

Letters to the Editor

Letters on any issue of interest to IMS members are welcome. Email your letters to the Editor at bulletin@imstat.org. The Editor's decision about whether to publish letters is final. Letters are submitted on the understanding that they may be edited before publication.

Christopher Tong writes further comments on the review times for Statistics and Physics Journals

Dear Editor:

Last year, Larry Wasserman published a letter in the IMS Bulletin where he compared review times for statistics papers with those for physics papers. He wrote, "Review times in physics are measured in days or perhaps weeks. When I tell my physics colleagues that it can be months or years in our field [statistics], they are stunned." In their reply, the co-editors of the Annals of Statistics dismissed Wasserman's claim with the following statement: "We feel that Larry's comparisons with physics are misleading. Although referee times for the publications emphasizing short publications may be short, review times for the mainline journals in Astronomy are as long as those for the Annals according to one of our Associate Editors with experience in this area."

Instead of changing the subject to Astronomy and citing anecdotal evidence, I would like to present data that support Wasserman's point that the editorial process for physics journals is by far shorter than that for statistics journals. I am interested in the comparison with physics in particular, since (in my view) the field has many "best practices" in scientific publishing and communication.

The most prominent research journals in physics are the sections of the *Physical Review*, published by the American Physical Society (APS). The editorial staff of the journals have graciously provided

me with the median times for articles to be published in the journal in 2002. Specifically, they provided times for receipt to acceptance (which includes peer review) as well as from acceptance to publication, for both regular articles as well as articles receiving expedited review/publication (letters and rapid communications). The data for each section of the journal are presented in the table below. The second column includes only direct submissions, not transfers from other sections of the journal, but the third column includes all papers. I am grateful to Barbara Gill for compiling the data, Margaret C. Foster for arranging for its release and sending it to me, Editorial Director Stanley G. Brown, and their colleagues Margaret Malloy, Gary Grest, and Frederick MacKintosh, all of APS.

Median times (in days) for Physical Review papers published in 2002

| Regular Articles and Brief Reports: | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Section | Receipt to acceptance | Acceptance to published date |
| A | 98 | 71 |
| B | 131 | 60 |
| C | 89 | 54 |
| D | 64 | 99 |
| E | 99 | 74 |
| ST-AB | 99 | 21 |
| Rapid Communications and Letters: | | |
| Section | Receipt to acceptance | Acceptance to published date |
| A | 86 | 51 |
| B | 71 | 45 |
| C | 60 | 35 |
| D | 52 | 43 |
| E | 71 | 54 |
| L | 134 | 36 |

For reference, the sections of the journal are as follows: A (Atomic, Molecular, and Optical Physics), B (Condensed Matter and Materials Physics), C (Nuclear Physics), D (Particles, Fields, Gravitation, and Cosmology), E (Statistical, Nonlinear, and Soft Matter Physics), L (Letters), and the online-only ST-AB (Special Topics: Accelerators and Beams).

It is important to note that each of these "sections" functions as an autonomous journal, each with its own editorial staff and production schedule. Also, the editorial review process for all sections is conducted mainly electronically, and publication is online first (so that published date in the table refers to the date of online publication).

Although only the median times are reported here, and not any data on variability (which are unfortunately not available), the median total time between submission and publication is certainly measured in months, not years (as is the case in statistics).

Sincerely,

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