

Editorial

WELCOME to the February 2004 issue of SIGNAL PROCESSING LETTERS (SPL), which has two parts: a regular issue and a separate supplement issue. This unique collection of excellent papers comes as a bonus to our subscribers and marks an important event in the history of our journal. Starting 2004, we double in size, from 32 pages per issue to a sustained 64!

In 2002, SPL was among the first IEEE journals to move to an all-electronic submission and review system, Manuscript Central. Initially, the system had a complicated interaction between IEEE Staff, Associate Editors, and reviewers, and as a consequence, many papers got significantly delayed. All this improved, when in May 2002, we switched to a better version of Manuscript Central. A backlog of over 200 papers was quickly reviewed and received final decisions by the end of Summer 2002. This created a new problem: a large buffer of accepted papers waiting to be published. Our page budgets are determined annually in April, and there was no space to print many of these papers throughout 2003. Now, in 2004, we have a page budget that matches our submission rates and allows to publish the accumulated set of papers as well. To avoid further delays, we decided to print the majority of these papers in this special Supplement Issue. The longest queue delay a paper experienced is 11 months, and we sincerely apologize to authors for this disappointing performance.

Our current statistics are much better. With the renewed efforts of our excellent editorial team and the helpful IEEE SPS staff in Piscataway, NJ, we managed to bring the time between submission and first decision down to (median) 48 days, and 90% of papers are reviewed within three months. At this moment, the time an accepted paper has to wait to be printed is four to five months, and the aim is to reduce this to less than three months by the end of 2004, i.e., limited by the production process. If we do not reach this goal, it will be because the number and quality of submissions is rising: we saw a healthy 10% increase in 2003. It is expected that this trend continues as our statistics improve.

EDICS

In 2003, we had some quiet changes. One of them was a new paper classification scheme (EDICS). In the previous scheme, the majority of papers was submitted under "Signal Processing Techniques and Methods," indeed a wide category. This was split up into seven different areas, allowing better classification and, hence, a better assignment of papers to Associate Editors. The most popular categories are currently STAT (Detection, Estimation, and Classification Theory), IMMD (Image and Multi-dimensional Signal Processing), and COMM (Signal Processing

for Communications). It is good to see that the number of papers submitted under SPEE (Speech Processing) is growing. An entirely new category BIOL (Signal Processing in Biology) is starting to attract papers as well.

Another quiet change was the manuscript submission length. Until 2003, authors were supposed to count the number of words and equations. Since this proved hard to check and enforce, the actual length at publication ranged between 2.5 pages and 5 or even 6, putting the "honest" authors at a clear disadvantage. In 2003, we put a new limit of ten double-spaced pages at submission, typically resulting in three pages in print. No paper is allowed to be over four pages in print, and these limits are strictly enforced. It has happened that authors had to shrink their paper at the galley-proof stage. While unpleasant to do so, the increased level of fairness is to the benefit of our authors as a group and improves the reputation of the journal.

(SELF-)PLAGIARISM

Unfortunately, there have been several cases of blatant plagiarism in 2002 and 2003, where significant parts of manuscripts were literally copied from existing publications by other authors. It is hard to understand this inexcusable behavior. In many cases, the culprits were M.Sc. or Ph.D. students under pressure to have a certain number of publications before graduation, with their advisors unaware of the submission. Thanks to the attentiveness of Associate Editors and reviewers, these cases were caught in the early stages. It is reassuring that, apparently, no duplicated papers were printed until now. In the future, we are considering installing automatic tools for detecting plagiarism.

A more subtle case is that of self-plagiarism, where authors attempt to publish the same material twice. The general IEEE policy, by word of the Board of Directors, says that "The verbatim copying or reuse of one's own research which results in subsequent journal or conference papers without appropriate reference is considered another form of plagiarism, or self-plagiarism; it is unacceptable." The worry of the Board of Directors is that now that everything is electronically searchable and online, the accumulation of duplicate material is undesirable, as it reflects poorly on the IEEE and our authors.

Specifically to SPL, there are two common cases. The first is the submission of a paper to SPL and a more extended version to a different journal, e.g., TRANSACTIONS ON SIGNAL PROCESSING. The rule here is that there cannot be more than 25% crossover, and that the later paper should clearly refer to the earlier paper and briefly discuss how it offers substantively novel contributions beyond those of the earlier work. Obviously, the shorter paper should also fit the style of SPL: self-contained, timely, and significant.

The second case is the submission of a paper to SPL and essentially the same paper to a conference. Our policy, suggested by the IEEE Signal Processing Society and derived from

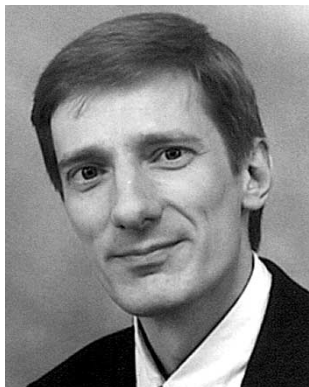
the general IEEE policy, is that we do not allow resubmission of conference papers as SPL papers, unless 1) it is really outstanding novel work, 2) cites the earlier paper, and 3) truly fits the style of papers in SPL. Further, the author is required to edit the paper before submitting it: literal copying of text is undesirable, but reusing some of the same equations and graphics or images is permissible.

BEST PAPER AWARDS

Finally, let me remark that papers published in SPL are eligible for Best Paper Awards handed out each year by the Society. Now is a good time to forward your nominations. (Note

that self-nominations are discouraged.) Papers published between 2001–2003 are applicable, and your nomination along with a brief motivation should be sent to the cognizant Technical Committee. For more information, see <http://www.ieee.org/organizations/society/sp/tc.html>. The Technical Committees are responsible for making a first selection and will submit the most promising nominations to the Award Committee.

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Alle-Jan van der Veen (S'87–M'94–SM'02) received the Ph.D. degree (cum laude) from Delft University of Technology, Delft, The Netherlands, in 1993.

Throughout 1994, he was a Postdoctoral Scholar at Stanford University, Stanford, CA. He is currently a Full Professor in the Signal Processing group of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Delft University of Technology. His research interests are in the general area of signal processing for communication, in particular source separation, interference cancellation, and blind equalization.

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