

2011 SSB Annual Meeting
Editor's Report (Ron DeBry)

I. Submissions and Decisions: 2010

Number of Submissions 2010: 180. This represents a second consecutive decline in submissions. It is down by 52 (23%) from 2009, which was itself a 5% decline from the record year of 2008. The reason for such a sharp decline is not obvious. Certainly, some is due to an overall increase in the number of journals available. Anecdotally, I have heard from some individuals that Systematic Biology is developing a reputation as being “slower” than many competing journals. Steps being taken to speed up manuscript processing are outlined in Section III.

One 2010 submission was withdrawn during the review process, so I issued decisions on 179 manuscripts in 2010. Of those, 42 were rejected without review, as Not Appropriate for Journal. This is a higher percentage, compared to Jack's last year (~23% vs 15%), although the absolute numbers are similar over the years (35 last year, 39 the year before). Ten of the 42 were sent to AEs, who declined to send them out for review and returned them to me with the recommendation of Not Appropriate. The manuscripts rejected under this category cover a very broad range - many are phylogenetic studies that are not of sufficiently general interest, but another large group is submissions that are simply in the wrong scientific discipline (e.g., “systems biology” rather than “systematic biology”).

That leaves 137 submissions that received a regular decision. **Of those 137, I concurred with the AE recommendation 123 times (~90% of decisions).** This percentage is consistent with recent years. Of the 14 times I made a decision that differed from the AE's recommendation, my decision was less favorable for the author in 10 cases. Of these, two were a minor matter of degree (Accept with minor revision bumped down to Accept with major revision) that made no real difference in how the authors should proceed. In three cases, I declined to offer the option of resubmission, against the AE's recommendation (in two of those cases, the AE's confidential comments said, essentially, “I'm not sure – your call”). I decided to Reject, with resubmission encouraged, four manuscripts for which the AE had recommended Accept with major revisions. In those cases, I was not comfortable accepting a manuscript for which substantial re-analysis was being called for by the reviewers and AE. In each case, I explained my deviation in the decision letter, and strongly encouraged the authors to resubmit.

2010 Decisions: (179)

Accept pending minor revisions: 20 (11%; 9% in 2009; 10% in 2008)

Accept pending major revisions: 36 (20%; 25% in 2009; 21% in 2008)

Reject, encourage/permit resubmission: 45 (25%; 29% in 2009; 30% in 2008)

Reject: 36 (20%; 20% in 2009; 23% in 2008)

Not Appropriate: 42 (24%; 17% in 2009; 16% in 2008)

Overall acceptance rate: 31% (34% in 2009; 31% in 2008)

Overall rejection rate: 69% (66% in 2009; 69% in 2009)

II. Submissions and Decisions: 2011 (as of 6/14/2011).

Manuscripts submitted since 1 Jan 2011: 72

This represents a 7% decline compared to this point in 2010, which continues the downward trend of the past three years

45 decisions so far for 2011 submissions

22 Not Appropriate (5 with AE input)

1 Accept

3 Accept minor

3 Accept major

10 Reject, resubmission encouraged

6 Reject

Only 1 deviation from the AE recommendation so far, and that was in favor of the authors.

III. Manuscript Handling:

We have made some changes in the flow of manuscripts. These will not be noticed much by AEs or reviewers, but they have resulted in manuscripts spending less time in non-review editorial functions. I have also added one communication step that should improve authors' perception regarding the overall speed of the review process. When a manuscript is ready for final acceptance, it is first sent to the Managing Editor. She goes through it carefully for a number of issues. For example, she checks the resolution and size of figures, checks for Genbank, TreeBASE and Dryad accession numbers, makes sure any supplemental material referred to in the text is actually available, and makes a list of changes required in order for the overall manuscript to be in compliance with the journal's format. This process is

allotted 1 week, but can take longer depending on Debbie's current workload. Rather than wait for that process to be complete before I contact the authors, I now send an email notification to the authors as soon as we have made the decision that the manuscript is scientifically ready. In that email I tell the authors that they may begin to list the paper as "in press".

The editorial office has traditionally worked on the basis of sending an entire issue's worth of papers to the publisher on a schedule determined by the deadline for the upcoming print issue. I think that authors now think of time in review as being everything up until online publication, so we now send manuscripts to OUP as soon as they are ready on our end. This allows OUP to get articles posted in the Advance Access section of the journal's website. Print-issue order is determined at the appropriate time.

We are also making some adjustments to how the Associate Editors handle manuscripts. We hope that those will streamline the process and improve handling time.

IV. New Section for the Journal: Software for Systematics and Evolution

After several years of discussing the possibility, we will soon begin accepting submissions for this new category of paper. Our goal is to publish papers announcing and describing software tools that will make important contributions to progress in our field. This section will have its own dedicated staff. Dr. David Posada has agreed to become the Associate Editor, and he will appoint two members to the Editorial Board. Submissions will, in general, be reviewed only by the Editorial Board and AE. A brief announcement will appear in the next issue of the journal, and a full set of Instructions for Authors will become available on the journal's web pages and on Manuscript Central in the near future.

V. LaTeX

Submissions using LaTeX have caused problems for us for several years. In an effort to solve those problems once and for all, Managing Editor Debbie Ciszek has recently learned LaTeX and produced a set of style and bibliography templates for authors to use.

VI. Data Archiving:

We continue to work with Dryad on implementing our data-archiving policy. The Managing Editor's report includes a synopsis of the year's work on this.

VII. Associate Editors:

Marc Suchard stepped down as Associate Editor this year. He always did really excellent work for the journal, for which we are extremely grateful. Ed Susko, of Dalhousie University, has been rewarded(?) for consistently excellent review work by being added to the ranks of the Associate Editors. Sincere thanks to Ed for agreeing to take on that service for the society. And, of course, sincere thanks to all of the continuing Associate Editors. As mentioned above, David Posada becomes the AE for the new section "Software for Systematics and Evolution".