State of the Journal

Each year at the Annual Conference & Expo of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), the Editorial Review Board of the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy (AJOT)* meets to review the "state of the journal" (similar to a state of the union). We discuss accomplishments and statistics from the previous year in addition to plans and concerns related to the journal. Because the November–December issue of *AJOT* is traditionally archival, it seems reasonable to share this information with readers at this time.

**Accomplishments**

In 2005, *AJOT* joined the group of journals offered by OVID, an informational database offering several products and services to subscribers, including full-text articles. Many university libraries subscribe to OVID for their faculty, students, and staff. The annual report provided by OVID to AOTA suggests that requests for *AJOT* have been higher than expected in the first year. Although new subscribers are generally universities, some have specifically requested *AJOT* as a stand-alone publication. This is great news as we attempt to reach a wider audience for our literature, and collaborations with other full-text databases are being considered.

Two issues of *AJOT* were devoted to special topics in 2005. Video Methods in Practice and Research, guest edited by Dr. Doris Pierce, made up the January–February 2005 issue, and the September–October 2005 *AJOT* was a special issue on Disability Studies, guest edited by Dr. Gary Kielhofner. Reactions to both of these special issues were very positive, with comments from providers, researchers, and educators within and outside the profession of occupational therapy. Editing a special issue can be a huge and time-consuming undertaking, but the efforts of Dr. Pierce and Dr. Kielhofner resulted in two important contributions to the occupational therapy literature.

**2005 Manuscript Review Statistics**

To appreciate the 2005 statistics, it is important to briefly remind readers that “There are approximately three decision points in the life of an *AJOT* manuscript: triage at submission, review of the original manuscript (first review), and review of the revised manuscript (second review)” (Corcoran, 2005, pp. 367–368). As shown in Table 1, statistics are calculated to describe several aspects of the process for a given year, including the total number of manuscripts (a) submitted to *AJOT*, (b) rejected at triage, (c) rejected by reviewers, (d) in revision at the time of the report, and (e) accepted. In addition, the average number of days required to reach a decision is calculated. Table 1 also compares 2005 statistics with those from the previous year.

**Manuscripts Submitted**

A look at the statistics for 2005 shows that a total of 148 manuscripts were submitted to *AJOT*, slightly fewer than the 2004 total of 179 but similar to 2003 total submissions (158). This is partly explained by a change in the reporting system involving submissions for special issues, which are no longer counted in the total because they are handled separately by a guest editor.

**Initial Editor Review (Triage at Submission)**

Of those 148 submissions in 2005, 20 (13.51%) were rejected by the editor without a request for review by members of the *AJOT* Editorial Review Board. This number represents a substantial decrease in the number and percentage rejected at triage in
2004 (42 manuscripts, 23%) but is slightly higher than 2003 statistics (12 manuscripts, 8%). It is difficult to interpret these differences, and more data are required over time to understand the existence and direction of a trend. Manuscripts rejected at this point usually demonstrate a number of problems, which are detailed in Corcoran (2005). On average, the decision to reject a manuscript without review occurs in 4 days and, when indicated, authors are encouraged to revise and resubmit either to AJOT or another publication (e.g., OT Practice).

Decision After First or Second Review

If the manuscript is consistent with author guidelines and does not report design flaws, it is sent to two reviewers for critique and comments. These reviewers are selected based on familiarity with the topic of the manuscript from the roster of the AJOT Editorial Review Board (described in more detail in Corcoran, 2005). Reviewers are requested to review the manuscript and report comments, plus a recommendation for disposition, back to the editor within 4 weeks. The editor reads and considers all reviewers’ comments and recommendations before deciding on and communicating one of the following decisions to the author(s):

- *Accept.* Usually, manuscripts are revised at least once before acceptance. In 2005, 31.76% of all manuscripts were accepted for publication ($N = 47$). However, this number is expected to rise as the manuscripts that are currently in revision (19) are resubmitted. The Board was pleased to hear that the average number of days to acceptance was greatly reduced from 259 days in 2004 to 178 days in 2005, partly due to a new process by which reviewers are notified 1 week in advance that a review is due.

- *Revise and resubmit.* Reviewers often request that the author change or clarify some aspect of the manuscript. Although the requested revisions are unique to each manuscript and therefore vary widely, they most often include a request for more details, clarification, or expanded discussion and implications for practice.

- *Reject.* Usually, a decision to reject a manuscript from further decision occurs after the first review. Occasionally, an author is given the opportunity to make major revisions and resubmit a revised draft, which may or may not be accepted. In 2005, 41.89% ($N = 62$) were rejected after review, and an average of 70 days was required to reach a decision to reject (not including the manuscripts rejected in an initial editor triage). This represents a reduction from 82 days in 2004.

Concerns and Decisions for 2007

Although it is expected to have manuscripts in revision at the time of an end-of-year report, the number of outstanding manuscripts reported at the April 2006 meeting was very high and included 18 from 2004. At the meeting, the Board discussed implications of a lengthy revision period and expressed concern about the need to publish up-to-date information. Therefore, the Board adopted a policy to require revisions to be completed within 90 days of request from the editor. Authors are provided with more time upon request but must provide a firm date by which revisions can be expected. Meanwhile, the authors of all 18 outstanding manuscripts from 2004 were contacted and have either withdrawn the manuscript or completed revisions. As shown in Table 1, three manuscripts from 2004 are in the final stages of revision and 19 are outstanding from 2005.

The Board continues to debate methods for improving translation of AJOT publications to practice. This remains a universal issue relative to all service professions, especially in disability studies. Encouraging practicing clinical scholars to serve as AJOT reviewers is seen as a positive step and should be continued. In addition, the Board plans to devote time in subsequent annual meetings to the question of translating knowledge to practice. Several other techniques were discussed, including the use of “call-out” boxes with specific bulleted implications for practice, and this will be recommended on a case-by-case basis, as they seem indicated.

Finally, a special issue on Sensory Processing and Sensory Integration, guest edited by Dr. Shelly Lane, is scheduled for publication as the March–April 2007 issue of AJOT. Other special issues are under consideration with decisions pending.

In summary, the state of the journal is strong and getting stronger. The manuscript review process seems to be improving in efficiency, and efforts to translate findings to practice remain at the top of the AJOT agenda. Readers are encouraged to become involved by directing suggestions to the Editor or by joining the AJOT Editorial Review Board. I also would like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge the hardworking and dedicated members of the Board, who are listed on the third page of each issue. Their commitment to excellence is the primary reason for the accomplishments and continued success of AJOT.

Table 1. Manuscript Status for 2004 and 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscripts Submitted</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>Average Number of Days to Decision</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>Average Number of Days to Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>27.93% 259</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>31.76% 178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejected without review</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23.46% 5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.51% 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejected after review</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>46.93% 62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>41.89% 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In revision</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.68% Pending</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.84% Pending</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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References