

My Journey Continues . . . What SPE Is Doing To Improve Peer Review

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Happy New Year, Fellow SPE Members.

Yes, this is February, but as I finalize these comments it's January 1st. I hope 2008 will bring good health, happiness, and prosperity to you and your families.

During the holiday period, I have had discussions with several of our members and the SPE staff regarding SPE's technical-paper peer review. I would like to share with you some of our thoughts and action items for the near future.

Peer review is very important to SPE. While peer-approved papers comprise a small part of our eLibrary collection, peer review plays an important part in SPE's mission as a technical society. It enhances SPE's reputation as a learned society, and benefits both authors and readers.

Regardless of whether his/her paper is accepted for publication, the author benefits from suggestions for improving the work from individuals with special expertise or experience. Having a paper published in an SPE peer-reviewed journal merits a lot of prestige in our industry—only about 22% of submitted papers are accepted for publication.

Readers benefit because the review process selects among the enormous number of papers written each year and gives them a literature base of papers that subject-matter experts have found to be exceptional in some manner.

Today, we have some significant issues with the performance of this important part of SPE. In recent years, the average time that it takes for a paper to complete peer review has stretched to 8 months or longer. Several factors have contributed to this unsatisfactory state.

First, the number of papers submitted for peer review has grown by more than 25% since 2004, tracking the increase in SPE conferences offered each year—32 were held last year. In 2007, nearly 2,200 papers were submitted for review.

Second, too often, authors submit papers for peer review automatically when they submit papers for SPE meetings, without fully considering whether their papers are right for peer review. As a result, reviewers (who are all volunteers) spend considerable time sifting through papers that fall outside the coverage areas of our journals or that don't contribute something new to the industry's literature.

Third, at this busy time in our industry, our volunteers have less time than ever to devote to peer review. (Many years ago, I served as a reviewer, and I know how much time and effort our volunteers put into selecting and enhancing the best papers that ultimately become a part of our industry's archival literature. Currently, more than 800 volunteers review submissions for the five SPE journals.)

Here's what we are doing to shorten the time for peer review. A publication consultant specializing in process improvement has been working with SPE staff to identify bottlenecks and to streamline our procedures. As a result of this study, several key actions are underway:

- Reviewers who accounted for some significant delays have been replaced, and we have set shorter deadlines to get the papers reviewed in a timely manner. We are also recruiting new reviewers and review chairs to spread the increased number of papers across a larger number of individuals.
- The journal executive editors are taking special measures to clear out all papers that have been in review for 18 months or longer, even bringing in a special team of reviewers to address older papers when required.

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• We are taking a hard look at our online paper management system to be sure we have the right tools to support timely processing and help volunteers to better manage their workload.

For those who have a paper that has been in review for a long time, we share your frustration and assure you that changes are being made.

We also ask for authors to do their part:

• *Not every paper is a good candidate for peer review.* If you're submitting a paper to an SPE meeting, don't automatically request peer review. Make sure your paper meets the criteria outlined in the author materials on the SPE website

• Some of our journals need more reviewers! Just complete the volunteer form at <http://www.spe.org/erc> to contribute your expertise.

Peer review sets SPE's journals apart, and enhances the value of our industry

literature. We are committed to doing the best job possible for our authors and readers.

I had the pleasure of representing SPE at the International Petroleum Technology Conference—which SPE cosponsors with the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, the European Association of Geologists and Engineers, and the Society of Exploration Geophysicists—in Dubai in early December. It was a marvelous program and exhibition. This is the second year for this event; almost 3,800 people attended, compared to about 2,500 in 2005. IPTC was originally envisioned to be held every other year in the Middle East, but plans now are to hold the meeting annually, with the location rotating between the Middle East and Asia Pacific region. Accordingly, in 2008, the IPTC will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Following my trip to Dubai, I visited the SPE Angola Section in Luanda. We had an excellent turnout and I would like to take full credit for that, but the free meal and drinks may have influenced the high attendance. While in Angola, I met with the section members and helped promote a Talent Council Colloquium. Thanks to the work of section president Scot Buell, of Chevron, and other section officers, we were able to meet with the management of Sonangol (the Angolan NOC) and the Vice Minister of Petroleum of the Angolan government to outline the proposed Angolan Talent Colloquium, tentatively planned for April or May 2008. We received excellent feedback from both the government and Sonangol and believe they will be active supporters of this program.

Our official 2007 membership numbers are now in. At year end, we had 79,292 members—60,616 professional members and 18,676 student members. That's an 8% increase over 2006, when we ended the year with 73,235 members—56,496 professional members and 16,739 students. This growth is not only a mark of our industry's health, but also a tribute to the value that SPE membership brings to our industry.

On the road, building bridges, and encouraging SPE members... **JPT**

Bill

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