

Evolution of an Editor

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A commemorative editorial for the 50th anniversary of *Applied Optics* from former editor-in-chief, James C. Wyant. © 2012 Optical Society of America
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I first learned about *Applied Optics* (AO) during the fall of 1965 when I was a first-semester graduate student at the Institute of Optics at the University of Rochester. I was especially interested in holography, and AO looked like the best place to learn about the latest developments in holography. By the second semester, the spring of 1966, I was tired of having to go to the library to read AO, so I joined the Optical Society of America (OSA) to get my own copy of the journal. AO had so many papers in my areas of interest. In addition to the technical papers, I remember especially enjoying Stanley Ballard's column "Optical Activities in the Universities" and of course John Howard's editorials. It was quite exciting when I met both John and Stanley a few years later.

My first two papers as a graduate student were published in the *Journal of the Optical Society of America* (JOSA) because my advisor, M. Parker Givens, thought it was the best place for my papers. By the time I was ready to submit my third paper, I convinced Professor Givens that the paper should go to AO. I strongly felt that AO was the journal for me, and so as time went along it was my first choice for publishing and reading papers.

I also remember the excitement when I received my first paper from John Howard to review. While I am no longer as excited when I receive a paper to review, reviewing a paper is a good way of forcing yourself to read a paper in great detail and learn something you might not learn otherwise. Reviewing papers is important for authors, journals, and reviewers.

In the mid-1970s, I was asked to be the editor for three special issues of the SPIE journal *Optical Engineering*. I found that to be a lot of fun, so I became an associate editor of *Optical Engineering* for eight years. At about the same time, I became an advisory editor of *Optics Letters* for one year and an associate/topical editor of JOSA for eight years. I am not sure it made sense to be an editor for both OSA and SPIE journals at the same time, but no one complained and I enjoyed it. At that point I got a chance to be an associate/topical editor of my favorite journal, *Applied Optics*, from I think 1983 until 1992. Then during 1992–1997, I was the optical technology division editor of AO. When Bill Rhodes completed his term as editor-in-chief of AO at the end of 1993, all the division editors were given the opportunity of applying for the editor-in-chief position, and I really wanted to, but I was so busy running and growing the WYKO Corporation and being a professor at the University of Arizona that I did not feel I had the time to do an adequate job. For years I was sorry about that decision, but I got another chance. After my term as AO division editor, I served as an associate editor of *Optics Express* for six years, and then in the fall of 2005, I was asked if I wanted to become the editor-in-chief of AO. I jumped at the opportunity. However, after serving two years in the position, I was elected to the OSA presidential chain. I served as editor-in-chief for one more year, but then in the fall of 2008 I felt I had to resign. Being the dean of the College of Optical Sciences at the University of Arizona, an OSA officer, and a board chairman of another startup company, 4D Technology, did not leave enough time to be the AO editor-in-chief. I hated to give up my AO duties, but I knew that Joe Mait would be a great AO editor-in-chief.

The time I was AO editor-in-chief was a very exciting time in publishing. To better understand this, let's think about what was happening during the years I was involved with the OSA journals. During the paper submission, review, and editorial process, papers are sent around to a lot of people. When I first became involved in editing, papers were sent around using the postal service. Then FedEx came along, and papers traveled around faster. Then fax came along, and the papers were sent around even faster. Then e-mail and the Web became popular, and the whole process became much faster. The problem was that the time to publication—the time between submitting a paper and having the paper published—had not improved very much, but it seemed like everything else in the world was happening faster and faster. Authors demanded that the time to publication had to reduce, or AO was going to lose papers to other journals. The OSA staff, AO division editors, and the topical editors responded to the challenge very well. During the three years I was AO editor-in-chief, the time to publication was reduced from 269 days to 141 days, and the year after I was editor, the time to publication reduced even more to 121 days. The time between submission and when people can actually read the article has improved more than these numbers indicate because everything is now published online; therefore, the time between publication and when we can actually read the article has

now gone essentially to zero. The postal service is completely out of the picture!

Being involved over the years with AO has been a lot of fun, and I encourage young people in optics to get involved, first by writing and reviewing papers, and then, if they are so inclined, getting involved with the editing process. Hopefully it will be as enjoyable for you as it has been for me. There will certainly be many interesting challenges in the scientific publishing business over the next few years.

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