

# Editorial

**T**HIS issue marks a change in the life of this journal, as I am stepping down from being the Editor in Chief (EIC), and Prof. Alejandro Frery from the Universidade Federal de Alagoas, Maceió, Brazil, is taking over. My term to serve this journal has come to an end, and I am glad that Alejandro was selected and that he agreed to work with the Associate Editors' (AEs) team.

These past five years that I have been the EIC have been quite rewarding from the point of view of the performance of the IEEE Geoscience and Remote Sensing Letters (GRSL).

- The submissions have more than doubled, and we are still managing them with the same, if not shorter, average processing time than in 2008.
- The Impact Factor that GRSL reached is a good one (above 1.8), despite the fact that a Letter journal is not always widely cited and is mostly targeted by authors who are willing to have their papers quickly published, as opposed to "big" archival journals, such as the Transactions, which is targeted by more mature—and "citation-savvy"—authors.
- The AEs' team has become larger without losing efficiency, and everyone worked hard to make this journal successful.

More specifically, in 2013, the submissions are currently forecasted, at the time of this writing, to be around 1200, which is not far from the number of submissions to the IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON GEOSCIENCE AND REMOTE SENSING, which is our sister publication with a much longer history and larger Impact Factor. I personally think that this is a result of the work that we have done in reducing the time to first decision without reducing the quality. Indeed, we at GRSL are proud of both the short review time and the excellent quality of our papers. To be accepted, a paper must balance the clarity of the text, the significance of the proposed techniques/designs/algorithms, and the timeliness of the results. Forgetting one of the elements of this mixture—as well as considering only one of them—could have resulted into a different journal. Fig. 1 summarizes the increase in submission numbers and the decrease of the average time to first decision (in days) for the past five years.

Although the papers are almost immediately published on the Web, the increasing number of submissions results in a longer printing queue. It has to be noted that papers in the "early access" state already have the Digital Object Identifier and are indeed to be considered "published." However, for those authors whose institutions—wrongly—do not recognize them as publications, we decided to try and reduce this time as a combined effort of the IEEE central office staff and our decision to move from a bimonthly to a monthly publication rate in

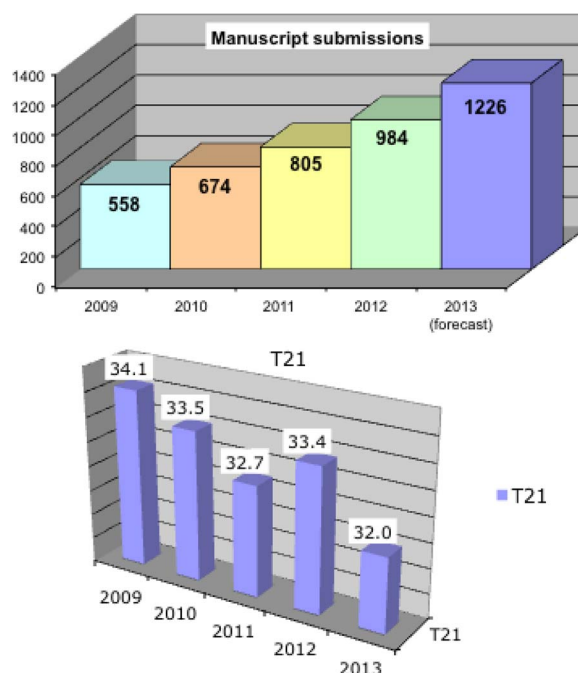


Fig. 1. (Top) Sequence of numbers detailing the submissions and (bottom) average time to first decision (T21) for GRSL.

2014. In this sense, this year is really historical because, for the first time, all of the three journals that are edited by the IEEE Geoscience and Remote Sensing Society will have 12 printed issues per year. This choice is definitely a very important step for GRSL, marking the fact that it has completed its developing stage and that it has become a mature journal.

Finally, submissions have also increased with respect to the geographical distribution of the authors, with authors belonging to 35 countries in 2009 and expanding to 40 countries in 2013. This is also a very positive result of our attempt to attract different communities by providing them a way to submit their results. In addition to the involvement of more authors from Asia and South America, this effort brought forth the idea to have Special Streams, which are groups of papers submitted to GRSL in a limited time frame and focusing on a specific topic. We already had five streams that went operational in the past two years, and one stream is already planned for 2014. They provided interesting papers on "EO data for the Japan and New Zealand earthquakes," "Biophysical variables," "Geographical Object-Based Image Analysis," "Earth Observation Remote Sensing Applications," and "Full-waveform LIDARs." They served the purpose of providing a venue for researchers in these areas, and they also showcase the results of these communities by means of an established and high-quality journal. We are considering to keep this possibility open, although it is limited to no more than two Special Streams per year, and use it as a way to promote novel and promising research communities.

