

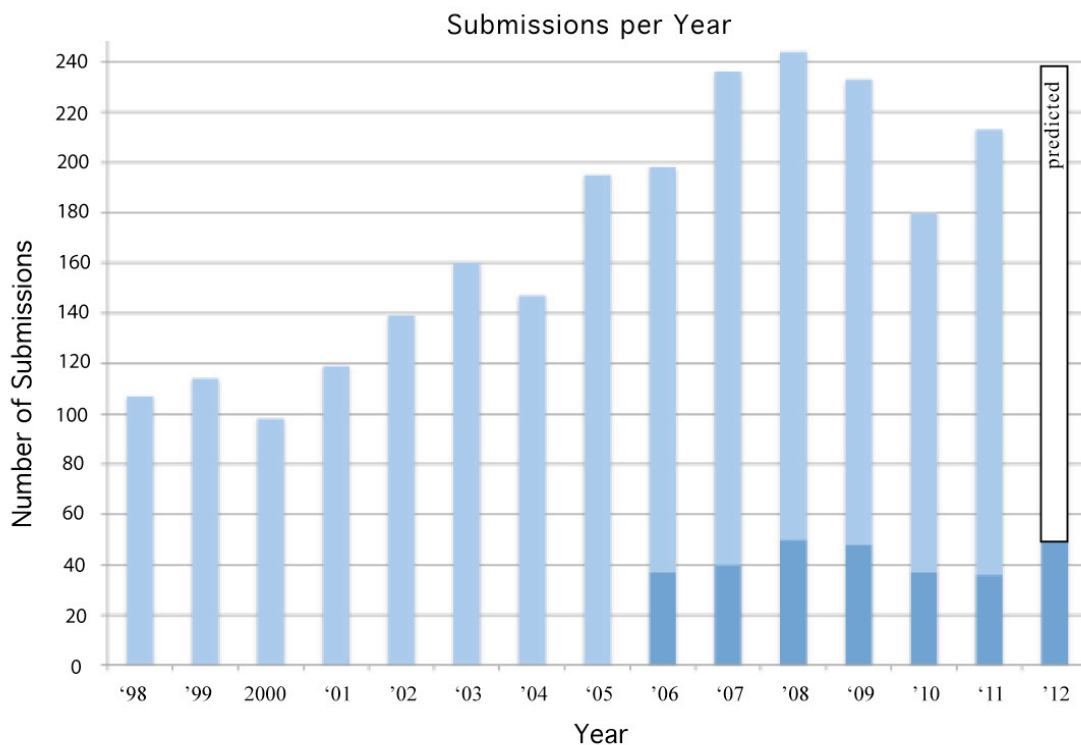
Managing Editor's Report

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Executive Council Meeting, March 2012

Submissions

The submission rate was down in 2010, but has bounced back. There were 213 submissions in 2011, not including revisions or book reviews. Considering the number of submissions that have already come in this year, 2012 is likely to be a busy year (2012 prediction shown on the graph as a white bar). Of the 213 submissions, 36 (17%) were resubmissions. A resubmission is distinct from a revision. Resubmissions always follow a reject decision and are treated as new papers except that authors are expected to reply to previous reviews.



The dark blue portions of the bars are the number of submissions as of 21March each year (data not easily available pre-Manuscript Central in 2006 and so not shown). The eventual total for 2012 is predicted based on the number as of 21March2012.

We continue to receive many more Regular Articles than Points of View or the new category, Software manuscripts.

Manuscript type	# 2011 submissions	acceptance rate
Regular Article	178	24%
Point of View	31	50%
Software for Systematics and Evolution	4	50%

Printed in 2011

Manuscript type	# printed	mean length (typeset pages)
Regular Article	50	14.5
Point of View	16	8.7
Book Review	13	1.9

Manuscript processing time

A. From submission to return of first decision

For manuscripts submitted in 2011, the following table lists the data for each step in the process.

Phase	Mean days duration and stand. dev. (SD)
Initial intake. Admin processing of new papers involves many topics and troubleshooting, including: files not corrupted during conversion by Manuscript Central (MC), figures legible, all data and appendices that should be present are accounted for, Dryad link is provided to reviewers, response to previous reviews (if applicable) provided. Some authors need help with various aspects. This step is now faster than it was, with the 2012 mean = 3.1 days and still decreasing.	5.5 (6.9)
EiC assign AE. The Editor in Chief reads the paper, decides whether to send it out for review (or at least AE opinion) and chooses an Associate Editor.	1.7 (2.1)
AE assignment through completion of outside reviews. This includes the sometimes time-consuming step of finding willing reviewers as well as the time reviewers take to return their reviews.	54.9 (25.4)
AE completes their recommendation. After outside reviews are received, the AE writes their recommendation to the EiC. Duration varies widely, depending on the individual AE and their schedule.	19.7 (26.1)
EiC decision. The EiC takes the manuscript, the reviews, and the AE recommendation into account to evaluate the ms, and writes a decision letter. The value shown combines papers that went out for full review as well as those that were returned without review.	7.9 (15.1)
2011 ms processing time, submission to first decision, by adding each portion:	89.7 days = 3 months

B. From 1st decision to publication

Data are from revisions of 2011 papers.

