**Template: A.2 Assessment of Journal (to be filled out by the Outgoing EiC)**

Name of Journal: *Transactions on Computing Education (TOCE)*

Name of Outgoing EiC: Josh Tenenberg and Robert McCartney

We thank you for all of your years of service as EiC. Before we appoint a new EiC, we are seeking your help for assessing the journal. Your help is much appreciated.

1. What is your assessment of the overall health of the journal?

We assess the journal to be in good health and stable condition.

Some background: we were originally appointed as EiC's of TOCE's predecessor, JERIC, in July, 2006. JERIC was in poor health, not having published an issue in over a year, with papers languishing in review queues for months, no written review criteria, and little guidance given to authors who were asked to revise and resubmit. After clearing the review queues, making up the deficit in unpublished issues, appointing a new editorial board, writing a guide for associate editors, and establishing a set of written review criteria, we decided that the name and legacy of JERIC was an obstacle to our building it into the top journal in computing education. We proposed replacing JERIC with a new journal with a different charter to the ACM Publications Board in 2008. The Pubs board accepted our new journal application, and we were appointed the founding EiC's of this journal in October 2008 and reappointed for a second term to expire at the end of June 2015.

Since our first issue in early 2009, we have had a steady growth in submissions, and have run several special issues that we believe are deep contributions to the field, in addition to publishing high-quality issues quarterly. We believe that we have a superb editorial group, and have established a dialog with them to ensure both a high degrees of consistency and quality in reviewing. We have also written several editorials that articulate our vision of computing education and of the role of TOCE within this vision.

In addition to a steady growth in the number of submissions yearly, we also see that the quality is improving. Much of that is due to the efforts of the editorial board and reviewers, who are professionally carrying out their gate-keeping responsibilities to create the very excellence that is establishing TOCE as the venue of choice for publishing their research, a virtuous circle. We have conceived of and carried out our efforts to oversee this enterprise, and to create an environment of openness and dialog so that we can jointly determine TOCE's character as we move forward.

Now that it is time to turn over TOCE to new leadership, we believe that the new editors should reconsider the choices that we made to establish TOCE in the first place. Consistent with our target audience -- computing educators and curriculum designers -- we favor manuscripts that are directly tied to application in the classroom or curriculum design, which leaves out papers of theoretical interest far removed from the classroom that might nonetheless be substantial contributions. In addition, our insistence that papers be supported by empirical evidence means that we have not published speculative work that could help the field envision itself in new ways.

We also think that the journal could move from "stable" to "growing" if new editors form alliances with some of the existing conferences and/or SIG's (such as SIGCSE and SIGITE). While we have tried to do this, particularly by soliciting extended versions of papers at related conferences, we have not been as successful as we hoped. It may be of mutual benefit for TOCE to establish more direct links with conferences to combine the rigorous review of a journal with the public presentation and discussion of a conference. Such arrangements take time and effort to establish and maintain, but there are examples of such collaborations among other ACM publications.

1. How would you compare the actual coverage of topics during your term with the journal’s editorial charter?

We track our charter closely. Even more so, we see our publication criteria (published on the "Authors" page of our website) as operationalizing our charter, and we use this criteria directly in our review forms and refer to it when we make decisions on every paper. In light of our discussion in the question above, however, we believe that any new EiC's should closely evaluate the journal's charter.

1. What is the specific review process that you used (please be specific)?

When a manuscript is received for a regular issue, we read and discuss it prior to sending it out for review. Our primary reasons for doing so are 1) to reject papers that are out of scope, and 2) to determine if a paper is sufficiently close to meeting our publication criteria to justify the time of our associate editors and reviewers. We believe we have a higher percentage of papers that are out of scope than many of ACM's journals, because our charter keeps us focused on computing education (i.e. the teaching and learning of computing topics) rather than the use of computers *in* education, for which there are many other venues, including ACM’s *eLearn*.

If we decide to send a paper to review, we assign it to one of the AE’s on the editorial board whom we believe is most appropriate for overseeing the review. This person then assigns at least 3 reviewers, and makes a recommendation to us after receiving the reviews. We then discuss the AE’s meta-review, the reviews, and the paper itself. The majority of the time, we accept the AE’s decision. However, and often with new AE’s, we will ask the AE’s to provide a more detailed rationale. Also, for any paper that is a revise and resubmit (major or minor revision), we ask the AE’s to provide concrete recommendations that detail what the author will need to do in order to satisfy the publication criteria. Infrequently we will have an extended discussion with the AE if we disagree with the recommendation, or if we believe that there are inconsistencies.

For special issues, we have a different process. We take cultivate guest editors through a dialog that lasts from months to years. We seek guest editors whom we believe have the expertise on their focus area *and* have the commitment and experience to carry out the administrative responsibilities. We have a process whereby we request the editor(s) to send a proposal that clearly outlines the focus of the issue, its rationale, who will be involved at the editorial level, who are likely authors, the venues for soliciting papers, and a draft “call for papers” for the issue. Through an iterative process, we often arrive at a proposal that we accept. We have always requested that each guest issue be edited by at least two people, both to help with the administrative overhead and to add a level of debate and discussion concerning all decisions on manuscripts. Prior to acceptance, we make clear the guest editor responsibilities, and establish a timeline of milestones and deadlines between the current date and the scheduled date of publication.

Papers submitted to special issues begin with the submission of a one-page abstract prior to the development of full papers. This fulfills several functions. First, it allows us to gauge interest. A few times in the past, the response has been so strong that we decide (along with the guest editors) to extend the special issue from one to two issues. Second, it allows, at an early stage, for the guest editors to filter out those papers that are unlikely to ever be within the scope of the journal and/or special issue or meet the publication criteria. At this point, we provide the guest editors with templates for invitation letters to submit full papers as well as a rejection letter for those that will not be further pursued. We give the guest editors the freedom to determine which papers to solicit and which papers to reject based on these abstracts. Once these are sent out, the guest editors are able to line up reviewers in anticipation of the completed papers. Once the completed papers are submitted, the process proceeds much as for regular issue papers, with the guest editors serving as AE. When decisions are ready, we send them all out at the same time (which we also do for the abstracts), though for subsequent rounds of review we often send these out as they are completed. Finally, when the lineup of the special issue has been determined and the papers are nearing completion, we request and editorial from the guest editors, which we review for quality and consistently.

1. What is the status of new initiatives that you pioneered for the journal?

Since we are the founding EiC’s, everything that we have done is pioneering for this journal, which we have described above.

1. Is there anything else that you can say to help us in the assessment of the journal?

In discussions with Laura Lander, she has mentioned that we have a higher than average number of papers that are determined to be major revisions that are never resubmitted. There are a number of reasons for this. First, because most of the authors of TOCE papers are computer scientists who are not trained in educational research, we have a high number of papers that require major revisions in order to meet our publication criteria. Although experience has shown that many of these are not resubmitted, we nonetheless want to give authors a clear statement of what they would need to do to meet the publication criteria and the opportunity to do so. We believe many authors choose not to revise and resubmit because as members of disciplinary organizations and departments (most frequently but not exclusively in Computer Science), there are either insufficient rewards in their institutions or lack of identification as an educational researcher for their taking the time and energy required to meet our publication criteria to publish an educationally-oriented paper. Second, and more pragmatically, if a paper is evaluated as “major revision”, subsequent versions are easy to track in Manuscript Central, while papers that are rejected (the alternative) can be resubmitted without links to the original paper with its reviews and recommendations. If there were another mechanism to track resubmissions we could choose reject over major revision more often.