TABLE I  
BEST GRSL REVIEWERS RECOGNIZED IN YEARS 2009–2012

2009	2010	2011	2012
B. Menze	T. Perciano	H. Goncalves	P. Marpu
J. Rosebrock	M. Martorella	A. Zare	Y. Yamaguchi
A. Plaza	T. Ainsworth	X. Huang	M. Arii
D. Tuia	Y. Bazi	A. Doulgeris	E. Pasolli
H. Messer-Yaron	Q. Du	N. Dobigeon	T. Celik

In addition to the authors, there is another community that has been growing steadily, i.e., the one of our reviewers. In general, GRSL has excellent reviewers. We need their help, and we recognize that a good review takes time. Still, GRSL requires the reviewers to work very quickly without forgetting about quality and managing the review in less than three weeks. Sometimes it may be very challenging, but in general, it is manageable due to the limited length of GRSL papers. The reviewers' quality has increased in these past five years, and their understanding of the system has improved as well. We are greatly indebted to all of our reviewers for their work. We cannot analyze and review more than 1000 papers per year without a large database of efficient and capable reviewers. This is the main reason why we started in 2010 the tradition to recognize the five best reviewers for the previous year. Their names are recalled in Table I, for the years 2009–2012. Stay tuned to hear about those who will be recognized at the 2014 International Geoscience and Remote Sensing Symposium (IGARSS) in Quebec City, Canada, for the year that just ended!

As you all know, the reviewers are not selected by the EIC but are invited by the AEs who manage the papers according to their specific area of interest and expertise. GRSL currently has 32 AEs from having 23 in 2009, and each of them is always busy with 5–10 papers. I owe them a big “thank you” because the excellent results of GRSL come from the efforts by every one of them. Indeed, I greatly prize the teamwork, and I felt that our team—from the more experienced AEs to those that just started their volunteer work—has been always working toward the same goal. We want a journal that publishes excellent papers, that helps researchers share their experience quickly and effectively, and that focuses on new results, novel design, and analysis techniques on topics of interest to our Society. We have developed a working methodology that may be improved (and I am sure Prof. Frery will be able to find a way), but this methodology is already quite effective. It includes a good deal of interaction and mutual help. I cannot count the times that I had to look for a comment, suggestion, or recommendation from one of the AEs. Indeed, in our review procedure, the authors interact with the EIC only. They have some requests that can be easily managed, with other requests that are more complex and a few that are extravagant and impossible. Anyway,

the EIC cannot manage all of them alone. Help from the AEs and, occasionally, from expert reviewers is extremely useful, and I am glad that I received almost immediate replies in many cases. This shows the level of commitment of the AEs of this journal, and I am glad to leave this as a heritage for the future.

A final note about a more technical issue that happens to be increasingly important to our authors and thus to this journal, i.e., the so-called “open access” option for GRSL. As you probably know, “open access” means that a paper is available for free to the readers, provided that the authors pay an additional fee to the publisher. There is a general trend by funding agencies in the USA and Europe to ask for open access publications of the research results. GRSL is a possible venue for open access papers, being a “hybrid journal.” However, the additional fee may be an issue for some authors. Indeed, its current values do not fit well with our scope and format because GRSL short papers are currently priced for open access at the same level as longer papers, such as those published in the Transactions. We are working on it to make this option more reasonable and affordable for our authors. I personally apologize if, until now, we have not been able to serve our open access community as much as we would have liked.

All in all, it has been a great and rewarding experience to be the GRSL EIC for the past five years. I am greatly indebted to the previous GRSL EIC and current Vice President for Publications of the IEEE Geoscience and Remote Sensing Society, William J. Emery. He strongly supported my nomination after him and helped me in the very first days of my term. I am also indebted to the current and past Editors of the other GRSS journals for their support, for the long and interesting discussions about the improvements for the review/submission and paper management experience, and, in general, for their friendship. Finally, I am indebted to the GRSS Administrative Committee (AdCom), who supported my work by providing guidance on many different issues, from the technicalities of the budget and publications to the selection of the AEs.

As for the future, I will manage the queue of remaining papers and stay as a GRSL AE until 2015. As the GRSL editorial team knows, I am in favor of a limited time mandate for the AEs, and I have been with GRSL almost from its starting days. I think it is time to let some younger colleagues take over. I have been elected to the AdCom, however, and I am the Technical Cochair for the IGARSS'15 conference in Milan, Italy. I will be around because GRSS is my Society, and I plan to serve it in a different role.

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