum of two published pages in *OE*). To assist the editor in evaluating the submission, the author must attach a one-page cover letter describing the importance of the work and indicating why it merits rapid publication. No paper, other than a copyright release form, is used in the submission or review process. And when digital signatures become more readily available, even the copyright form may be transmitted electronically.

To shorten the review process, the responsible editor will serve as an initial filter to decide if the work is significant. He or she may also serve as one of at least two reviewers who will evaluate the manuscript on a short time schedule. Reviewers will receive the manuscript electronically and be asked to provide an electronic review. Authors will be notified by e-mail regarding acceptance/rejection of their papers, with any reviewer comments and corrections attached to the message.

Once a final version of an accepted manuscript is received from an author, a PDF version of the letter will be published on the SPIE Web site within the *Optical Engi-*

*neering* web pages. There will be a notation to the effect that the current document has been accepted as a rapid communication in *Optical Engineering* and appears therein as a preprint. This provides a mechanism for rapid publication and allows anyone coming to SPIE Web to access and read the letter.

However, that is not the end of the matter. A note attached to the web version will tell readers that this letter has been reviewed, but not yet copy edited or formatted for publication. It will indicate that the manuscript will be copy edited and typeset for publication in the next available issue of *OE*. The *OEL* section will be set off in the front section of the journal. Thus, the process offers the author not only access to rapid publication, but also citation of an archived, indexed paper. Once the paper is printed in *Optical Engineering*, the PDF version will be removed from the web site, since an accessible published version is now available both electronically (*Optical Engineering Online*) and in print.

There is currently a section of *OE* called "Communications," which has been used mainly for short technical notes, comments, and errata. This section will remain, but its purpose will be quite different from the new *OEL* section.

Optical engineers will derive a number of benefits from this initiative. First, a rapid publication mechanism is established within the SPIE journal structure without the need to create an entirely new publication and build a readership for it. This will immediately give letters contributions the wide readership of *Optical Engineering* (currently about 10,000 subscribers). Second, authors are given both rapid publication on the web and archival publication in the journal. The time lag between acceptance and publication is virtually eliminated. If this publication method becomes accepted, it may eventually be used by all SPIE journals. However, there is no way of knowing how many submissions we will receive. Only by giving you the opportunity can we determine this.

On August 15, 2000, we will begin accepting submissions for *OEL*. We will begin to test our rapid review process to work out the bugs. Once manuscripts are accepted, they will be placed on the web, where they will be available to anyone without charge until published in the announced print issue of *Optical Engineering*. We will begin to print an *OEL* section at the beginning of the next volume of *OE* in January 2001.

We hope *Optical Engineering Letters* will provide authors with a means to publish letters announcing significant new work and innovation in a timely and effective manner as well as giving readers immediate access to valuable and timely new information in topics of interest to the optical engineering community.

**Roger Lessard, Editor (2000)**

**Donald C. O'Shea, Editor (2001)**