Phase	Mean days duration and stand. dev. (SD)
From decision letter to receipt of revision from author(s). This value is not included in the calculation of time for processing done by us because it rests with the authors.	43.5 (37.9)
From receipt of 1 st revision to EiC's second decision letter. This includes time required for all the phases of a review process in most cases. We're taking action to speed this step. For example, we recently changed the instructions to AEs so as to discourage sending revisions back to reviewers if the original decision was "accept pending minor revisions."	37.9 (35.1)
From receipt of 1 st revision to EiC's final accept decision. The time this takes depends primarily on authors following the review comments and the instructions to authors. This value includes the previous phase; they are shown separately to fine tune the picture of what's happening. For some papers the second decision is the final decision. (For this value and the preceding one data were cut off at revisions received through mid November. That provides a 4 month buffer, when final decisions were finished in virtually all cases, in order to prevent biasing the data to reflect relatively quick turnaround times.)	51.2 (44.0)
From final decision to export of paper to OUP. This is the phase when papers have to meet our minimum requirements for publication. Delays result from things like last minute submissions of data to GenBank, TreeBASE, or Dryad; replacing figures or other files with corrected versions; etc. We're working on speeding this phase, with a resultant 2012 mean of 14.5 days, a saving of more than two weeks.	34.0 (38.5)
Total revision processing time = 51.2 days + 34.0 days = 85.2 days. Manuscripts can be published online within a week after export, for a total time to publication of:	3 months

Eliminating backlogs

It's imperative that manuscripts do not become backlogged awaiting processing. We've taken several actions to prevent this.

1) Narrowing focus to core problems with manuscripts. We no longer take time to make sure manuscripts follow the details of standard *Systematic Biology* style. They still must convey scientific content reasonably clearly in text and figures, but the details of how that's done are not as controlled. We have other firm requirements, such as appropriate deposition of data and online supplemental material such that

it's publicly available. In short, we've kept the important rules but don't sweat the small stuff.

2) Elimination of revision notes. I used to write "R1 notes" for each manuscript in revision, explaining to authors the various changes needed for their final version. The goal was to receive finalized manuscripts that were ready for export, making that process faster. Unfortunately, the goal wasn't being achieved for several reasons. Some authors tried to follow the instructions but ran into problems, some seemed to ignore the notes, and in any case final version manuscripts still had to be checked before export in case of problems. The inefficient use of time combined with the narrowed focus on core items made R1 notes no longer worth doing, so they were eliminated in late November 2011. R1 notes had been the most time-consuming task I had, and therefore were involved in slowing processing at almost every phase.

3) Weekly Manuscript Status Reports were instituted the second week of February, 2012. These reports are a synopsis of manuscripts that have been awaiting the Admin Intake Checklist for >3 days and those that have been awaiting export >2 weeks. This does not take as much of Ron's time as one might think, because the numbers have almost always been zero since the status reports began. Basically, by the time I've gone through a problematic ms record in enough detail to explain its peculiarities to someone else, it's faster to just fix the problems I can and process the ms. The only times manuscripts are listed on the report are when the author has a specific task to do before I can proceed. I've also kept the papers < 3 days and < 2 weeks, respectively, down to zero for virtually every weekly report. Manuscript processing as of early February 2012 has been dramatically faster than it was in 2011.

4) We're expanding the use of Manuscript Central to prod Associate Editors' progress at various stages. We're also discouraging AEs from sending revisions to reviewers (unless they're sure it's necessary) in cases in which the initial decision was accept pending minor revision.

The late 2011 backlog and OUP's Virtual Editorial Office

The submission rate during the later part of 2011 was extremely high, and the above steps had not yet been taken to prevent backlogs. Unacceptable delays occurred in Admin Intake Processing, R1 notes, and Export of papers to OUP. To alleviate the backlogs, R1 notes were eliminated and OUP's Virtual Editorial Office was employed briefly. The VEO helped eliminate the Intake backlog by processing 18 incoming manuscripts. In a few cases there later turned out to be problems resulting from the confusion of data files with online appendices, but in general the VEO was quite competent. The person assigned to us was knowledgeable of Manuscript Central and very congenial to work with. I was able to concentrate on eliminating the Export backlog, which requires a much more broad knowledge of *Systematic Biology* processing than the Intake phase does. With our new policies in place I don't anticipate any need for future use of the VEO except possibly as a backup in the unlikely case of a prolonged medical condition that prevents me from keeping up our current standard.

The Dryad Consortium Board Meeting

I represented SSB at the meeting in Vancouver July 7-9, 2011. I plan to write up notes as part of my report to the full SSB council in July, but I also wanted to mention it here in case anyone has questions about it or wants to suggest topics to be covered in my July report.